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Senate Bill 529 (as passed by the Senate)
Senate Bill 530 (Substitute S-1 as passed by the Senate)
Senate Bill 531 (Substitute S-3 as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Jeremy Moss (S.B. 529 & 530)
Senator Jeff Irwin (S.B. 531)
Committee: Elections and Ethics

Date Completed: 12-1-25

RATIONALE

In 2022, Michigan's gubernatorial race faced increased scrutiny after the State Bureau of Elections disqualified five primary candidates for failing to meet required signature thresholds. Though each candidate submitted a nominating petition with the required number of signatures, the Bureau found that an estimated 68,000 signatures submitted across 10 nominating petitions were fraudulent, an unprecedented number.¹ An investigation by Attorney General (AG) Dana Nessel found that the signature-gathering firms hired by each candidate engaged in fraudulent activity, not the candidates themselves.² In 2024, former State Senator Adam Hollier submitted 1,553 signatures to run in the 13th Congressional District's Democratic primary; however, 690 were deemed invalid, disqualifying him.³ Signature fraud also affects local petitions and ballot initiative petitions. In 2021, for example, AG Nessel found that the group Unlock Michigan engaged in unethical behavior during promotion of its 2020 petition. The AG's office reviewed the group's circulator training, alleging that circulators were told to misrepresent the purpose of the initiative to voters and to commit perjury during depositions if questioned about signature validity.⁴ The AG's office could not charge circulators who engaged in this deception because the Michigan Election Law does not criminalize the action. Some believe that paying circulators per signature incentivizes them to engage in deception and that deception, regardless of the reason, runs counter to the democratic process. Accordingly, it has been suggested that the Law be amended to prohibit practices that incentivize deceptive behavior and to penalize bad actors for spreading misinformation.

CONTENT

Senate Bill 531 (S-3) would amend the Michigan Election Law to do the following:

- Require that, if an elector signed a petition, nominating petition, qualifying petition for a candidate without political party affiliation, a petition to form a new State political party, or a recall petition more than once, only the first valid signature of that elector would be counted.**

¹ Mauger, Craig, "Board of canvassers deadlocks, blocking 5 candidates for governor from ballot", *The Detroit News*, May 26, 2022.

² Timm, Jane C., "Criminal charges filed over fake signatures that spoiled Michigan GOP gubernatorial bids", *NBC News*, June 22, 2023.

³ Hendrickson, Clara, "Adam Hollier failed to file enough voter signatures to land spot on ballot, review finds", *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 2024.

⁴ Burns, Gus, "Unlock Michigan petition effort was 'sleazy,' but not illegal, AG says", *MLIVE*, April 21, 2021.

-- Modify various petition headings and warnings in accordance with the requirements above.

Senate Bill 529 would amend the Michigan Election Law to prohibit an individual employed to circulate a petition, a nominating petition, a qualifying petition, or a recall petition from being paid a fixed rate or amount for each petition signature collected or for each completed petition signature sheet.

Senate Bill 530 (S-1) would amend the Michigan Election Law to require the circulator of a petition to offer an individual the choice to be read to or to read the summary of the purpose of a petition's proposed amendment or question before the individual signed the petition.

Senate Bill 531 would take effect January 1, 2027. Senate Bills 531 and 530 are described in detail below.

Senate Bill 531 (S-3)

Among other things, the Law requires the following warning to be printed in 12-point type immediately above the place for signatures, on each part of the petition: "A person who knowingly signs this petition more than once, signs a name other than his or her own, signs when not a qualified and registered elector, or sets opposite his or her signature on a petition, a date other than the actual date the signature was affixed, is violating the provisions of the Michigan Election Law."

Instead, under the bill, if a petition, nominating petition, qualifying petition for a candidate without political party affiliation, a petition to form a new State political party, or a recall petition contained the signature of the same elector more than one time, only the first valid signature of that elector could be counted. As such, the bill would modify the warning to read as follows: "An individual who knowingly signs a name other than the individual's own name, signs if not a qualified and registered elector, or sets opposite the individual's signature on a petition a date other than the actual date the signature was affixed is violating the provisions of the Michigan Election Law."

Additionally, a petition to form a new political party must contain the following warning: "A person who knowingly signs petitions to organize more than one new State political party, signs a petition to organize a new State political party more than once, or signs a name other than his or her own is violating the provisions of the Michigan Election Law."

The Law prohibits an individual from knowingly signing a petition to organize more than one new State political party. It also prohibits a voter from signing a petition to a new State political party more than once. The bill would delete the latter provision. As such, the bill would modify the warning's language to read as follows: "An individual who knowingly signs petitions to organize more than one new State political party or signs a name other than the individual's own name is violating the provisions of the Michigan Election Law."

Currently, a person circulating a recall petition must fill out a certificate of circulator. Among other things, the circulator must certify that the circulator had neither caused nor permitted a person to sign the recall petition more than once and has no knowledge of a person signing the recall petition more than once. The bill would delete this provision.

Lastly, the bill would specify that, if a circulator who certified a petition used the circulator's mailing address and that mailing address incorporated the political jurisdiction in which the circulator was registered to vote, the circulator's certification by signature would *not* be invalid

solely because the circulator signed the petition using a mailing address instead of a residential address.

Senate Bill 530 (S-1)

The bill would require the circulator of a petition to offer to an individual considering the petition a choice of either of the following:

- To have the circulator indicate to the individual where the approved summary of the purpose of the proposed amendment or question proposed was located on the petition and give that individual the opportunity to read the summary.
- To have the circulator read to the individual the approved summary of the purpose of the proposed amendment or question proposed.

If a circulator failed to comply with this requirement when obtaining a signature on a petition, the sponsor of the petition would be subject to a civil fine of up to \$1,500, or \$50 for each violation, whichever was greater.

MCL 168.483b & 168.957a (S.B. 529)
Proposed MCL 168.482g (S.B. 530)
MCL 168.482 et al. (S.B. 531)

PREVIOUS LEGISLATION

(This section does not provide a comprehensive account of previous legislative efforts on this subject matter.)

Senate Bills 529 and 530 are reintroductions of Senate Bills 1108 and 1109 from the 2023-2024 Legislative Session. Senate Bill 531 is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 1110 as introduced from the 2023-2024 Legislative Session. The Senate passed Senate Bills 1108 through 1110, which were referred to the House but received no further action.

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The bill would deter fraud by prohibiting the practice of payment per signature. While some candidates and causes may employ volunteers to gather petitions, the sheer number of signatures required often necessitates the hiring of professional petition circulators. These circulators are often paid by signature, usually less than \$10 per signature;⁵ however, in 2022, some circulators were paid up to \$20 per signature.⁶ This system incentivizes circulators to gather as many signatures as possible, and some may employ deceptive tactics to do so. For example, a petition circulator operating on a college campus may misrepresent the nature of a controversial ballot initiative petition to gather signatures⁷ or allow a voter to sign the name of another person.⁸ Petition circulators also may engage in a process known as "round-robin," passing around multiple petitions to other circulators and taking turns signing each,⁹

⁵ Ibarguen, Emilio Perez, "Petition pushers mislead students", *The State News*, October 13, 2025.

⁶ Yu, Yue Stella, "Soaring signature costs may bar some candidates from making Michigan ballot", *Bridge Michigan*, April 15, 2022.

⁷ Ibarguen, "Petition pushers mislead students".

⁸ Egan, Paul, "New video shows Unlock Michigan circulator telling woman she can sign husband's name", *Detroit Free Press*, September 30, 2020.

⁹ Egan, Paul, "5 Michigan GOP candidates for governor disqualified from ballot after board deadlocks", *Detroit Free Press*, September 30, 2020.

or otherwise falsify signatures.¹⁰ Additionally, voters aware that circulators are paid by signature may feel pressure to sign a petition in order to ensure a circulator receives compensation.¹¹ Paying circulators per signature creates a system with potential for abuse. By banning this practice, the State would allow circulators to be paid fairly for their work without incentivizing them to act unethically. Reportedly, 10 out of the 26 states that allow for an initiative or referendum process ban per signature payments. Michigan should join these states and ban the payment per signature practice.

Response: The bills would not wholly prevent fraud. Petition circulators may serve for a variety of reasons. Some may be motivated for financial purposes, while some may feel strongly for the issue at hand. The bill would remove a financial incentive for fraud, but it would not discourage circulators from engaging in fraud for other reasons, such as to support or oppose a petition.

Supporting Argument

The bills would ensure that voters who signed a petition more than once would not be disenfranchised. The State currently invalidates the signature of any voter who has signed a petition more than once, regardless of the reason. While some instances may be fraudulent, voters also may sign a petition multiple times accidentally or in good faith. A voter may have forgotten that the voter already signed the petition during the 180-day signature gathering window or sign multiple times out of enthusiasm, not realizing such an action is prohibited. By removing that voter's signature entirely, the State invalidates the will of a legitimate voter, silencing the voter's voice in the democratic process. By passing these bills, the State would protect voters' rights.

Supporting Argument

The bills would further support transparency by requiring petition circulators to point out to or read to voters a summary of the petition. Currently, the law requires the sponsor of a petition proposing an amendment to the State Constitution or to initiate legislation to submit to the Board of State Canvassers (Board) a 100-word summary of purpose regarding the proposed amendment or initiated law for approval. Such a summary must be true and impartial.¹² Upon approval by the Board, this summary must be incorporated into a petition. Currently, a petition circulator is not required to point out this summary to voters, which may facilitate deceptive practices. By requiring circulators to point out or read to voters this impartial statement concerning the nature of a constitutional amendment or initiated legislation, the bills would further obstruct a circulator's ability to misrepresent the nature of the petition. In so doing, the State would increase faith in the State's petition process.

Response: This requirement could be unenforceable or enforced in a biased manner. Monitoring every circulator's interaction with a voter to ensure compliance with this requirement would be impossible. If a circulator were caught violating the proposed requirement, the AG would prosecute that individual. The AG is a partisan official and could choose whether to prosecute a circulator based upon whether the AG agreed with the subject of the petition.

Opposing Argument

Ultimately, the bills would be ineffective, if passed. Though Senate Bill 529 would prohibit petition circulators from being paid per signature or signature sheet, the firms for which petition circulators worked could find other ways to reward productivity. For example, a firm could pay circulators a flat rate, as allowed by law, but offer circulators a bonus based on the

¹⁰ Laytner, Bill and Christina Hall, "Forged signatures raise concerns about ballot petition efforts in Michigan", *Detroit Free Press*, September 17, 2018.

¹¹ Ibarguen, "Petition pushers mislead students".

¹² See MCL 168.482b.

number of signatures gathered. The bills would restrict, not prohibit, the ability of firms to reward productivity, which ultimately would harm circulators.

Opposing Argument

Senate Bill 531 (S-3) would make the signature validation process more difficult. Generally, petition signatures are validated by municipal clerks or by the Board. During the election season, these individuals are tremendously busy. Requiring a clerk to count duplicate signatures and validate the first signature would create an unnecessary burden for election officials.

Response: Senate Bill 531 (S-3) would prevent the disenfranchisement of voters. Administrative efficacy should be sacrificed to ensure voters' rights are upheld.

Legislative Analyst: Abby Schneider

FISCAL IMPACT

Senate Bills 529 and 530 (S-1) would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Senate Bill 531 (S-3) could have a positive fiscal impact on local units of government. The bill provides for the imposition of new civil fines of up to a maximum of \$1,500. Revenue collected from civil fines is used to support local libraries and county law libraries. The amount of revenue for local libraries is indeterminate and dependent on the actual number of violations.

Fiscal Analyst: Joe Carrasco, Jr.
Bobby Canell

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.