

April 2, 2025

**Position on Bills at 2025
Session of Oregon Legislature:**

SJR 30: Additional Testimony in Opposition



The Consolidated Oregon Indivisible Network (COIN) is a coalition of over 50 local Indivisible groups throughout Oregon that cooperate and amplify their joint efforts to advance important federal and state legislation and engage with elected officials to promote causes for the benefit of all Oregonians.

COIN opposes SJR 30, which would refer to voters an amendment to the Oregon Constitution to increase the number of signatures that must be gathered to qualify an initiative for the Oregon ballot and require that 1/6 of that number be gathered in each of Oregon's 6 congressional districts (CDs).

This additional testimony addresses statements made at today's hearing.

A witness at today's hearing stated that Oregon has lower signature requirements than most other states with the initiative process. In fact, on a per capita basis, Oregon has signatures requirements that are already equal to or higher than most of those states.

18 states allow constitutional amendments by initiative. Oregon's existing signature requirements per capita are already higher than 9 of those states. If SJR 30 were enacted, Oregon would be higher than 14 of those 17 other states, giving Oregon the 3rd highest requirement.

21 states allow statutes by initiative. Oregon's existing signature requirements per capita are already higher than 10 of those states. If SJR 30 is enacted, Oregon would be higher than 13 of those 20 other states.

This data is confirmed by the two tables on the following pages, derived from: https://ballotpedia.org/Signature_requirements_for_ballot_measures. The table shows how the Oregon signature requirements compare to other states, with and without SJR 30, on a per capita basis.

Other witnesses stated that Oregon's signature requirements have not changed since 1968. But the requirements are a percentage of the number of persons who cast votes in the most recent election for Governor. That number has basically doubled since 1990, so the number of signatures required on initiatives has also doubled since then. In 1986, 1,059,663 persons voted in the election for Governor. In 2022, 1,997,689 persons voted in the election for Governor. That was an 86% increase, so the number

of signatures required on Oregon initiatives has also increased by 86% since 1990 (the last cycle governed by the 1986 voter numbers).

Senator Bonham stated that the ballot measure process in Oregon already requires too much money. In the 1980s, we found it possible to qualify a measure for the ballot at a cost of about \$20,000, mostly to pay staff to serve as volunteer coordinators. UFCW # 555 last year paid over \$2.4 million for signature gathering to qualify Measure 119 for the ballot. As stated in my earlier testimony, this massive increase in cost is partly the result of decades of the Oregon Legislature and the Secretary of State adding more hypertechnical requirements that discourage volunteer signature gathering and end up disqualifying large numbers of actually valid signatures. It was also caused by the decision of the Oregon Supreme Court in 2000 that shopping centers and stores could completely exclude petitioners from their premises, including parking lots. It was also caused by changes in society, with fewer large gatherings in person and more time online. The Oregon Legislature has not adjusted the signature gathering requirements to account for those changes.

SJR 30 would make signature gathering far more expensive than it is now, so it is a step in the wrong direction. There are available steps in the right direction. One would be the Initiative Primary, as described in the attached opinion piece from the Salem Statesman-Journal. Another would be allowing the gathering of signatures online. The Secretary of State already allows any voter to change her voter registration information (address, party affiliation, etc.) online and allows online voting for voters who are overseas or in the military. The Consolidated Oregon Indivisible Network (COIN) and others would welcome the opportunity to work with Senator Bonham to modernize signature gathering.

Senator Bonham remarked that SJR 30 would merely put the proposed changes on the ballot for Oregonians to decide. But the words on the ballot would likely be written by the Oregon Legislature itself, which in recent years has diverged from the previous practice of allowing the ordinary processes for composing the ballot title and the explanatory statement. The ordinary process for composing the ballot title is a draft from the Attorney General, followed by public comment, revisions by the Attorney General, and judicial review in the Oregon Supreme Court, if desired. But the Oregon Legislature has instead been writing the ballot titles itself for measures it refers to the ballot. The ballot title is all that many voters see about a measure on the ballot. The Oregon Legislature could write a very laudatory ballot title about SJR 30.

The Oregon Legislature has also been supplanting the ordinary process for composing the official explanatory statement in the Voters' Pamphlet. The ordinary process in current law is that the Secretary of State appoints a committee consisting of two supporters and two opponents of the measure. Those four select a fifth member, or the Secretary of State selects a fifth member if the four members cannot agree on one. That committee then writes a 500-word explanatory statement that appears in the Voters' Pamphlet before any arguments for or against the measure. But recently the Legislature has instead been writing its own official explanatory statements, with no committees, and can write them to favor the measures that the Legislature places on the ballot.

**Signature Requirements Per Capita
Sorted by Highest for Constitutional Amendments**

	Signatures Required		Population	Signatures as % of Population	
	Constitutional	Statutory		Constitutional	Statutory
Nebraska	126,838	88,787	2005000	6.3%	4.4%
Montana	60,240	30,120	1137000	5.3%	2.6%
Arizona	383,923	255,949	7582000	5.1%	3.4%
Oregon with SJR 30	195,289	156,231	4272000	4.6%	3.7%
Michigan	446,198	356,958	10140000	4.4%	3.5%
Oklahoma	172,993	92,263	4095000	4.2%	2.3%
North Dakota	31,164	15,582	797000	3.9%	2.0%
South Dakota	35,017	17,508	925000	3.8%	1.9%
Florida	871,500	N/A	23372000	3.7%	
Oregon	156,231	117,173	4272000	3.7%	2.7%
Mississippi	106,190	N/A	2943000	3.6%	
Ohio	413,487	248092	11833000	3.5%	2.1%
Nevada	102,362	135,561	3267000	3.1%	4.1%
Missouri	185152	115720	6245000	3.0%	1.9%
Arkansas	90,704	72,563	3088000	2.9%	2.3%
Illinois	328,371	N/A	12710000	2.6%	
California	874,641	546,651	39431000	2.2%	1.4%
Colorado	124,238	124,238	5957000	2.1%	2.1%
Massachusetts	74,490	74,490	7136000	1.0%	1.0%
Wyoming	N/A	40,669	588000		6.9%
Maine	N/A	67,682	1405000		4.8%
Alaska	N/A	34,098	740000		4.6%
Utah	N/A	140,748	3503000		4.0%
Washington	N/A	308,911	7958000		3.9%
Idaho	N/A	70,725	2002000		3.5%
Maryland	N/A	N/A	6263000		
New Mexico	N/A	N/A	2130000		

Signature Requirements Per Capita Sorted by Highest for Statutory Measures

	Signatures Required		Population	Signatures as % of Population	
	Constitutional	Statutory		Constitutional	Statutory
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Maine	N/A	67,682	1405000		4.8%
Alaska	N/A	34,098	740000		4.6%
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The Initiative Process: A Better Way

July 21, 2008

By Dan Meek and Harry Lonsdale



It's initiative season again. The time when young people with clipboards approach us on the streets or at bus stops, or in front of post offices, to get our signatures on petitions for the ballot measures we may vote on in November.

From one point of view, the initiative process is a drag. Signature gatherers pester us, take our time, and can be gruff at times. As sometime signature gatherers ourselves, we can speak to the opposite side of that coin. Gathering signatures in the rain or heat, or knocking on the doors of sometimes hostile people, or fending off their menacing dogs, can be daunting. And the best public places to gather signatures (parking lots of large stores) are now off limits to petition circulators.

On the other hand, the initiative is a beautiful thing. It allows We the People to make laws, even amend our state constitution, and fix things that our Legislature is afraid or unwilling to fix. Oregonians have used the initiative more than the people of any other state, and we've used it for good causes: Women got the right to vote in Oregon via the initiative eight years before the U.S. Constitution was similarly amended. The 8-hour work day, the 40-hour work week and the nation's highest minimum wage were enacted by initiative.

Our death-with-dignity law and the scenic waterway system both became law by initiative. Many other valuable laws, such as the nation's first "bottle bill," were passed by the Legislature because supporters were ready and able to put the measure of the ballot, if the Legislature failed to act.

But gathering signatures to get initiatives on the ballot has become much more difficult since 2000. The Oregon Supreme Court eight years ago reversed course and removed the right of petitioners to collect signatures in the common areas of shopping centers or in parking lots of other stores. The Secretary of State and Oregon Legislature have imposed onerous regulations that are so difficult for ordinary people to follow (or even comprehend) that there will be zero measures on the 2008 ballot put there by volunteer circulators.

Citizens just cannot put measures on the statewide ballot any more. Too much cost and hassle. Signature gathering has been taken over by small businesses that pay people to do the dirty work. And the cost of gathering signatures using paid employees is so great — now \$300,000 and up for each statewide initiative — that only the well-heeled or corporations or labor unions can afford it.

But there's a better way: The Initiative Primary. Every May in the even-numbered years, we have a primary election and receive a detailed Voters Pamphlet from the Secretary of State. Under the Initiative Primary, any individual or group could gather a significant number of signatures (perhaps 10,000 or 5,000 from volunteers only) to qualify the measure for inclusion in the May Voters Pamphlet, along with pro and con arguments about the measure. The voters would then

vote, as part of their vote-by-mail ballot, for those measures that they would like to see on the November ballot. Those measures that receive a majority of yes votes would be included on the November ballot for voters to enact or reject. Simple. Painless. No fraud. No huge expense. No need to separately validate the voter signatures, which are already checked as part of the vote-by-mail process.

Who could object to this? Those who would rather that average voters have no say in a government dominated by lobbyists and other contributors of massive campaign cash.

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