



Portland City Auditor

Elections



February 3, 2025

House Committee on Rules
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: House Bill 3384

Chair Bowman, Vice Chairs Drazan and Pham, and Members of the Committee,

The Portland Auditor's Office would like to offer **support for HB 3384, with a requested amendment to preserve the power of referendum petitions as a part of our democratic process.**

The Portland Elections Division is housed within the City of Portland's Auditor's Office. The Division carries out municipal elections according to state and local law, including accepting and reviewing initiative and referendum petitions to determine ballot eligibility. Petition verification is done in close coordination with Multnomah County Elections, and the City has one of the largest signature threshold and the highest frequency of local petitions in the state. While we support the flexibility provided to elections officials in this bill, and an increased focus on vote by mail procedures during peak election times, **the Portland Auditor's Office requests that referendum petitions be removed from the bill's language to protect what is an important and powerful balance for legislative bodies.**

HB 3384 creates a brief time period around general and primary elections during which initiative and referendum petitions may not be accepted by local elections offices. During this period, county elections offices are simultaneously conducting vote-by-mail procedures on behalf of cities, including the City of Portland. Flexibility for county offices to prioritize vote-by-mail elections procedures under rigorous deadlines, increasing complexity, and heightened public view is critical to the success of both the County and City's elections operations. Sections 4, 5, and 6 allow cities to delay an initial review of petitions and prohibits a review of petitions containing signatures during this time period (otherwise known as prospective or perfected petitions). Referendum petitions require timely and urgent action on the part of voters and the City. They act as a powerful path for the public to reject City legislation by mandating a repeal or a public vote. Unlike initiative petitions, if qualified to the ballot, City referendums may be held on special elections, reflecting their potential urgency. In essence, referendums provide a powerful check on legislative bodies, and the prohibition in this bill not to accept referendum petitions in a timely manner could unintentionally abridge that power.

While rare throughout the state, referendum petitions are not hypothetical for the City of Portland. We have received at least three referendum petitions in the last 20 years on legislation ranging from health to taxes. Two of those referendums had direct impact on the City's resulting actions, including a public vote.

To preserve access to the referendum petition process year-round, the City of Portland requests referendum petitions be excluded from the time periods proposed in HB 3384.

With the requested amendment, we urge your support for this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Deborah Scroggin

Deborah Scroggin
Elections Manager