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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5382**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senate State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Valdez, Liias, Nobles, Saldaña, and C. Wilson)

AN ACT Relating to requirements pertaining to signatures and addresses of ballot measure petitioners and petition signature gatherers; amending RCW 29A.72.110, 29A.72.120, and 29A.72.130; adding new sections to chapter 29A.72 RCW; and prescribing penalties.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 29A.72 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The legislature recognizes that the people have reserved for themselves the power to enact or reject legislation through the initiative and referendum process, as provided in Article II, section 1 of the state Constitution. The legislature determines that this right must be further guarded against fraud and mistake.

(2) The legislature has previously found that "paying a worker, whose task it is to secure the signatures of voters on initiative or referendum petitions, on the basis of the number of signatures the worker secures on the petitions encourages the introduction of fraud in the signature gathering process. Such a form of payment may act as an incentive for the worker to encourage a person to sign a petition which the person is not qualified to sign or to sign a petition for a ballot measure even if the person has already signed a petition for the measure." RCW 29A.84.280. Despite this finding, paid signature gathering has proliferated in Washington state and is routinely used by ballot measure proponents to qualify initiatives and referenda.

(3) Currently, the law requires initiative and referendum petitions to include a statement that the petition signature gatherer swears or affirms under penalty of law that, to the best of the circulator's knowledge, every petitioner signed their true name, correctly provided the accompanying information on the signature sheet, and was not compensated or promised compensation for signing the petition. These circulator declarations regularly go unsigned, leaving no record of the paid worker or other person who circulated the petition and was responsible for gathering the signatures contained therein. To adequately guard the people's initiative and referendum right against fraud and mistake, the legislature determines that the law must be clarified to require each petition signature gatherer circulating an initiative or referendum petition to sign the declaration under penalty of false swearing.

(4) The requirement for the petition circulator to sign such a declaration aligns with similar requirements in many other states in fact, a majority of states that have a ballot measure process require similar signed declarations. This requirement promotes the accuracy and integrity of information furnished on petition sheets and enables meaningful enforcement of existing law addressing petition misconduct and other crimes in chapters 9.44 and 29A.84 RCW.

(5) The legislature further finds that an election official verifying that the petitioner's residence address on the petition or paper is the same as the residence address on the affidavit of registration will also guard the people's initiative and referendum right against fraud and mistake. Currently, the law requires initiative and referendum petition sheets to include a place for each petitioner to sign and print his or her name, and the address, city, and county at which he or she is registered to vote. However, in 2023, numerous petition signatures on initiatives to the legislature were validated by the secretary of state that were not accompanied by the petitioner's address, city, and county of registration. Without the petitioner's residence address, the secretary of state validated petition signatures by relying on an apparent match between a signature on the petition sheet and a signature associated with a voter registration record, identified through a one-to-many comparison. The requirement for verification of the petitioner's address aligns with similar requirements in several other states, including Idaho and California. Verifying that the petitioner's residence address on an initiative or referendum petition is the same as the residence address on the petitioner's affidavit of voter registration will improve the accuracy of signature matching by reducing the number of potential comparators and confirming that an apparent signature match is correct. This verification will ensure that validated signatures are from registered voters who are qualified to sign petitions. The requirement reduces the risk that signatures from persons who are not qualified to sign will be incorrectly attributed to a qualified registered voter and that duplicate signatures from the same person will be counted more than once.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 29A.72 RCW to read as follows:

Each petition signature gatherer circulating an initiative or referendum petition must sign the declaration contained on each sheet of the petition as prescribed in RCW 29A.72.110(1)(b), 29A.72.120(1)(b), or 29A.72.130(1)(b).

**Sec.**  RCW 29A.72.110 and 2005 c 239 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Petitions for proposing measures for submission to the legislature at its next regular session must be substantially in the following form:

(a) The warning prescribed by RCW 29A.72.140; followed by:

INITIATIVE PETITION FOR SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATURE

To the Honorable . . . . . ., Secretary of State of the State of Washington:

We, the undersigned citizens and legal voters of the State of Washington, respectfully direct that this petition and the proposed measure known as Initiative Measure No. . . . . and entitled (here set forth the established ballot title of the measure), a full, true, and correct copy of which is printed on the reverse side of this petition, be transmitted to the legislature of the State of Washington at its next ensuing regular session, and we respectfully petition the legislature to enact said proposed measure into law; and each of us for himself or herself says: I have personally signed this petition; I am a legal voter of the State of Washington in the city (or town) and county written after my name, my residence address is correctly stated, and I have knowingly signed this petition only once.

(b) The following declaration must be printed on the reverse side of the petition:

I, . . . . . . . . . . . ., swear or affirm under penalty of ((~~law~~)) false swearing that I circulated this sheet of the foregoing petition, and that, to the best of my knowledge, every person who signed this sheet of the foregoing petition reviewed the sheet and knowingly and without any compensation or gratuity or promise of compensation or gratuity willingly signed his or her true name and that the information provided therewith is true and correct. I further acknowledge that under chapter 29A.84 RCW, forgery of signatures on this petition constitutes a class C felony, and that offering any consideration or gratuity to any person to induce them to sign a petition is a gross misdemeanor, such violations being punishable by fine or imprisonment or both.

Signature . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Date . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Address . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

State of Washington

County . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

RCW 9A.46.020 applies to any conduct constituting harassment against a petition signature gatherer. This penalty does not preclude the victim from seeking any other remedy otherwise available under law.

(2) The petition must include a place for each petitioner to sign and print his or her name, and the address, city, and county at which he or she is registered to vote.

**Sec.**  RCW 29A.72.120 and 2005 c 239 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Petitions for proposing measures for submission to the people for their approval or rejection at the next ensuing general election must be substantially in the following form:

(a) The warning prescribed by RCW 29A.72.140; followed by:

INITIATIVE PETITION FOR SUBMISSION TO THE PEOPLE

To the Honorable . . . . . ., Secretary of State of the State of Washington:

We, the undersigned citizens and legal voters of the State of Washington, respectfully direct that the proposed measure known as Initiative Measure No. . . . ., entitled (here insert the established ballot title of the measure), a full, true and correct copy of which is printed on the reverse side of this petition, be submitted to the legal voters of the State of Washington for their approval or rejection at the general election to be held on the . . . . . day of November, (year); and each of us for himself or herself says: I have personally signed this petition; I am a legal voter of the State of Washington, in the city (or town) and county written after my name, my residence address is correctly stated, and I have knowingly signed this petition only once.

(b) The following declaration must be printed on the reverse side of the petition:

I, . . . . . . . . . . . ., swear or affirm under penalty of ((~~law~~)) false swearing that I circulated this sheet of the foregoing petition, and that, to the best of my knowledge, every person who signed this sheet of the foregoing petition reviewed the sheet and knowingly and without any compensation or gratuity or promise of compensation or gratuity willingly signed his or her true name and that the information provided therewith is true and correct. I further acknowledge that under chapter 29A.84 RCW, forgery of signatures on this petition constitutes a class C felony, and that offering any consideration or gratuity to any person to induce them to sign a petition is a gross misdemeanor, such violations being punishable by fine or imprisonment or both.

Signature . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Date . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Address . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

State of Washington

County . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

RCW 9A.46.020 applies to any conduct constituting harassment against a petition signature gatherer. This penalty does not preclude the victim from seeking any other remedy otherwise available under law.

(2) The petition must include a place for each petitioner to sign and print his or her name, and the address, city, and county at which he or she is registered to vote.

**Sec.**  RCW 29A.72.130 and 2013 c 11 s 74 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Petitions ordering that acts or parts of acts passed by the legislature be referred to the people at the next ensuing general election, or special election ordered by the legislature, must be substantially in the following form:

(a) The warning prescribed by RCW 29A.72.140; followed by:

PETITION FOR REFERENDUM

To the Honorable . . . . . ., Secretary of State of the State of Washington:

We, the undersigned citizens and legal voters of the State of Washington, respectfully order and direct that Referendum Measure No. . . . . ., filed to revoke a (or part or parts of a) bill that (concise statement required by RCW 29A.72.050) and that was passed by the . . . . . . legislature of the State of Washington at the last regular (special) session of said legislature, shall be referred to the people of the state for their approval or rejection at the regular (special) election to be held on the . . . . day of November, (year); and each of us for himself or herself says: I have personally signed this petition; I am a legal voter of the State of Washington, in the city (or town) and county written after my name, my residence address is correctly stated, and I have knowingly signed this petition only once.

(b) The following declaration must be printed on the reverse side of the petition:

I, . . . . . . . . . . . ., swear or affirm under penalty of ((~~law~~)) false swearing that I circulated this sheet of the foregoing petition, and that, to the best of my knowledge, every person who signed this sheet of the foregoing petition reviewed the sheet and knowingly and without any compensation or gratuity or promise of compensation or gratuity willingly signed his or her true name and that the information provided therewith is true and correct. I further acknowledge that under chapter 29A.84 RCW, forgery of signatures on this petition constitutes a class C felony, and that offering any consideration or gratuity to any person to induce them to sign a petition is a gross misdemeanor, such violations being punishable by fine or imprisonment or both.

Signature . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Date . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Address . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

State of Washington

County . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

RCW 9A.46.020 applies to any conduct constituting harassment against a petition signature gatherer. This penalty does not preclude the victim from seeking any other remedy otherwise available under law.

(2) The petition must include a place for each petitioner to sign and print his or her name, and the address, city, and county at which he or she is registered to vote.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 29A.72 RCW to read as follows:

(1)(a) For purposes of verifying a signature on an initiative or referendum petition, the secretary of state shall verify that the residence address on the petition or paper is the same as the residence address on the affidavit of voter registration or a previous affidavit of voter registration. If there is no residence address match, or if the petition or paper does not specify the residence address, or if the information required to be provided under this chapter is not contained in the petition, the affected signature shall not be counted as valid.

(b) Notwithstanding (a) of this subsection, the secretary of state shall not invalidate a signature for minor discrepancies, such as an incomplete or inaccurate apartment or unit number in the signer's residence address.

(2) A signature invalidated pursuant to this section does not affect the validity of another valid signature on the particular petition or paper.

(3) The requirements of this section do not affect the use of statistical sampling techniques for verifying signatures under RCW 29A.72.230. Address verification as part of statistical sampling is sufficient to meet the requirements of this section.

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