



March 10, 2025

**TO:** Members of the House Committee on Rules

**FR:** Preston Mann, Oregon Business & Industry

**RE:** Support for HJR 11

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Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Pham, members of the House Committee on Rules. For the record, I am Preston Mann, political director for Oregon Business & Industry (OBI).

OBI is a statewide association representing businesses from a wide variety of industries and from each of Oregon's 36 counties. In addition to being the statewide chamber of commerce, OBI is the state affiliate for the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Retail Federation. Our 1,600 member companies, more than 70% of which are small businesses, employ more than 250,000 Oregonians. Oregon's private sector businesses help drive a healthy, prosperous economy for the benefit of everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HJR 11. OBI supports efforts to modernize Oregon's initiative system, provided that any changes do not unreasonably restrict voters' right to propose, amend, or repeal state laws through direct access to the ballot. HJR 11 meets this test. However, we have some additional considerations we hope the committee will contemplate as you deliberate on this measure and others similar.

OBI believes support for direct democracy is embedded in our state's DNA. Oregon was one of the first states in the nation to adopt an initiative and referendum process when voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment establishing the system in 1902. Since then, we've been busy. Oregon voters have considered [379](#) citizen initiatives – among the most of any state in the nation – and have adopted 133 of them, or just over 35%. Among those adopted are a 1998 measure establishing the state's vote-by-mail system, 1990's measures establishing property tax limits, and, perhaps most famously, a 1912 initiative led by Abigail Scott Duniway granting women the right to vote.

I mention this history because I think it's important context for lawmakers to be mindful of as you consider potential changes to the initiative system. Much like our reputation as an easy state to cast a ballot, Oregon is widely recognized as having one of the most accessible initiative processes in the country. That should continue to be celebrated.

However, it's also fair to criticize Oregon's system as antiquated. As I mentioned, the system was first established in 1902. The last significant changes to the number of valid signatures required to qualify an initiative were adopted in 1968. A lot has changed since then. For example, when the current signature requirements were adopted in 1968, voter registration rates were significantly lower than they are today. When fewer individuals are registered to vote, it's more difficult to find registered voters to sign an initiative petition. By extension, when more individuals

are registered to vote, the likelihood that a prospective petition signer is eligible to sign a petition is far higher. The pioneers of our initiative system simply would not have foreseen the modern era of automatic voter registration and how these higher registration rates would have impacted the initiative system. To that end, we consider an increase in the number of signatures required to qualify an initiative petition, such as the modest increase proposed by HJR 11, to be a reasonable update to the existing requirements.

HJR 11, through a forthcoming amendment, also proposes a new requirement that initiative petitions collect a minimum number of signatures from each congressional district. More than a dozen states have similar features embedded in their initiative systems. We support the modest geographic requirements envisioned by the forthcoming amendment. However, we feel compelled to express our reservations about geographic requirements more generally, as other states have adopted more burdensome requirements in recent years in deliberate attempts to limit direct democracy.

Finally, as you consider potential changes to Oregon's initiative system, we urge you to contemplate what prospective changes intend to accomplish. We gather that some lawmakers and interest groups are frustrated by a recent wave of controversial measures, such as Measure 118 (2024) and Measure 110 (2020). We, too, share much of that frustration. But we also encourage lawmakers to recognize that Oregon's relatively modest population makes for a relatively low-cost avenue to advance a proposed policy change compared to other states, even considering increasing the required number of signatures. Further, we ask you to consider that changes to the initiative system intended to make it more difficult to qualify for the ballot run the risk of resulting in a system that only allows for sophisticated, well-funded political operations to gain access to the ballot. In the cases of both Measures 118 and 110, the initiatives were supported by significant financial resources and well-organized political operations and likely would have qualified even under more significant qualification burdens.

In conclusion, OBI supports HJR 11 in its attempts to modernize Oregon's initiative process without compromising our state's pioneering legacy of direct democracy, but urges committee members to be cautious about further changes to the system.

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