

Chair Jama and members of the Committee, for the record my name is Felisa Hagins, and I am here today representing the Service Employees International Union Oregon (SEIU). SEIU is the largest Union in an Oregon representing over 82,000 workers. Over 80% of our members are registered to vote and actively participate in elections usually at higher rates than the general public. SEIU members take positions on ballot measures and have been the chief petitioner on many previous ballot measures. We believe the citizens initiative process is a value add to Oregon's democracy but also there must be clear, accountable, processes to make the citizens initiative process valuable and legitimate for all Oregonians.

SEIU recognizes the value in efforts to enhance the Legislature's understanding of potential ballot measures, and as such, we see merit in Senate Bill 1180. Specifically, the bill proposes that the Legislative Policy and Research Director would provide the Legislature with a list of each prospective statewide initiative petition filed for the next general election by December 1 of each odd-numbered year, including the text, ballot title, and total number of signatures gathered, with updates in January and February. This is all publicly gathered information and would provide early and more streamlined notification to legislators that could allow for a more informed consideration of these measures.

Furthermore, SB 1180 permits legislative leadership to request impartial analyses and summaries by nonpartisan legislative staff concerning the policy, fiscal, and revenue impacts, as well as the legality, of each prospective petition. We believe that access to such in-depth, nonpartisan information could provide legislators with a more comprehensive understanding of the potential effects of these measures on our state and the working families we represent, allowing for more informed discussions about their potential benefits and drawbacks. The possibility for legislative leadership to hold public hearings on these prospective petitions during the interim or the even-year session also presents an opportunity for valuable dialogue and a deeper examination of implementation challenges before potential enactment.

However, while we support these measures aimed at improving legislative understanding, SEIU also believes it is absolutely crucial to underscore the fundamental importance of the citizen initiative process in Oregon. This direct avenue for the people to shape the laws of our state is a vital component of our democracy and must be treated with the utmost respect. Therefore, as the Legislature considers the implementation of SB 1180, it must be vigilant in ensuring that this process does not inadvertently create obstacles or disincentives for citizens to exercise their right to initiate legislation.

The authority granted to request analyses and hold public hearings should be utilized judiciously, strictly for the purpose of fostering better understanding and preparation for potential implementation and a robust democratic dialogue. These tools must not be used in a manner that could unduly delay, obstruct, or undermine the will of the people if a measure is ultimately approved by the voters. The integrity and accessibility of the citizen initiative must be preserved. The legislative focus should remain on ensuring effective implementation should a measure pass, utilizing the information gleaned through the process outlined in SB 1180 to best serve all Oregonians, while safeguarding this fundamental democratic right. We urge the Legislature to proceed thoughtfully, ensuring that SB 1180 enhances understanding without overstepping the crucial boundaries related to the citizen initiative in Oregon.