

Date: March 9, 2025
To: House Committee On Rules
From: William Vollmer, citizen
Re: Testimony In Opposition to HJR 11

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HJR 11. This bill would refer to voters an amendment to the Oregon Constitution that would both increase the number of signatures needed to qualify for the ballot and require that these higher limits (percentage of voters for whom signatures are required) be met in each of Oregon's 6 congressional districts.

Not only does the increased number of signatures add a further time and cost burden to those wishing to get a measure on the ballot, but the requirement that the new limits be met in each of Oregon's 6 congressional districts would effectively give a heavily Democratic district, such as CD3, veto power over conservative proposed initiatives and a more conservative leaning district, such as CD2, veto power over progressive proposed initiatives.

HJR 11 would also greatly increase the cost of obtaining the required signatures. Oregon's lesser populated counties, located mostly in CD2, do not have mass gatherings where volunteers can efficiently gather signatures. Thus this bill would basically require signature gatherers to go door-to-door in those counties.

It is already hard enough to qualify statewide voter-initiated measures for the ballot. The number of statewide initiatives has greatly declined since 2000 owing largely (a) to the fact that the Oregon Legislature and Secretary of State keep adding new (and often arbitrary) requirements to the signature gathering rules and (b) to the long delays involved in obtaining official ballot titles from Oregon Supreme Court review.

Simply put, the Legislature doesn't like the initiative process. Why? Presumably because the initiative process takes away some of the power of the Legislature and, perhaps more importantly, it provides a counter to the outsized influence that big money donors currently have in Oregon politics. Big money donors, and the member of both parties who are beholden to those donors, are quite happy with the status quo. That is why the Legislature has been so resistant to passing meaningful campaign finance reform. Indeed, the passage of HB4024 last year only happened because the Legislature feared that Initiative Petition 9 would make it to the ballot and bring with it even stricter reforms.

Ultimately, we need to ask ourselves what is the problem with the current ballot measure process that HJR 11 is meant to solve? Alas, the only conceivable rationale behind HJR 11 is to kill the voter-initiated initiative process. Why do we need to increase the required number of signatures and why, if a measure that makes it to the ballot only needs a simple majority of votes to pass, do we need the added congressional district requirement to get the measure to the ballot in the first place? If the Legislature really felt such a measure was needed, then they should also prohibit the passage of any legislation that isn't supported by some minimum number of members of each of Oregon's congressional districts!

Oregon needs its initiative process to give the voters in this State an ability to decide for themselves what legislation they wish to see on the books and counters some of the huge influence that big money donors currently have over politicians in this state.

Respectfully submitted,

William Vollmer (NE Portland)