

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5820

As of January 25, 2024

Title: An act relating to establishing protections for citizens participating in the initiative and referendum process.

Brief Description: Establishing protections for citizens participating in the initiative and referendum process.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, J., Padden, Fortunato, Holy, McCune, Mullet, Short, Torres and Wagoner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government & Elections: 1/26/24.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a 25-foot buffer zone around people collecting signatures for, signing, or attempting to sign an initiative or referendum petition, in which persons cannot publicly protest the signature gathering within that zone.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

Staff: Greg Vogel (786-7413)

Background: Washington allows citizens to participate in the lawmaking process through initiatives or referenda that may be voted on by the general public. Initiatives may also be submitted to the Legislature. To qualify for the ballot, petitions must be signed by a certain percentage of legal voters. For initiatives, petitions must be signed by at least 8 percent of the number of votes cast for governor at the last election. A referendum petition requires at least 4 percent of the number of votes at the last gubernatorial election.

State law makes it a gross misdemeanor to interfere with, or attempt to interfere with, the

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right of any voter to sign or not to sign an initiative or referendum petition by threats, intimidation, or any other corrupt means or practice. A gross misdemeanor is punishable by up to 364 days in a county jail and a fine of up to \$5,000.

State law also creates a buffer zone of 100 feet around a voting center or student engagement hub entrances and 25 feet around ballot drop boxes during the voting period that begins 18 days before and ends the day of an election. Within this buffer zone, people may not:

- suggest or persuade, or attempt to suggest or persuade, any voter to vote for or against any candidate or ballot measure;
- circulate cards or handbills of any kind;
- solicit signatures to any kind of petition; or
- engage in any practice which interferes with the freedom of voters or disrupts the administration of the voting center.

Furthermore, it is illegal to engage in any of these prohibited activities using electronic amplification outside the buffer zone if the person is capable of being understood within the buffer zone. Violation of any of these provisions is also a gross misdemeanor.

Summary of Bill: No person may publicly protest another person collecting signatures for or signing any initiative or referendum petition within 25 feet of the person collecting signatures or the person signing or attempting to sign any initiative or referendum petition.

A violation of this prohibition is considered a gross misdemeanor.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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