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Assistance Commission for the years 2005 and 2006, shows that a decade after the NVRA went into effect, about three percent of all voter registration applications received through state agencies nationally were processed through an office providing public assistance or disability services. However, a whopping 85 percent of all applications were received at DMV offices. But this could all change. The Obama

organization, made the Oregon NVRA compliance legislation a priority during the last legislative session, said Henry Kraemer, the group's organizing and political director.

In addition to getting the state in compliance with federal requirements, the new law has the potential to boost political participation among hard-to-reach populations, said Kraemer. "It's a tremendous opportunity to bring people into democracy," said Kraemer. "It's

been applications from state public assistance agencies, about 4.8 percent of all registrations. It also processed 2,334 from agencies providing services to the disabled, less than 1 percent of all registrations.

In 2009 and 2010, nearly 246,923 voter registrations in Ohio were received at public agencies, 11 percent of all total registrations. Registrations at disability service offices rose to 19,307, still less 1 percent of all voter registrations.

A similar lawsuit filed in 2006 had similar results in Missouri by the now defunct Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, with help from Demos and Project Vote.

Before the lawsuit, only 16,568 voter registration forms were processed through public assistance agencies in Missouri, about 4 percent of all applications. After the lawsuit was settled in 2009, that number rose to 121,037, about 12 percent of all applications processed in the state.

"It's not like low-income people don't want to vote," said Zeitler.

Oregon has even lower numbers. Less than 10,000 people registered to vote at a public service agency, about two percent of all registrations in 2009 and 2010. Oregon disability service office processed 5,050.

With these low numbers, some lawmakers worry that Oregon could be the next state to face an expensive lawsuit, which prompted them to take action last legislative session.

Rep. Jefferson Smith, an East Portland Democrat who sponsored the bill, said that the council established by the legislation will evaluate how well the state is doing with NVRA compliance and what needs to change. The council will also be looking at practical considerations, he said. For instance, where will students at federally funded universities be given the opportunity to register?

One of the big obstacles, Smith anticipates, is getting large state departments that already have heavy case loads as well as entrenched habits and computer systems to make the changes needed to get in compliance.

"Getting large institutions to change regulations means significant leadership," said Smith. "Democracy works better when people do it."



administration is taking an interest in making sure states comply with the NVRA. The U.S. Department of Justice took Rhode Island to court for not offering voter registration at public assistance and disability services and reached a settlement with the state last spring. Earlier this month, the department filed a similar suit against Louisiana.

To date about a dozen states have had some sort of legal action brought against them by either voter advocacy organizations or the federal government seeking to get them in line with NVRA.

The Bus Project, a civic engagement

in other states."

In 2006, a coalition of public interest groups, including Demos, Project Vote and The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law brought a lawsuit against the state of Ohio to get it into compliance with NVRA's public assistance agency provisions.

Figures from the U.S. Electoral Assistance Commission show that voter registrations at agencies providing public assistance or disability services rose significantly in Ohio after the lawsuit was settled in 2009.

For the years 2005 and 2006, Ohio processed 42,599 voter registration

huge

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