

The Campaign for Initiative Petition Integrity

Protect the Integrity of the Initiative Petition Process!

Bills filed by Rep. Denise Provost (H1830) and Sen. Stanley Rosenberg (S13)

THE PROBLEM: The integrity of the initiative petition process is in jeopardy. The Massachusetts ballot initiative and referendum option was created to give the citizens of the Commonwealth a way to overcome what they believed to be inaction of the Legislature. It was envisioned as a tool for largely volunteer, grassroots efforts.

Now, this historically grassroots movement often is no longer driven by issues or an engaged civic culture but by the growth of a mercenary industry of paid signature gatherers who care only about maximizing quantities of signatures since they get paid by the signature. The use of misleading pitches and the collection of signatures from each voter on multiple initiative petitions on unrelated topics dilute substantive discussion of the issues at stake in the petition gathering process. Furthermore, the increasing presence within that industry of signature gatherers and crew leaders with criminal records of forgery, identity theft, and election fraud is eroding the faith of voters that they can safely express their will by petition. Thus, the initiative petition process has become a favored tool of narrow special interests and fringe groups with the requisite seed money to hire very aggressive petition signature gatherers. As a result of these abuses, Massachusetts has earned an “F” for ballot initiative integrity from the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center who rates the fairness of the ballot process in each state.

In addition, The Commonwealth’s constitution allows for a tiny percent of voters to decide what initiatives are put on the ballot. Compared to other states Massachusetts requires the fewest number of signatures as a percent of population of any state to put an initiative on the ballot. This allows a small fringe group to determine what the issues debated on Election Day will be.

THE SOLUTION: Common sense regulation of the initiative petition process to limit mercenary behavior and criminal misuse would restore integrity and confidence in our ballot initiative and referendum system. Colorado, which has earned an “A” for ballot initiative integrity, has pioneered a regulatory system much like that contained in this legislation. Far from limiting ballot questions, Colorado law has bolstered a robust and active initiative process.

WHAT DO THESE PROPOSALS DO?

One is a bill that makes the process more transparent by:

- Prohibiting paying signature gatherers based on the number of signatures collected.
- Prohibiting the simultaneous circulation of petitions relating to multiple initiatives or referenda.
- Requiring paid signature gatherers and signature-gathering businesses to register with the state.
- Restricting persons with criminal records of forgery, identity theft, election fraud, as well as sex offenders, from paid signature gathering.
- Specifying penalties for violation of these requirements.

The second proposal changes the state constitution to make Massachusetts consistent with many other states by:

- Requiring that the number of signatures equal just 2.5 percent of the population of the Commonwealth to put an initiative on the ballot.

The Campaign for **Initiative Petition Integrity**

By regulating paid signature gathering, Massachusetts can restore the grassroots integrity of our initiative and referendum petition process. Volunteer signature gathering and legitimate non-mercenary payment of petitioners by organizations or businesses will be strengthened by reducing the current pay-by-the-signature system. Voters' confidence in the process will increase when they know that their personal information and signature will not easily fall into the hands of individuals or companies that will do anything for a quick buck, or who have a relevant criminal record.

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