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Initiative Reform Plan Wins Final OK

Secretary of State Kate Brown says new laws will improve the system

SALEM -- Oregon's initiative system will be more fair, more effective and will regain public confidence under a package of reforms on its way to the governor's desk, Secretary of State Kate Brown said Friday.

Brown's bill, HB 2005, won final approval Friday with a 18-12 vote from the Oregon Senate. It passed the House May 19 on a 52-7 vote and now goes to Gov. Theodore R. Kulongoski for his signature.

"All Oregonians should be pleased with these improvements," Brown said. "This bill tightens up the law, closes loopholes and provides tough but fair enforcement tools that will help us prevent abuses."

The bill:

- Allows the Secretary of State to conduct comprehensive background checks to check the criminal history of prospective signature gatherers, and gives the Secretary of State the tools to prohibit someone from registering as a paid signature gatherer if convicted of fraud, forgery or identity theft.
- Prohibits the counting of signatures collected by a circulator who has violated the law or has been found liable for certain civil or criminal election offenses.
- Prevents Chief Petitioners from turning a blind eye when their employees are knowingly breaking the law.
- Allows the Secretary of State to impose a civil penalty while a criminal investigation is under way.

"The provisions in this bill will further protect and uphold the integrity of the initiative system," said Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland. "Direct democracy is a

tool that Oregonians value, but we must also continue to work toward greater accountability and transparency in its use.”

Brown said, “We need to preserve the right of Oregonians to petition and have an impact on their government. With the passage of this bill we can restore some confidence in the initiative system. Oregonians will know that the initiatives on the ballot are there legally and legitimately.

“People who commit crimes like forgery, bribery, and altering signature sheets will be restricted from the initiative system,” Brown said. “Law abiding Oregonians will retain full and complete access.”

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