

SB 651 – Petition Disclosure Act

SENATOR BEN ALLEN

FACT SHEET

SUMMARY

SB 651 helps voters make informed decisions by requiring disclosure of the top funders of ballot measure campaigns on petitions circulated by paid signature gatherers.

BACKGROUND

A dizzying 115 initiatives qualified for circulation in the 2016 election cycle, with a near-record 17 measures appearing on the November 2016 ballot. All but the two that were put on the ballot by the legislature qualified only after their sponsors spent between one and over 6 million dollars to hire professional signature gatherers.

While committees supporting or opposing ballot measures must file periodic campaign finance reports, voters who sign petitions do not have easy access to this information when approached by a circulator. In fact, circulators are not required to know or disclose this information, even when asked.

Surveys consistently show that voters want improved public disclosure of the sources that fund ballot measures. The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) has found greater than 70 percent support for increasing public disclosure of funding sources for initiative campaigns each of the eight times that they asked that question. In March 2013, the PPIC found 81 percent of Democrats, 80 percent of Republicans, and 85 percent of independents supported increased disclosure.

SOLUTION

SB 651, the Petition Disclosure Act, requires an initiative, referendum, or recall petition circulated by a paid circulator to include a disclosure statement at the top of the petition listing the top three donors to the committee funding the signature gathering.

If identities of the three largest funders to the committee change during the time a petition is circulated, the

committee is required to update the list of donors on petition within 14 days. The petition disclosure area may optionally include up to three endorsers.

Care has been taken to minimize the number of times that petitions might have to be reprinted due to changes in the top funders. Only donors of \$50,000 or more must be listed, and petitions don't have to be reprinted if there is only a change in order of their top contributors. The petition signature page takes no more space than in current law, and so will not change the number of signatures on each page.

SB 651 is a commonsense improvement to California current disclosure laws that is overwhelmingly popular with the public.

SUPPORT

California Clean Money Campaign (Sponsor)
California Church IMPACT
California League of Conservation Voters
California Public Interest Research Group
CounterPAC
Endangered Habitats League
GMO Free California
Lutheran Office of Public Policy
Maplight
Money Out Voters In
People Demanding Action
Voices For Progress Education Fund

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