

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Ethics and Elections

BILL: SB 1794

INTRODUCER: Senator Hutson

SUBJECT: Constitutional Amendments Proposed by Initiative

DATE: January 24, 2020      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Fox	Roberts	EE	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.			JU	
3.			RC	

**I. Summary:**

SB 1794 modifies the citizen initiative process for amending the State Constitution by:

- Expanding the scope of Florida Supreme Court review to include federal and state constitutional questions along with examining substantive, undefined terms.
- Narrowing the role of the Financial Impact Estimating Conference’s (FIEC) financial impact statement, to estimate the proposal's financial impact on state governments and the state budget (removing impacts to the local governments and economies).
- Statutorily authorizing the Senate President and House Speaker to direct legislative staff to analyze any other impacts of the proposal.
- Increasing—from 10 percent of the number of statewide electors to 50 percent—the petition signatures that must be verified before the Secretary of State refers the proposal to the Attorney General and FIEC.
- Creating a cause of action for citizens to challenge a petition circulator's registration.
- Providing that petition signatures are valid until the next February 1 of an even-numbered year, which prevents signatures from being held over for a subsequent election.
- Requiring a supervisor of elections to charge the actual cost for verifying a petition signature in lieu of the current 10 cents/signature, and requiring the Department of State to determine the actual cost annually by rule.
- Providing that a signature obtained illegally or by an unregistered paid petition circulator is invalid.
- Allowing the Division of Elections or a supervisor of elections to provide a petition form in PDF format, with printing costs to be borne by the sponsor.
- Requiring the ballot to include statements indicating:
  - The name of the sponsor.
  - The percentage of in-state contributions received for the proposal.
  - Whether the sponsor used out-of-state petition circulators.

- **Bolded** Notice, if applicable, that the FIEC: estimates an indeterminate fiscal impact; or, estimates a negative fiscal impact or cannot reach a consensus, along with the possible tax and government services impact.
- Requiring a copy of the proposed amendment in each voting booth, instead of being posted/available in the polling room.
- Requiring a political committee supporting a proposal to disclose the percentage of in-state contributions on periodic campaign finance reports.

The bill is effective upon becoming a law and, by its express terms, applies to 2020 ballot initiatives, though it *does not* “affect the validity of any petition form gathered before the effective date of this act or any contract entered into before the effective date of this act.”

## II. Present Situation:

The Florida Constitution may be amended only if the voters approve an amendment originating from the Legislature, the Constitution Revision Commission, the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, a constitutional convention, or a citizen initiative.<sup>1</sup> A citizen initiative must embrace only one subject (unless it concerns limiting the power of government to raise revenue),<sup>2</sup> but proposals originating from the other sources are not so limited.<sup>3</sup>

### Citizen Initiative Process

The Constitution requires the sponsor of an amendment proposed by citizen initiative to obtain a specified number of signatures on a petition to place the proposal on the ballot.<sup>4</sup> The petition must contain the signatures of a number of voters equal to eight percent of the votes cast in the state in the preceding presidential election as well as eight percent of the vote cast in that election in each of at least half of the congressional districts of the state.<sup>5</sup> The number of signatures required for placement on the 2018 or 2020 ballot is 766,200, with a specified number of that total required to come from at least 14 of the state's congressional districts.<sup>6</sup>

Before gathering signatures for an amendment proposed by citizen initiative, the sponsor of the proposed amendment must register as a Florida political committee.<sup>7</sup> The sponsor must then gather the required number of signatures. The sponsor must present each signature to the appropriate supervisor of elections (supervisor) where the signee resides within 30 days of gathering the signature for validation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Art. XI, Fla. Const.

<sup>2</sup> Art. XI, s. 3, Fla. Const.

<sup>3</sup> Art. XI, ss. 1, 2, 4, 6, Fla. Const.

<sup>4</sup> Art. XI, s. 3, Fla. Const.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Florida Dep't of State, *2018 Initiative Petition Handbook*, <https://dos.myflorida.com/media/697659/initiative-petitionhandbook-2018-election-cycle-eng.pdf> (last visited Jan. 22, 2020) [hereinafter DOS, *Initiative Petition Handbook*].

<sup>7</sup> Sections 100.371(2) and 106.03, F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 100.371(7), F.S.

If the sponsor uses a paid petition circulator to gather signatures, the circulator must register with the Secretary before collecting signatures.<sup>9</sup> Failure of a paid petition circulator to register before collecting petition forms is a second-degree misdemeanor.<sup>10</sup> The paid petition circulator must provide to the Secretary:

- His or her name, permanent address, temporary address, and date of birth.
- A Florida address where the circulator will accept service of process.
- A statement that the circulator consents to the jurisdiction of Florida courts.
- Any information required by the Secretary to verify the circulator's identity or address.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, a paid petition circulator must provide an affidavit with each petition form gathered. The affidavit must include the circulator's name and permanent address and a signed statement verifying, under penalties of perjury, that the petition was signed in the circulator's presence.<sup>12</sup>

The date when the elector signs the petition is presumed to be the date of collection.<sup>13</sup> The sponsor incurs a fine of \$50 for each petition form submitted to the supervisor more than 30 days after the elector signed the petition. The sponsor incurs a fine of \$500 for each petition form not submitted to the supervisor at all. If the sponsor acted willfully, the fines are raised to \$250 and \$1,000 per petition, respectively.<sup>14</sup> The sponsor can avoid fines if it shows that failure to deliver the petitions was due to *force majeure*<sup>15</sup> or impossibility of performance.<sup>16</sup> If the Secretary believes these provisions have been violated, the Secretary may refer the matter to the Attorney General for enforcement.<sup>17</sup>

The Division of Elections (division) within the Department of State or the supervisor must provide printed petition forms to registered paid petition circulators that contain information identifying the paid petition circulator. The division must maintain a database of registered paid petition circulators and petition forms assigned to each, updating the database daily with respect to petition forms. The supervisor must provide to the division information relating to petition forms assigned to and received from paid petition circulators.<sup>18</sup>

When a sponsor delivers the collected signatures to the supervisor, the supervisor must check<sup>19</sup> each signature to ensure that the:

- Elector's original signature is recorded.
- Elector accurately recorded the date on which he or she signed the form.
- Elector is a qualified and registered Florida voter.

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<sup>9</sup> Section 100.371(3), F.S.

<sup>10</sup> Section 104.187, F.S. *See also* s. 104.186, F.S. (making it a first-degree misdemeanor to compensate a petition circulator based on the number of petitions gathered).

<sup>11</sup> Section 100.371(4), F.S.

<sup>12</sup> Section 100.371(5), F.S.

<sup>13</sup> Section 100.371(10), F.S.

<sup>14</sup> Section 100.371(7)(a), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> “*Force majeure*” refers to circumstances that cannot be foreseen or controlled, which prevent a person from completing a legal obligation. *See Black's Law Dictionary* 673 (8th ed. 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Section 100.371(7)(b), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 100.371(8), F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Section 100.371(6), F.S.

<sup>19</sup> The sponsor is required to pay the supervisor the sum of 10 cents per signature checked or the actual cost of checking the signatures, whichever is less. Section 99.097(4), F.S.

- Form on which the signature is recorded contains the elector's name, address, city, county, and voter registration number or date of birth.<sup>20</sup>

A petition form is invalid if any of these requirements is not met.<sup>21</sup> The supervisors submit their total numbers of valid signatures to the Secretary of State (Secretary).<sup>22</sup> Once a sponsor obtains verified signatures equal to 10 percent of the statewide requirement in at least 25 percent of Florida's congressional districts,<sup>23</sup> the Secretary sends the petition to the:

- Financial Impact Estimating Conference (FIEC)<sup>24</sup> to complete an analysis on the proposed amendment's fiscal impact within 75 days.<sup>25</sup>
- Attorney General, who in turn petitions the Florida Supreme Court for an advisory opinion as to whether the proposed amendment complies with the single-subject requirement and other basic legal requirements.<sup>26</sup>

### **Fiscal Impact Estimating Conference (FIEC)**

After it receives a proposed amendment from the Secretary, FIEC estimates the proposal's projected impacts on the costs and revenues of state and local governments, the state and local economies, and the state budget. FIEC must complete two documents: a financial impact statement and an initiative financial information statement.<sup>27</sup>

The financial impact statement is placed on the ballot to inform voters of the financial impacts the proposed amendment will have.<sup>28</sup> The supervisor must include a copy of the FIEC's financial information summaries in the publication or mailing for sample ballots.

In addition, if the financial impact statement estimates that the proposal will cause increased costs, decreased revenues, a negative impact on the economy, or an indeterminate fiscal impact, the ballot must include a statement indicating such effect in **bold font**.<sup>29</sup>

The lengthier initiative financial information statement is available on the websites of the Secretary and the Office of Economic and Demographic Research.<sup>30</sup> Each supervisor must

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<sup>20</sup> Section 100.371(11), F.S.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> Section 15.21(3), F.S. For the 2018 and 2020 elections, the number is 76,632 and must come from at least seven congressional districts. DOS, *Initiative Petition Handbook*.

<sup>24</sup> The Florida Constitution provides that the legislature must provide by general law for the provision of a statement to the public regarding the probable financial impact of any amendment proposed by initiative. Art. XI, s. 5(c), Fla. Const. The legislature created FIEC to review, analyze, and estimate the fiscal impact of constitutional amendments proposed by citizen initiative. It consists of four persons:

one person from the Executive Office of the Governor; the coordinator of the Office of Economic and Demographic Research or a designee; one professional Senate staffer; and one professional House staffer. Section 100.371(13)(c)1., F.S.

<sup>25</sup> See s. 100.371(13), F.S. (providing for the 75-day timeframe, which is tolled when the Legislature is in session).

<sup>26</sup> Section 16.061, F.S.; DOS, *Initiative Petition Handbook*; art. IV, s. 10, Fla. Const.; *Advisory Opinion to the Atty. Gen' l re Rights of Electricity Consumers Regarding Solar Energy Choice*, 188 So. 3d 822 (Fla. 2016) (outlining scope of the Supreme Court analysis when reviewing proposed constitutional amendments for ballot placement).

<sup>27</sup> Section 100.371(13), F.S.

<sup>28</sup> Section 100.371(13)(a), F.S.

<sup>29</sup> Section 100.371(13)(d), F.S.

<sup>30</sup> Section 100.371(13)(e)5., F.S.

include in the publication and mailing of sample ballots the internet addresses where FIEC's full information statements can be viewed and a summary of the statements.<sup>31</sup> A summary of the information statements is also available at each polling place, at the main office of the supervisor, upon request, and on the supervisor's website.<sup>32</sup>

### **Ballot Placement and Passage**

If the Secretary determines that the sponsor has collected the required number of verified signatures by February 1 of the election year,<sup>33</sup> he or she assigns an amendment number and certifies the proposed amendment's ballot position.<sup>34</sup> When the proposal is printed on the ballot, the ballot must also include:

- A ballot summary of up to 75 words summarizing the proposal's purpose.
- A ballot title including a caption of up to 15 words describing the proposal.
- The financial impact statement prepared by FIEC.<sup>35</sup>

At the general election, if at least 60 percent of the voters voting on the proposed amendment vote yes,<sup>36</sup> the proposed amendment is incorporated into the Florida Constitution.<sup>37</sup> The amendment becomes effective on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January following the election or on a different date if specified in the amendment.<sup>38</sup>

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

SB 1794 changes the deadline for gathering signatures, the Fiscal Impact Estimating Conference (FIEC) analysis process, the ballot language requirements, and the requirements for supervisors of elections.

#### **Petition Circulators and Petition Form Signatures**

The bill creates a cause of action in circuit court for citizens to challenge a petition circulator's registration, and requires the court to enjoin a respondent not in compliance from collecting signatures or initiative petitions for compensation until such person is lawfully registered. Further, the bill invalidates any illegally-obtained signature, including ones that are collected by paid petition circulators who were not validly registered at the time they collected the signature.

SB 1794 also provides that a signature on a form is valid only until February 1 of the next even-numbered year instead of for two years from the date signed, thereby tying the current two-year signature validity period to the Secretary's ballot designation deadline.

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<sup>31</sup> Sections 100.371(13)(e)5. and 101.20, F.S.

<sup>32</sup> Section 100.371(13)(e), F.S.

<sup>33</sup> Art. XI, s. 5(b), Fla. Const.

<sup>34</sup> Sections 100.371(12) and 101.161, F.S.

<sup>35</sup> Section 101.161(1), F.S.

<sup>36</sup> Art. XI, s. 5(e), Fla. Const.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

### **Analysis of the Projected Impacts of Proposed Amendments**

SB 1794 changes the process for the Secretary of State to refer a proposed amendment for further analysis by:

- Changing the percentage of signatures required to trigger referral from 10 percent of the number of statewide electors to 50 percent; and
- Requiring the Secretary to refer the proposed amendment to the Senate President and House Speaker in addition to the Attorney General and FIEC.

Further, the FIEC's financial impact statement is no longer required to estimate the proposal's projected impacts on local government<sup>39</sup> and the state and local economies. The FIEC's revised role requires the statement to estimate the proposal's:

- Effect on increasing or decreasing revenues or costs to the State government; and,
- Overall impact to the State budget.

Instead, SB 1794 leaves to the discretion of the Senate President and House Speaker whether to direct legislative staff to conduct a broader analysis of the proposal, which may include whether the proposal has undefined terms or will cause unintended consequences or economic impacts.

The bill also requires the Attorney General, upon petitioning the Florida Supreme Court to review the legality of a proposed amendment, to ask the Court whether it:

- Violates the United States Constitution;
- Conflicts with existing provisions of the State Constitution;
- Is facially void for vagueness; and,
- Has any undefined terms that will have a substantive impact.

### **Political Committee Disclosure and Ballot Requirements**

SB 1794 requires a political committee supporting a proposed amendment to disclose, in its regular campaign finance reports, the percentage of contributions received from in-state persons,<sup>40</sup> excluding political parties, affiliated party committees, or political committees.

In addition to the ballot summary and the financial impact statement already required to appear on the ballot, the bill requires the ballot to include the following information:

- The name of the sponsor.
- The percentage of contributions received by the sponsor from in-state persons (excluding political parties, affiliated party committees, or political committees).
- A statement indicating whether an out-of-state petition circulator was used to collect any petitions.

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<sup>39</sup> This information on impacts to local governments will still be available on the FIEC's financial *information* statement. See s. 100.371(13)(e)3., F.S.

<sup>40</sup> "Person" includes an individual, corporation, association, firm, partnership, joint venture, joint stock company, club, organization, estate, trust, business trust, syndicate, or other combination of individuals having collective capacity. *Cf.* s. 106.011(14), F.S.

- A statement in bold capital indicating if the FIEC:
  - Estimates that the proposal will result in increased costs, decreased revenues, or a negative fiscal impact on state government;
  - Cannot determine the proposal's financial impact due to ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding the amendment's impact; or,
  - Is unable to reach a consensus on the proposal's financial impact.
 With respect to the first and third statements, the statement must also provide that the amendment may result in higher taxes or a loss of government services in order to maintain a constitutionally-mandated balanced State budget.

The extent of this additional ballot language could result in an additional ballot page(s), adding to printing costs and possibly resulting in longer lines at some busier polling places.

### **Supervisors of Elections**

SB 1794 requires a supervisor of elections to:

- Include a copy of the proposed amendment text in *each voting booth*, instead of posting it conspicuously in the polling room or early voting site on the day of the election. The Department of State is required to print and furnish each supervisor with a sufficient number of copies of the amendment in either poster or booklet form.
- Charge the actual cost for checking a petition form as opposed to the current 10 cents per signature, with the cost to be calculated by Department of State rulemaking and updated annually.

The bill also gives a supervisor of elections the option to provide petition forms to a sponsor in PDF format instead of requiring that the supervisor print the forms. This effectively shifts the printing costs for petition forms to the sponsor instead of the supervisor.

### **Severability Clause and Effective Date**

SB 1794 provides that if any provision contained within the bill is held invalid, the remaining portion of the bill is severed from that provision and should be given full legal effect.

The bill is effective upon becoming a law, and its changes apply to all initiative amendments proposed for the 2020 ballot. However, nothing in the bill affects the validity of a:

- Petition form gathered before the effective date.
- Contract entered into before the effective date.

## **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

## B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

## C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

## D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

## E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. **Fiscal Impact Statement:**

## A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

## B. Private Sector Impact:

***Initiative Petition Sponsors/Paid-Petition Gatherers***

Allowing supervisor to provide petition forms to initiative sponsors in PDF format instead of using printed forms shifts printing costs to the sponsor instead of the supervisor. The costs are indeterminate at this time, and will vary from election-to-election and by county, based on the county's size and the number of initiatives/petitions involved.

Further, requiring initiative sponsors to remit to supervisors the *actual* cost of signature verification (in lieu of the current 10 cents per signature) may result in additional costs or additional savings to sponsors, depending on how efficient each county is at performing this task and the approach of the Department of State rule determining the actual costs.

Finally, requiring political committees supporting an initiative to separate out and report the percentage of their in-state contributions may result in an indeterminate amount of administrative costs.

## C. Government Sector Impact:

***State******Recurring Costs***

The Department of State will incur indeterminate printing and delivery costs associated with furnishing supervisors constitutional amendments in poster and/or booklet form for display in each voting booth on Election Day and at early voting.



*Recurring Savings*

The bill provides an indeterminate positive impact on state government by: limiting the FIEC's role in analyzing a proposed amendment; and, delaying formal review of the proposed initiative until 50 percent of the necessary signatures are verified, as opposed to the current 10 percent.

*Local**Recurring Savings*

Allowing county supervisor of elections the option to provide petition forms to initiative sponsors in PDF format instead of requiring that the supervisor print the forms shifts the printing costs for petition forms to the sponsor instead of the supervisor. The cost savings is indeterminate at this time, and will vary from election-to-election and by county.

*Recurring Costs*

The additional ballot statements that the bill mandates with respect to citizen initiative amendments could add an extra page(s) to the ballot, resulting in greater printing costs. As this situation will vary from county-to-county, the cost is indeterminate at this time.

*Recurring Savings/Costs*

Requiring initiative petition sponsors to remit to supervisors the actual cost of signature verification (in lieu of the current 10 cents per signature) may result in additional costs or additional savings, depending on how efficient each county is at performing this task and the approach of the Department of State rule governing the actual costs.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 15.21, 100.371, 101.161, 101.171, and 106.07.

**IX. Additional Information:****A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

**B. Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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