

M A S S A C H U S E T T S
HIGHTECHNOLOGYCOUNCIL
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To: Senator Sal DiDomenico, Senator Jacob Oliveira, Senator Ryan Fattman
Representative Daniel Hunt, Representative Alice Peisch, Representative Paul Frost

From: Elizabeth Mahoney, Vice President of Policy & Government Affairs,
Massachusetts High Technology Council

Date: July 31, 2026

Subject: *An Act improving campaign finance reporting for statewide ballot question committees*

The Massachusetts High Technology Council has participated in statewide initiative campaigns for more than five decades because we believe the initiative petition process serves an important constitutional purpose. It provides citizens with a meaningful avenue to advance policy proposals when issues of broad public concern are not receiving timely legislative consideration. As political polarization and legislative gridlock increase, preserving public confidence in this process has become more—not less—important.

As the conference committee reconciles *An Act improving campaign finance reporting for statewide ballot question committees*, we offer the following recommendations to strengthen the initiative petition process while preserving citizens' constitutional right to place questions before voters.

Recent election cycles have highlighted three growing problems:

- Legal challenges to ballot language and summaries are often not resolved until late in the process, after tens of thousands of signatures have been collected, legislative hearings have been held, and substantial campaign resources (both for and against) have been spent.
- Ballot questions are an imperfect vehicle for making public policy. Voters are often asked to evaluate complex issues, statutory language can be imprecise, and unintended consequences frequently emerge after enactment.
- Well-funded special interests increasingly dominate the process through extensive paid campaigns and organizational resources that can overshadow genuine grassroots participation.

At the same time, the initiative petition process is a constitutional right and an important avenue for advancing proposals that may have public support but not receive timely legislative action. Reforms should improve transparency and accountability without making the process unnecessarily burdensome or favoring one constituency over another.

MHTC Recommendations

Conduct a Comprehensive Review of the Initiative Petition Process

Because the initiative petition process is complex and many aspects of the initiative petition process are established by the Massachusetts Constitution, the Council supports the House provision establishing a special legislative commission to conduct a comprehensive review. The commission should examine issues including the Attorney General's role in certifying questions and preparing ballot summaries, the timing of legal challenges, and any constitutional changes that may be warranted.

To ensure balanced representation, we recommend requiring both a representative of a labor organization and a representative of a trade association or business advocacy organization to serve on the commission. The current language allows the Speaker and Senate President to appoint members from either of those groups, which could result in only labor organizations being represented and not trade or business advocacy groups (or vice versa).

Adopt Reasonable Standards for Paid Signature Gathering

Both bills include provisions governing initiative petition forms and paid signature gathering. The Council supports greater transparency, but recommends several modifications to avoid unnecessary burdens, unintended consequences, and potential constitutional concerns.

The same standards governing integrity should apply regardless of whether signatures are gathered by volunteers, employees, contractors, or professional firms.

Improve Transparency for Petition Signers

Providing additional information to petition signers is a reasonable transparency measure. We support the provision in both bills requiring petition sheets to disclose when signatures are being collected by a paid circulator, as well as the House provision directing signers to campaign finance information for both supporting and opposing ballot committees.

Rather than requiring separate petition forms for paid and unpaid circulators (an administrative burden), we recommend that the Secretary of the Commonwealth include a

prominently displayed checkbox that could be checked to indicate whether the signature collector is being compensated.

Additionally, to guard against fraud, we recommend requiring all signature collectors (both paid and unpaid) to sign the bottom of each petition sheet, affirming they witnessed each signature. This requirement should apply to nomination sheets for candidates for office in addition to ballot question petitions. Given the allegations of fraud leveled against paid signature gatherers for several candidates for office this year, it is reasonable to subject candidates to this same requirement.

Do Not Prohibit Per-Signature Compensation

The Council opposes provisions in both bills prohibiting payment on a per-signature basis or incentive compensation tied to signatures collected.

Such restrictions may raise First Amendment concerns. They would likely also increase the overall cost of qualifying ballot questions, disadvantaging citizen groups, taxpayers, and smaller organizations while creating advantages for organizations with permanent paid staff or volunteer infrastructures.

Clarify the Definition of a Paid Signature Gatherer

The final legislation should clarify that a paid signature gatherer includes anyone collecting signatures as part of their compensated employment, regardless of whether they are employed by a signature-gathering firm or directly by an advocacy organization.

For example, employees of an organization who collect signatures as part of their work for that organization should be treated as paid circulators. Limiting the definition only to individuals hired through professional signature-gathering firms would undermine the bill's transparency goals and create an uneven playing field for organizations with significant staff resources.

Apply Signature Gathering Rules Consistently

Any restrictions governing paid signature gathering should apply equally to nomination papers for candidates for public office. Candidates across the political spectrum routinely use paid signature gatherers, and there is no compelling policy rationale for imposing different standards on ballot questions than on candidate petitions.

Campaign Finance Reforms

The Council supports the provisions in both bills requiring more frequent campaign finance reporting by ballot committees to better align with reporting requirements for candidates. However, these changes should take effect at the beginning of the next election cycle, in

January 2027, rather than during an election year. Changing reporting requirements in the middle of an active campaign creates unnecessary compliance burdens and confusion.

We also support enhanced disclosure of in-kind contributions. In recent election cycles, some organizations have financed substantial ballot campaign activity by paying directly for polling, consulting, advertising, and other campaign expenses before reporting those expenditures as lump-sum in-kind contributions. More detailed disclosure of these expenditures will provide voters with greater transparency regarding the true sources of campaign funding.

Conclusion

The initiative petition process remains one of the Commonwealth's most important constitutional safeguards and the Council urges the conference committee to adopt reforms that improve transparency, integrity, and public confidence. The objective should not be to make initiative petitions more difficult.

The Council looks forward to working with the Legislature on meaningful improvements that preserve citizen access to the ballot and avoid changes that unintentionally advantage one group of stakeholders over another.