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STATEWIDE ELECTIONS
ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS ADVISORY
COMMITTEE
CHAIR

**STATE OF HAWAII
STATEWIDE ELECTIONS ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

DRAFT MINUTES

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE
STATEWIDE ELECTIONS ACCESSIBILITY
NEEDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

February 18, 2026 @ 10:00 AM

Pursuant to Section 92-3.7, Hawaii Revised Statutes, the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee met remotely using interactive conference technology. The video of the meeting may be viewed on our website at: <https://elections.hawaii.gov/about-us/boards-and-commissions/elections-accessibility-needs-advisory-committee/>.

Committee Members in Attendance:

James Gashel, Vice Chair
Lou Ann Blake
Kathryn Keim

PROCEEDINGS

I. Call to order

The regular meeting of the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee was called to order by Vice Chair Gashel at 10:00 AM.

II. Roll call and determination of a quorum

All members of the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee were present at the meeting with the exception of Committee Member Nelson.

III. Approval of written minutes from the December 10, 2025 meeting

Committee Member Keim made a motion to approve the minutes for the meeting of December 10, 2025, which was seconded by Committee Member Blake, and approved by the Committee.

IV. Public comment on the value of mail-in voting on accessibility

Vice Chair Gashel provided an overview on Hawaii's history with vote by mail elections. He explained that Hawaii transitioned to statewide vote by mail elections following a 2019 law, noting that there were initial challenges in the 2020 Elections because there was no clear method for voters with disabilities to independently mark and return their ballots. He continued that accessibility improved by the 2022 Elections with the implementation of electronic ballot receipt and return. He added that by the 2024 Elections, accessible voting options were more streamlined.

Vice Chair Gashel explained that the Hawaii Elections Commission had recently asked the Legislature to consider returning to same-day, in-person voting. He shared his concern that in these discussions during the Elections Commission meetings, there were no mentions about how a return to same-day, in-person voting would impact accessibility needs. He added that the U.S. House recently passed the SAVE Act, which could have impacts on Hawaii's voting process including impacts on voter ID requirements. He wrapped up his discussion by emphasizing the Committee's role in ensuring that accessibility needs are protected.

Committee Member Blake shared that Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires voters with print disabilities to have an equal, private, and independent vote by mail option. She explained that eliminating vote by mail would force in person voting, creating barriers such as transportation and reliance on accessible machines. She added that voting by mail allows use of personal assistive technology, so removing it would deny equal opportunity.

Vice Chair introduced guest speakers Sanho Steele-Louchart and Stephanie Flynt to speak on election accessibility.

Sanho Steele-Louchart, Legal Program Coordinator, National Federation of the Blind (NFB), explained that the SAVE Act is complex, with multiple versions, and the House-passed version currently in the Senate focuses on voter registration rather than voting by mail. He continued that the SAVE Act would require voters to present current photo identification and matching documentation to register, which creates significant barriers for people with disabilities. He explained that these requirements involve obtaining physical documents, completing inaccessible paperwork, and maintaining accurate

records, which can be difficult and time consuming. He added that errors in voter files could lead to disenfranchisement, and that the proposed solutions, such as states sharing data with the Department of Homeland Security, remain uncertain. He concluded by stating that while the SAVE Act does not directly eliminate voting by mail, it would reduce the number of people eligible to vote by mail or remotely, which would disproportionately impact voters who rely on accessible voting options.

Stephanie Flynt, Public Policy Analyst, National Disability Rights Network (NDRN), stated that misinformation has circulated about the SAVE Act and clarified that the current focus is on voter registration, not voting itself. She clarified that there are three related bills, the SAVE Act, the Save America Act, and the Make Elections Great Again (MEGA) Act, two of which were recently introduced. She expressed concern that provisions in the MEGA Act could criminalize assisting voters with disabilities during the voting by mail process. She concluded by stating that NDRN and NFB are actively opposing these bills through the National Coalition on Accessible Voting and have issued statements summarizing their concerns.

Committee Members discussed federal voting protections for accessible voting, highlighting that there were no federal provisions guaranteeing assistance for voters with disabilities until the Voting Rights Act in 1982. Vice Chair Gashel expressed concerns that proposed legislation such as the SAVE Act or MEGA Act may include provisions to criminalize assisting voters, which would have significant implications. Committee Member Blake added that earlier versions of the SAVE Act included bans on electronic ballots and asked whether the current MEGA Act addresses electronic ballots for those in the military, overseas, or voters with print disabilities.

Mr. Steele-Louchart clarified that the current versions of the SAVE Act and related bills do not include provisions banning electronic ballot return. However, she added that the MEGA Act could ban universal voting by mail and require voters to submit specific requests for a mail ballot.

Vice Chair Gashel asked for clarification on the process for Hawaii voters to request an accessible electronic ballot. Raymund de Vega, Elections Specialist, Office of Elections (OE), explained that when voters register to vote, either online or through a paper application, they can indicate their need for an electronic ballot if they are unable to read standard print. He added that the request only needs to be made once, and the voter will continue to receive an electronic ballot for every election without reapplying unless their information changes.

Vice Chair Gashel asked about the implications of the discussed bills on

online voter registration. Mr. Steele-Louchart explained that it appears that the bills would allow online voter registration, however, it would still require applicants to submit physical documentation. He emphasized that requiring physical documentation can create accessibility challenges.

Ann De Silva Williams provided testimony sharing her strong support for preserving private and independent voting, and praised Hawaii's accessible electronic ballot option that allowed her to vote completely on her own in the 2024 Elections, as well as the ballot tracking system.

Vice Chair Gashel asked that OE prepare a report, consolidating testimony from this and the previous EANAC meeting for distribution to the public, OE, County Elections Divisions, and the Legislature. He clarified that Committee Members will review the report at the next meeting and decide whether to adopt or amend it.

Committee Members discussed potential meeting dates for the 2026 Election year, tentatively considering mid-April, mid-July, late September or early October, and mid to late December. Committee Members acknowledged that they must be mindful of interfering with the workload of OE during the election year.

V. Adjournment

Committee Member Blake made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Committee Member Keim, and approved by the Committee at 10:57 AM.