

HCS HBs 575 & 551 -- INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM PETITIONS

SPONSOR: Banderman

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elections by a vote of 8 to 4. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative by a vote of 6 to 2.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 575.

This bill requires initiative and referendum petition signature pages to be printed on a form as specified by the Secretary of State. Signature page forms will be made available in electronic format.

This bill requires petition circulators to be citizens of the United States, residents of Missouri or physically present in Missouri for at least 30 consecutive days prior to the collection of signatures, and prohibits them from being compensated based on the number of signatures collected.

Signatures will be recorded using black or dark ink.

Currently, any citizen can challenge the official ballot title or fiscal note for a Constitutional amendment, initiative petition, or referendum measure. This bill changes this to only allow any Missouri registered voter to make a challenge.

The bill requires final adjudication relating to a challenge of the official ballot title or fiscal note to occur at least eight weeks before the date of the election.

Currently, the Secretary of State and Attorney General review initiative and referendum petitions for sufficiency as to form and approve or reject them on that basis. This bill changes this to require these officials to review initiative and referendum petitions for compliance with Section 116.050, RSMo and with Article III of the Missouri Constitution.

This bill repeals the requirement that the Joint Committee on Legislative Research hold a hearing to take public comment on a proposed measure within 30 days of the Secretary of State issuing certification that the petition contains a sufficient number of valid signatures.

This bill is similar to HB 1749 (2024) and HB 703 (2023).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

**PROPOSERS:** Supporters say that there should be stronger safeguards for making sure the signature gathering process is properly conducted. The bill has a number of common sense changes designed to protect Missourians' identities, help them make their voices heard, and take charge of their constitution. These changes are necessary to streamline the work election officials must perform in order to process and approve initiative petitions with limited resources.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Banderman; Mark Fiegenbaum, Missouri Farm Bureau; Byron Keelin, Freedom Principle Missouri; Samuel H. Lee, Campaign Life Missouri.

**OPPOSERS:** Those who oppose the bill say that these changes are designed to prevent initiative petitions from being placed on the ballot by making it easier to disqualify signatures for clerical reasons, by restricting petitioners from compensating signature gatherers in certain ways, by increasing the number of people who can challenge an initiative petition, and by rejecting signatures if a court modifies the ballot title..

Testifying in person against the bill were Maggie Olivia Edmondson, Abortion Action Missouri; Connor Luebbert, Missouri Voter Protection Coalition; Melissa Vatterott, Missouri Coalition For The Environment; Ron Berry, Jobs With Justice Voter Action; Arnie C.Honest-Abe" Dienoff-State Public Advocate; Marcel Hagens, Action St. Louis Power Project.

**OTHERS:** Others testifying on the bill offered to answer questions members of the committee had.

Testifying in person on the bill was Amanda Bell, Secretary Of State.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.