

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5392

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Government Operations & Elections, February 6, 2007

**Title:** An act relating to changing the initiative filing fee.

**Brief Description:** Increasing the initiative filing fee.

**Sponsors:** Senators Kohl-Welles, Swecker, Fairley and Murray.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Government Operations & Elections: 1/30/07, 2/6/07 [DP, DNP].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; Kline and Pridemore.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Ranking Minority Member and Swecker.

**Staff:** Amy Van Horn (786-7784)

**Background:** The state of Washington adopted the initiative and referendum process in 1912, setting a filing fee of five dollars. The fee remains five dollars today. To qualify for the ballot, an initiative petition must contain signatures equal to eight percent of the votes cast for the office of Governor in the last election; a petition for a referendum must contain half that number.

**Summary of Bill:** The fee to file a petition for an initiative or a referendum is raised to one hundred dollars, which shall be fully refunded if the proposed measure qualifies for the ballot.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: The filing fee has not changed since 1912; adjusting the filing fee for inflation would bring it up to about a hundred dollars. Compared to other filing fees, such as for marriage licenses, one hundred dollars is very low, particularly considering all of the work the Secretary of State must do to process each filing. Increasing

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the fee is reasonable and fair, and will not deprive anyone of his or her free speech rights. Moreover, proponents will be fully refunded if the measures they sponsor reach the ballot. Other states have much higher filing fees. California's is two hundred dollars.

CON: Raising the filing fee is just putting a finger in the eye of the citizen. It puts free speech out of reach of the little guy. It would stifle grass roots organizing, silence fringe ideas, and encourage big money and professional lobbyists. The system is not broken. This bill would not bring a lot of money in to the state, but it would buy a lot of ill will from the people. It's not worth it.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles, prime sponsor; Andrew Villeneuve, Northwest Progressive Institute; David Anderson, citizen.

CON: Jack Fagan, Mike Fagan, and Mike Dunmire, Taxpayer Protection Initiative.