



Colorado Common Cause statement in Opposition to Referendum O

The initiative process is an important element of Colorado's governance and allows Colorado voters to propose reforms where the Legislature lacks political will to act or has a conflict of interest. Historically, many citizen initiatives were advanced because the Legislature failed to take action, or voted against the interest of their constituents. Our state's open government laws, independent redistricting panel, campaign finance reform, term limits, and ethics reform are just a few of the issues that were advanced through the initiative process.

Ref. O includes some good provisions to encourage citizens to propose statutes instead of constitutional amendments. If that's all Referendum O did, Common Cause would be a strong proponent. But the Legislature took it too far. The trade-off for the improved statutory requirements is a real attack on citizens' ability to propose changes to the Constitution. And, the goal of these changes is not to create a better initiative process, but to create a more difficult initiative process in the hopes that it will prevent future amendments to the Constitution.

Ref. O is particularly problematic in 2 key ways.

1. Ref O sets up rules that are anti-democratic. If this proposal for signatures was instead applied to the votes needed to pass a measure, it would violate the constitutional protection of one person one vote, where all votes are counted equally. Ref. O allows one part of the state to become a gatekeeper and prevent proposals from advancing, even if there is strong support elsewhere. If there are enough voters from any part of the state who support an issue, they should be able to place it before all voters.
2. The other major problem with Ref. O is that it would change the deadline to submit proposed constitutional amendments. Many initiatives move forward after attempts to advance the policies fail during the Legislative session. By requiring language to be turned in early during the legislative session, Ref. O forces proponents to make the decision about whether or not to go to the ballot prematurely.

Ultimately, Ref O won't deter well-funded campaigns from amending the Constitution, and it won't improve public debate about the issues. The real impact of Ref. O will be to establish onerous requirements that discourage grassroots groups from using the initiative process while doing nothing to stop well-funded, often out-of-state, special interests from amending the Constitution.

Referendum O will not create a better or more fair initiative process. Colorado Common Cause urges Coloradans to reject this attack on the initiative process and vote NO on Referendum O.

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Colorado Common Cause is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working for open, honest, and accountable government. For more information, visit <http://www.ColoradoCommonCause.org>