

Students Help to Write Laws

True Story!

Once upon a time (in 2001), some students on the island of Moloka'i had an idea for how to make Hawai'i a better place. They saw plenty of bottles and cans on the side of the road and on their favorite beaches. They thought about getting together with others in the community to have a clean-up day, but that would not really solve the problem. People would just litter again. They wanted to come up with a better answer to solve the problem.

At school, a couple of the students' teachers decided to help them sort through some of their ideas. By having a _____, the students were able to present proposals, discuss them, challenge them, and work together to figure out the best strategy. If they put up signs saying, "Please Don't Litter," would that do the trick? There were already _____ and rules in place, but they did not seem to be effective. What if the State put people on guard to make sure no one littered and fined anyone who was caught? Even if they *liked* the idea of litterbug-catchers at every park, that would be expensive, and they could not possibly put guards everywhere! The students discussed a lot of ideas, and came up with a great one.

The idea would help to clean up the land – even bottles and cans that were *already* lying all over the place. It would also save limited landfill space, and conserve natural resources. ***Why not make a State law to require all cans and bottles be made out of material that could be recycled? And, to make sure that people would recycle, why not pay people for each bottle and can recycled?*** After looking at laws in other states and other people's ideas, they were sure it would work. They had done their _____ and had facts and figures to convince others why their idea was a good one. But their idea involved all of Hawai'i, not just Moloka'i. Who would help them?

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Their teachers told them that everybody in the State of Hawai'i has a voice in what the laws should be. Laws start out as _____ in the State Legislature. There are 51 _____ (members of the House of Representatives) and 25 _____ (members of the Senate) and eventually, the bill would have to be voted on by all of them. But first, they needed one legislator to turn their idea into a written bill, and then to _____ the bill to the Legislature to start it on its way.

They got to work. Many of the legislators were interested in their idea. The Chair of the House's Energy and Environmental Protection committee (the person who decides which bills related to energy and the environment will be discussed) was Representative Hermina Morita from Kaua'i, and she was happy to introduce a bill that would require beverage containers to be recyclable and redeemable for cash.

There was still a lot of work ahead, and a lot of compromise and decision making. In making laws, it is important to make sure that everyone gets a chance to present their viewpoint. The legislators, the students, and the person selling sodas all may have different perspectives, special knowledge, or ideas to contribute. There were hearings at the State Capitol so that anyone could offer their _____ and a lot of different viewpoints could be heard. The students were thrilled to be able to use their research to support their idea.

And the result?

In June of 2002, the _____ signed the "Bottle Bill" into law (Act 176). Now the students on Moloka'i have their eyes open for stray bottles and cans – they're worth a nickel a piece, which can really add up! The beaches and parks are cleaner, and the students all know they really *can* make a difference.

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