

REVISE INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM PETITION SIZE

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House Bill 4328 (Substitute H-2)

Sponsor: Rep. Leon Drolet

Committee: House Oversight, Elections, and Ethics

First Analysis (6-9-05)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would modify the requirements for the size of most petition sheets, allowing them to be 8-1/2 by 11 inches, in addition to their customary size of 8-1/2 inches by 14 inches, in order to facilitate electronic transmission of the forms.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have no fiscal impact on state government or on local units of government.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Michigan Election Law requires that a petition that proposes a constitutional amendment, the initiation of legislation, or a referendum on legislation be eight-and-one-half inches by fourteen inches in size. The same requirement applies to a petition to place a question on the ballot before the electorate of a political subdivision.

Some people would prefer the option of using petition sheets eight-and-one-half by eleven, the standard letter size. This, they say, would be useful in an era of downloading forms from the Internet, and exchanging information by fax and e-mail.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend Section 482 of the Michigan Election Law to modify the requirements for the size of petition sheets for petitions proposing a constitutional amendment, the initiation of legislation, or a referendum on legislation, and for putting a question on a local ballot. Generally, the bill would amend the Michigan Election Law to allow petition sheets to be 8-1/2 inches by 11 inches, in addition to their customary size of 8-1/2 inches by 14 inches.

Currently the law requires that each petition be 8-1/2 inches by 14 inches in size. The bill would allow a petition sheet to be of that size, but also require that each sheet be in horizontal format, and that each have no fewer than seven signature lines. In addition, a smaller 8-1/2 by 11 inch petition sheet could be used in horizontal format, if three conditions were met: 1) the full text of the proposal could be printed on one or both sides of the 8-1/2 inches by 11 inches petition sheet; 2) each petition sheet that was submitted was 8-1/2 inches by 11 inches in size; and 3) each petition sheet contained no fewer than seven signature lines.

Finally, under the bill the title of the proposal that appeared on the petition would have to be printed in 12-point boldfaced type. Currently the law requires 14-point boldfaced type.

MCL 168.482

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Providing the option of eight-and-one-half by eleven petition sheets would make them more accessible to people through modern means, such as downloading from the Internet, faxing, and e-mail. This will be a public service to citizens who want to circulate petitions to get proposals on the ballot. The bill makes no change to other requirements, whether the content of petitions, the number of signatures required, who may circulate or sign petitions, or most other design features.

Against:

In previous legislative sessions there have been questions about how practical such a change will be, given the amount of information that must be on petitions to get issues on the ballot. There may be little room for signatures once all of the other necessary information and warnings are placed on the smaller page. It should be noted that eight-and-one-half by fourteen is the standard size for other kinds of petitions (such as nominating petitions).

Response:

It should be noted that the bill would reduce the font size from 14 point to 12 point for the heading to the petition.

POSITIONS:

No positions were advanced on the bill.

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.