



NEWS RELEASE

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE **BRUCE McPHERSON**

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Secretary of State Bruce McPherson Lays Out Reforms to Improve the Initiative Process

Sacramento - Secretary of State Bruce McPherson today announced a three-point reform plan to prevent irregularities in the initiative process, particularly the circulation for signature of different versions of an initiative petition. Secretary McPherson's three-point solution includes a legislative proposal, the creation of a rapid response team of his staff and county elections officials, and the invitation to a summit of staff from the offices of the Attorney General, Legislative Counsel and Legislative Analyst to review how the initiative process can be improved.

"The initiative process is a right of the people. It must be treated with respect. Voters must have confidence in the process," said Secretary of State Bruce McPherson. "As California's Chief Elections Officer, I am introducing these reforms so that we will avoid putting the rights of the voters in jeopardy."

The **legislative solution** will give the Secretary of State the authority to review initiative petitions prior to their release for signature gathering. Current law requires only recall petitions to be reviewed for form by the Secretary of State. Secretary McPherson's proposal will add initiative petition review.

This proposed legislation, in addition to requiring the Attorney General to transmit the text, title and summary of an initiative to the Secretary of State, would require the proponents of the measure to submit two copies of the proposed petition to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State would then review the petition to ensure it is identical to the text, title and summary transmitted by the Attorney General.

If the Secretary of State finds any discrepancies between the two versions, the petition would be returned to the proponents for corrections and the proponents would have 10 days to resubmit. A proponent would not be able to begin gathering signatures on the proposed initiative until the Secretary of State has approved the petition.

The signature-gathering period would remain unchanged, 150 days from the date of approval of the petition form. Proponents will be required to deposit \$200, and if their initiative qualifies, then the fee would be returned.

"My office currently has this authority for recall petitions," stated McPherson. "I am asking the Legislature to give us that authority for initiative petitions to prevent future clerical errors."

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The second step in McPherson's proposal is the **creation of a rapid response team** to review initiative petitions and address any issues and concerns that are raised by election officials or the public regarding whether an initiative petition conforms to the California Elections Code. The team will consist of members of the Secretary of State's staff and two representatives of the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials. This team is the one-stop shop to review initiatives.

"I want a team of elections experts to immediately address any potential issue that may surface during the initiative process," stated McPherson. "This will give voters the confidence and a second layer of protection."

The third step is to **convene a summit of professional staff** from the offices of the Attorney General, the Legislative Analyst, Legislative Counsel and the Secretary of State to discuss how the various agencies can partner to enhance the process.

"I want safeguards to be placed to ensure the integrity of the democratic process so the will of the voters cannot be questioned," McPherson concluded.