



**STATE OF HAWAII  
OFFICE OF ELECTIONS**

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SCOTT T. NAGO  
CHIEF ELECTION OFFICER

July 17, 2020

To: Elections Commission

From: Scott T. Nago  
Chief Election Officer

Re: Status of Operations

As COVID-19 has had an impact on the world, the 2020 Elections were not spared. However, we have continued our preparations for the 2020 Elections. Our office has remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic and there has been no disruption in service for voters. Candidate filing continued and we were able to assist voters by phone and email, as well as by mailing *Voter Registration Applications* to homebound applicants. As a result of the closures of community events caused by COVID-19, we have had to find new ways to reach voters and we adjusted our media campaign. Additionally, we relocated our counting centers, recruited and trained volunteers, as well as administered testing and certification of the voting and vote counting system.

**COVID-19**

We have been impacted by COVID-19 as community events continue to be cancelled, social distancing guidelines have been introduced, and we must take extra precautions to ensure the health and safety of voters and Election Officials. On March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was signed into law. Hawaii received \$3,295,842 in CARES Act funds, administered by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), to "prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus" as it relates to elections. The funds must be expended by December 31, 2020 or returned to the U.S. Treasury. The State must provide a 20% match, totaling \$659,168.40, as well as

report the spending within 20 days of each election and at subsequent deadlines in May 2021 and November 2021.

We are working with the County Elections Divisions to ensure CARES Act funds are available to meet our needs. Our application for the funding was submitted to the U.S. EAC on April 14, 2020 for the purposes of (1) a public communications campaign to facilitate voting (e.g., media campaign, election mailings, associated staffing); (2) facility expansion (e.g., larger and/or additional facilities for voter service centers, counting centers, places of deposit, and other activities associated with elections, including temporary and/or fixed structures with corresponding increased equipment, furniture, and staffing to address additional workload, social distancing, and cleaning); and (3) cleaning, disinfecting, and associated health and safety measures (e.g., cleaning supplies, air filtration system, safety and security shields, machinery, personal protective equipment, and staff). We have spent over \$2 million of the CARES funds and we will continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on voters and the conduct of the election to determine how remaining funds may be used.

We have been procuring cleaning supplies and equipment and personal protective equipment to be used by election officials, such as air purifiers, disinfecting wipes, face shields, hand sanitizer, gloves, and plexi-glass barriers. Health and safety supplies and equipment will be provided at the voter service centers, operated by the County Elections Divisions, as well as offices and counting centers. We have requested assistance from the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) to procure the supplies to ensure they are received in a timely manner. We have also submitted additional orders to vendors that are backordered.

On June 9, election officials were invited to attend a hearing held by the Senate Special Committee on COVID-19 to report on the CARES funding we received and preparations for the 2020 Elections. As a follow-up to the hearing, the Senate Special Committee asked for a map of the County drop boxes and voter service centers, and USPS collection locations which is published on our website.

## **VOTER EDUCATION**

CARES funds are being used to supplement our media campaign for the 2020 Elections. The pandemic and subsequent closures came at a critical time as interest ramps up as the elections approach. Similarly, as we were answering voter inquiries, we found that we would need to find a different way to reach the elderly population as they would be most affected. With that in mind, we partnered with an advertising agency and have expanded our voter education to include advertising in the newspapers, through sponsorships of events and shows, and various community outreach channels, in addition to our scheduled television, radio, and digital ads, as well as social media. We have also partnered with a podcast and television show, “It’s a Hawaii Thing,” on Spectrum OC16, Kupuna Power through the Hawaii News Now Network, and Spotlight Hawaii on the Star Advertiser. The viewership targets our elderly population while reaching all Hawaii voters. Similarly, our commercials, reminding voters about voting by mail and voter registration, have been airing on local news channels. The ads as well as the sponsorship interviews for “It’s a Hawaii Thing” are available on our YouTube channel through our website. The commercials feature trusted elders encouraging voters to pick up a *2020 Hawaii Primary Election Guide* which has been printed in newspapers statewide and is available through the Digital Billboard Network. This includes distribution, free for everyone, at 7-11, Aloha Island Mart, Hele, Longs, and Walgreens. It is also featured on our website and available at the Office of Elections and County Elections Divisions.

Additionally, we have partnered with Hawaii Meals on Wheels to have them distribute our election materials in conjunction with their food distribution activities. They are a part of large-scale events and distribution channels that are still permissible and provide a critical service to our community and those directly impacted by COVID-19. At the end of May, representatives of the Office of Elections worked the line by distributing our *Vote Here* brochure at the food distribution at the Aloha Stadium hosted by the Show Aloha Challenge. In the coming weeks, Hawaii Meals on Wheels will also be distributing Kupuna Boxes with everyday necessities and will include materials about the upcoming elections and voting by mail.

## **Community Outreach**

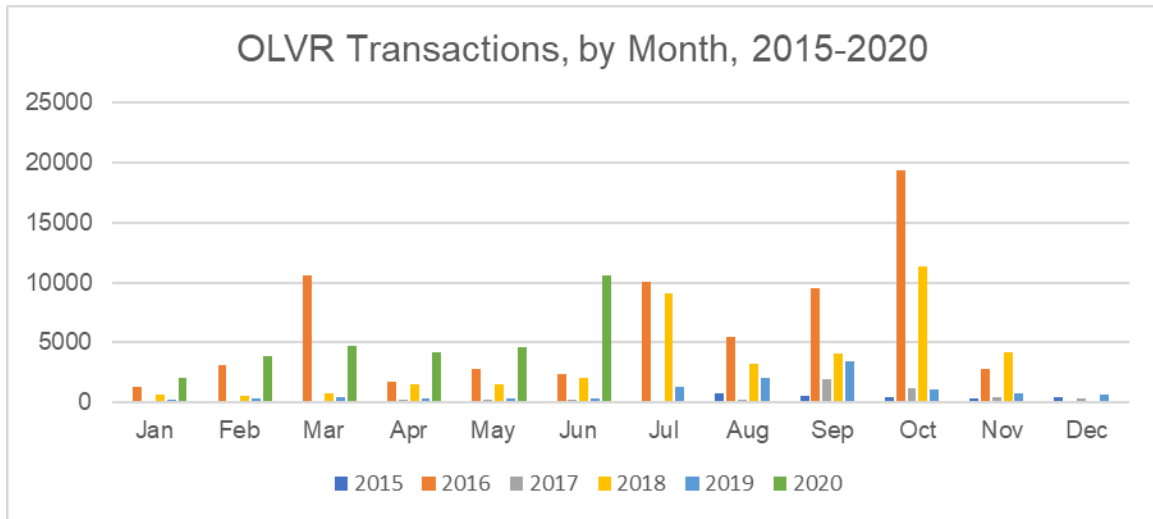
More than 70 community events and presentations where we would provide voter registration and outreach have been cancelled through 2020 since the quarantine went into effect. To adapt our community outreach, we have focused on distributing brochures and applications, and conducting voter education presentations through Facebook Live. Through Facebook Live, we have presented on voter registration, voting by mail, and ballots. On Wednesday, July 22, we will be presenting on voting in our single-party primary election. In the presentations, staff provide an overview and background about the topic and then respond to questions posted in the comments by viewers. The Facebook Live videos remain posted on our page and can be viewed at any time. We have planned to continue this Facebook Live series through the end of the year.

The Office of Elections is working with the Hawaii State Libraries to disseminate our *Vote Here* brochure and replenish *Voter Registration and Absentee Applications*. The library is currently conducting curbside pickup and we have coordinated with them to hand out the *Vote Here* brochure to their patrons at branches across the state. We have also worked with Lanakila Meals on Wheels, Kauai Economic Opportunity Inc., Kaunoha Senior Services, County of Hawaii Elderly Activities Division, Institute of Human Services, and Hope Services to distribute brochures and *Voter Registration Applications*.

As community events are opening, we have attended the Royal Open Market in Waikiki and conducted drive-thru voter registration. On June 28 and July 5, we had a Voter Information booth at the Royal Open Market, hosted by the Royal Hawaiian Center, during Open Street Sunday on Kalakaua Avenue. With limited events occurring, we found this to be a good opportunity to be available for residents.

On July 8 and July 9, the Office of Elections and County Elections Divisions conducted drive-thru voter registration. Statewide, 636 voters used this opportunity to register or update their registration. The deadline for new Hawaii voters to register for the 2020 Primary Election was Thursday, July 9. The graph below depicts the number of online voter registration (OLVR) transactions by month. The Online Voter Registration System was launched in August 2015 and

there have been more than 172,575 voters registering or updating their voter registration.



## BALLOT OPERATIONS

For the 2020 Elections, the Aloha Aina Party, the Constitution Party of Hawaii, and the American Shopping Party qualified by petition to field candidates. On April 1, we conducted the Political Party Drawing to determine the order political preferences would appear on the Primary Election ballot. At this event, staff explained that the order in which political parties appear on the Primary Election ballot is determined by lot under state law, then proceeded to randomly select the party names out of a box. The results of the drawing are posted on our Facebook page and website.

Candidate filing ran from February 3 through June 2 at 4:30 p.m. Statewide, 336 candidates filed their nomination paper to appear on the 2020 Election ballot of the 423 who were issued a nomination paper. There are 100 contests on the 2020 Primary Election ballot across 250 district/precincts. Following the close of candidate filing, staff and the County Elections Divisions proofed the ballot for each district/precinct ballot to check for spelling and the correct contests and candidates to appear. Once the paper ballot is finalized, it is printed. We also use the paper ballot to create the electronic ballot for the accessible in-person voting equipment and the HTML ballot which is available to overseas voters, voters with special needs, and any voter who spoils their ballot within 5 days of the election.

### **Election Proclamation**

On May 15, the Office of Elections finalized the proclamation, naming the time, place, and manner of the upcoming elections as well as the voter service centers and places of deposit. This joint proclamation with the Office of the City/County Clerks, Elections Divisions was published in the newspaper pursuant to HRS §§ 11-91 and 11-92.1. Should any changes arise, a subsequent proclamation will be published, and the website will be updated with the most current information.

### **Mail Ballot Packets**

June 24 was the deadline to transmit ballots to voters under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). Under federal and state law, uniformed and overseas citizens must be transmitted their ballot 45 days prior to the election. Statewide, 961 ballots were transmitted by email and 274 were sent by mail.

Mail ballot packets were dropped in the mail starting July 14 and will continue through July 20. This ensured we were able to meet the deadline for voters to receive the mail ballot packet approximately 18 days prior to the election. Mail ballot packets are created for active voters, who have had their voter registration confirmed through the mailing of a “notice of voter registration” card (e.g., signature capture card).

### **COUNTING CENTER OPERATIONS**

As voted ballots are returned by voters, the County Elections Division will validate the signature on the return envelope with the signature associated with the voter’s registration and secure for transport to the counting center for further processing. At the counting center, the return envelope will be opened, counted, and secured beginning 10 days prior to the election.

Given the social distancing requirements, we have had to find facilities that can ensure election officials and volunteers can process, open, and count the voted ballots. We have relocated the Oahu counting center to the Hawaii Convention Center as there is insufficient space at the State Capitol to ensure six feet between election officials with the necessary work areas and equipment. Similarly, we are leasing space at the Prince Kuhio Plaza in Hilo to serve as the

counting center for the County of Hawaii. Prince Kuhio Plaza previously served as a counting center in 2010.

Staff and the neighbor island County Elections Divisions have been recruiting volunteers to work at the four counting centers statewide. Volunteers at the counting centers open and prepare ballots for counting, inventory and track voted ballots as they are counted and secured, duplicate defective ballots, and manually audit the voting and vote counting system. All counting center operations are monitored and witnessed by Official Observers, who serve as the “eyes and ears” of the public. Official Observers are also volunteers named by the political parties, community groups, media, and interested individuals.

We asked each of the political parties and previous volunteers to sign up by May 9 so that we could prepare test ballot packets and print manuals for all Counting Center Officials. At the end of June, we began conducting training for Counting Center Officials and Official Observers. The presentation provides a general overview about elections by mail, and the various work areas within the counting center to open, process, count, and reconcile voted ballots.

Beginning July 11, our office held logic and accuracy tests of the voting and vote counting system. The tests are conducted by the Official Observers who vote a set of test ballots in any manner of their choosing, create a tally of expected results, and reconcile with the computer-generated results. Following the test, the equipment is certified and secured. The logic and accuracy tests are conducted in phases. First, the equipment used for in-person voting is tested and secured to be deployed to the voter service centers. At a subsequent test, the voting and vote counting system used to count mail ballots is tested, certified, and secured at the counting center. This test will be conducted simultaneously at each counting center on July 25, prior to processing voted ballots.

For the Primary Election, voted ballots can be opened, processed, and counted starting July 29.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (808) 453-VOTE (8683) or 1-800-442-VOTE (8683).