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About Initiatives

What is the Initiative Process?

The initiative process, often referred to as "direct democracy," is a tool which citizens can use to directly propose change to California law instead of going through their legislative representatives in state government.

How to Qualify an Initiative for the Ballot

The first step in the process is drafting the text of the proposed law (or measure). The proponent(s) or author(s) of the measure can write the text themselves, seek assistance from private counsel, or request assistance from the Office of the Legislative Counsel.

Title and Summary

Once the text has been drafted, the proponent(s) must submit a written request to the Attorney General, along with the text of the measure and $200, for an official title and summary of the measure. The Attorney General prepares an official title and summary and, if necessary, requests a joint fiscal impact report from the Department of Finance and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee.

Petition Circulation

Once an official title and summary is issued by the Attorney General, an official filing date is established and a calendar of important filing deadlines is prepared for the proponent(s) by the Secretary of State. The proponent(s) have 150 days to circulate petitions for signatures to qualify the measure for the ballot. Proponent(s) must collect signatures equal to 5% of the total number of votes cast for all candidates for Governor at the last gubernatorial election to qualify an initiative proposing to change California statutes. If an initiative proposes to amend the California Constitution, proponent(s) must collect signatures equal to 8% of the total number of votes cast for all candidates for Governor at the last gubernatorial election.

Filing and Circulation

Once the required number of signatures has been collected, the proponent(s) must file the petitions with the appropriate county elections official for signature verification. The initiative is considered qualified once the Secretary of State receives notification from the county elections officials certifying the petitions have been signed by the requisite number of registered voters.

Proposition Placed on the Ballot for Voter Approval

Once an initiative has qualified, it is placed on the next statewide ballot. However, it must qualify at least 131 days before the next statewide election at which it will be placed before the voters. If approved by a simple majority vote, the initiative takes effect the day after the election unless another enactment date is specified in the text of the measure.

For more information regarding the initiative process, please visit the Secretary of State's website at www.ss.ca.gov or call the Elections Division at 916-657-2166.

SUBJECT TO COURT ORDERED CHANGES