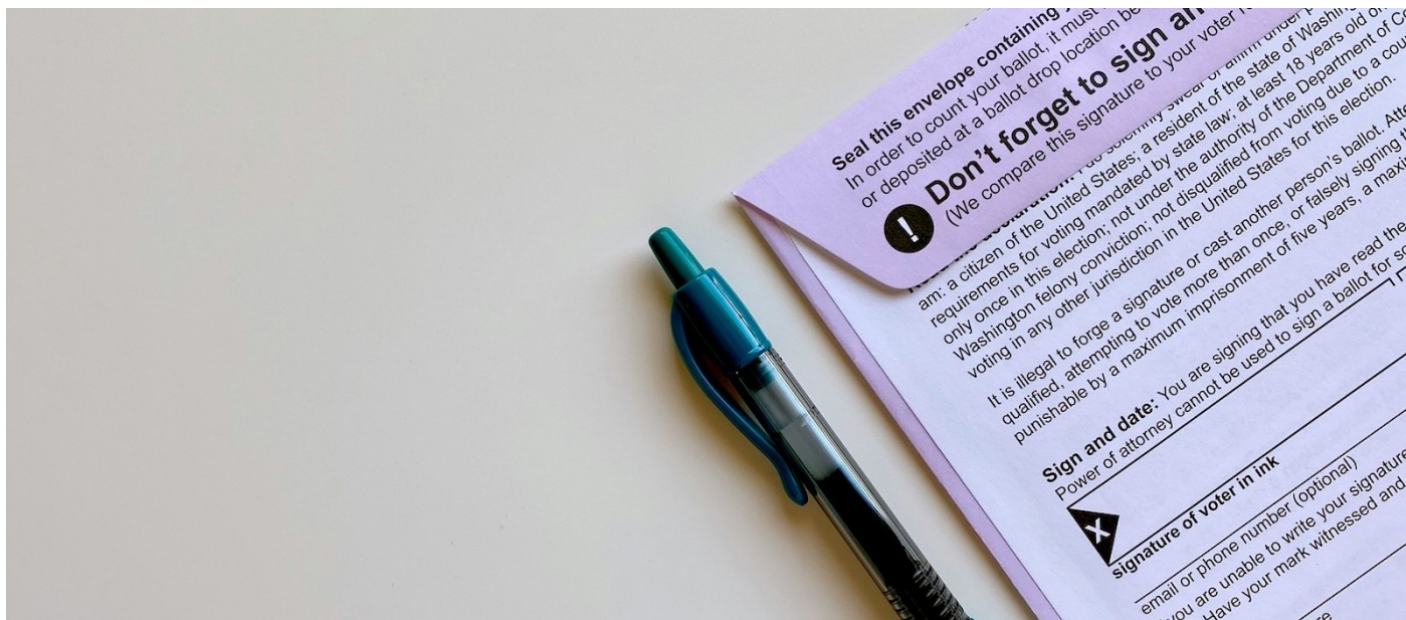


Voices Opposes Legislative Efforts to Suppress Public Ballot Initiatives

Published: Tuesday, 06 February 2024 16:15

Written by: Anna Thomas



Our organization recognizes the importance of standing against policies that jeopardize the well-being of Utah's children. We believe that regular community members have the right and responsibility to influence decisions about policies that affect their lives.

The ability of everyday Utahns to influence public policy directly, through ballot initiatives, should be part of our state's democratic process. However, the state legislature for years has passed laws that make it more difficult for members of the public to pose questions to their fellow voters statewide, by conducting ballot initiatives.

This year, the campaign to suppress public ballot initiatives takes the form of two complementary bills, both sponsored by Rep. Jason Kyle (R-Huntsville). [HJR14, "Proposal to Amend Utah Constitution - Statewide Initiatives,"](#) would amend our state constitution so that a simple majority of Utah voters can no longer approve new or expanded funding streams for state programs. The bill increases the threshold for a winning ballot initiative from 50% to 60%, when the ballot initiative seeks to increase revenue for state programs through a new tax or by expanding an existing tax. [HB284, "Initiative Amendments,"](#) would require a ballot initiative that increases

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taxes to specify where the money will come from to pay for the tax increase.

Ballot Initiatives in Utah Are Already Nearly Impossible

Utah is already one of the most difficult states in which to conduct a public ballot initiative. Whether the ballot initiative reflects the desires of Utahns to revert to our old state flag, or to expand Medicaid coverage to more people in need, organizers face high barriers before the voting public can weigh in.

For example. Utah law currently requires ballot initiative organizers to collect a total of 134,298 signatures, and they must meet specific signature thresholds in at least 26 out of 29 Senate districts. (between about 3,000 and 5,600 handwritten signatures per district, depending on the Senate district).

Even when organizers manage to clear all the hurdles to get a public ballot initiative before Utah voters, the Legislature has shown that it feels no obligation to respect voters' desires. Ballot initiatives to legalize medical cannabis, expand Medicaid coverage to more Utahns, and to create an independent redistricting commission (to push back on legislative gerrymandering) all successfully passed in 2018. The legislature walked back all of these efforts, either completely undoing, or mangling the implementation of, each successful initiative.

Why Voices Opposes HJR14 & HB284

Decisions made at the state level regarding investments in education, healthcare, childcare, and other essential services have profound consequences for future generations. By adding yet more hurdles for members of the public seeking to impact state laws, HJR14 and HB284 risk undermining the public's constitutional right to directly petition their government.

If HJR14 is approved, the proposed amendment will appear on voter ballots this November. Utah voters will be able to decide whether to limit their own access to this incredibly important tool for democratic influence over public policies that affect us all.

Voices for Utah Children opposes the passage of HJR14 and HB284, recognizing the importance of preserving Utahns' right to safeguard the interests of its children

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through ballot initiatives. This is particularly important now, as the legislature increasingly ignores public comment, public outcry and public sentiment when introducing and passing their bills.

Your voice matters! You can participate in the democratic process right now by weighing in on these bills, either by providing a public comment during the committee hearings or by writing your legislator to express your objections.

[VIEW OUR LEGISLATIVE TRACKER TO LEARN MORE!](#)