

By: Swanson

H.B. No. 4537

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to requirements for certain petitions requesting an election and ballot propositions.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Section 52.072, Election Code, is amended by adding Subsection (f) to read as follows:

(f) A proposition must substantially submit the question with such definiteness and certainty that the voters are not misled.

SECTION 2. Chapter 233, Election Code, is amended by adding Section 233.0115 to read as follows:

Sec. 233.0115. BALLOT LANGUAGE MANDAMUS ACTION. If a court orders a new election under Section 233.011, a person may seek from the court a writ of mandamus to compel the governing body of a city to comply with the requirement that a ballot proposition must substantially submit the question with such definiteness and certainty that the voters are not misled, as provided by Section 273.102.

SECTION 3. Section 253.094(b), Election Code, is amended to read as follows:

(b) A corporation or labor organization may not make a political contribution in connection with a recall election, including the circulation and submission of a petition to call an election. This subsection does not prohibit a religious

1 organization from circulating or submitting a petition in  
2 connection with a recall election.

3 SECTION 4. Chapter 273, Election Code, is amended by adding  
4 Subchapter F to read as follows:

5 SUBCHAPTER F. BALLOT PROPOSITION LANGUAGE ENFORCEMENT PROVISIONS

6 Sec. 273.101. REVIEW BY SECRETARY OF STATE. (a) Not later  
7 than the seventh day after the date on which a home-rule city  
8 publishes in the election order or by other means ballot  
9 proposition language proposing an amendment to the city charter or  
10 a voter-initiated initiative or referendum as requested by  
11 petition, a registered voter eligible to vote in the election may  
12 submit the proposition for review by the secretary of state.

13 (b) The secretary of state shall review the proposition not  
14 later than the seventh day after the date the secretary receives the  
15 submission to determine whether the proposition is misleading or  
16 inaccurate.

17 (c) If the secretary of state determines that the  
18 proposition is misleading or inaccurate, the city shall draft a  
19 proposition to cure the defects and give notice of the new  
20 proposition using the method of giving notice prescribed for notice  
21 of an election under Section 4.003.

22 (d) A proposition drafted by a city under Subsection (c) to  
23 cure the defects may be submitted to the secretary of state under  
24 Subsection (a). If the secretary of state determines that the city  
25 has on its third attempt drafted a proposition that is misleading or  
26 inaccurate, the secretary of state shall draft the ballot  
27 proposition.

1       Sec. 273.102. MANDAMUS ACTIONS. (a) In an action in a  
2 court of competent jurisdiction seeking a writ of mandamus to  
3 compel the city's governing body to comply with the requirement  
4 that a ballot proposition must substantially submit the question  
5 with such definiteness and certainty that the voters are not  
6 misled, the court shall make its determination without delay and  
7 may order the city to use ballot proposition language drafted by the  
8 court.

9       (b) The court may award a plaintiff or relator who  
10 substantially prevails in a mandamus action described by Subsection  
11 (a) the party's reasonable attorney's fees, expenses, and court  
12 costs.

13       (c) Governmental immunity to suit is waived and abolished  
14 only to the extent of the liability created by Subsection (b).

15       Sec. 273.103. MANDATORY SUBMISSION TO SECRETARY OF STATE.  
16 Following a final nonappealable judgment containing a finding by a  
17 court that a ballot proposition drafted by a city failed to  
18 substantially submit the question with such definiteness and  
19 certainty that the voters are not misled, the city shall submit to  
20 the secretary of state for approval any proposition to be voted on  
21 at an election held by the city before the fourth anniversary of the  
22 court's finding.

23       Sec. 273.104. CITY REQUIRED TO PAY FOR LEGAL SERVICES.  
24 Notwithstanding a home-rule city charter provision to the contrary,  
25 a city may not accept legal services relating to a proceeding under  
26 this subchapter without paying fair market value for those  
27 services.

1 SECTION 5. Sections 277.001, 277.002, 277.0021, 277.0022,  
2 277.0023, 277.0024, and 277.003, Election Code, are designated as  
3 Subchapter A, Chapter 277, Election Code, and a heading is added to  
4 Subchapter A to read as follows:

5 SUBCHAPTER A. PROVISIONS RELATING TO SIGNATURES, VALIDITY, AND  
6 VERIFICATION OF PETITIONS

7 SECTION 6. Section 277.001, Election Code, is amended to  
8 read as follows:

9 Sec. 277.001. APPLICABILITY OF SUBCHAPTER [~~CHAPTER~~]. This  
10 subchapter [~~chapter~~] applies to a petition authorized or required  
11 to be filed under a law outside this code in connection with an  
12 election.

13 SECTION 7. Section 277.002, Election Code, is amended by  
14 adding Subsection (f) to read as follows:

15 (f) The illegibility of a signature on a petition submitted  
16 to a home-rule city is not a valid basis for invalidating the  
17 signature if the information provided with the signature as  
18 required by this section and other applicable law legibly provides  
19 enough information to demonstrate that the signer:

- 20 (1) is eligible to have signed the petition; and  
21 (2) signed the petition on or after the 180th day  
22 before the date the petition was filed.

23 SECTION 8. Subchapter A, Chapter 277, Election Code, as  
24 added by this Act, is amended by adding Section 277.005 to read as  
25 follows:

26 Sec. 277.005. PETITION FORM; USE BY CITY AND OTHER PERSONS.

27 (a) The secretary of state shall prescribe a form, content, and

1 procedure for a petition.

2 (b) A home-rule city that uses a form that is different from  
3 the official form prescribed under Subsection (a) may not  
4 invalidate a petition because the petition does not contain  
5 information that the petition form failed to provide for or to  
6 require to be provided.

7 (c) A person who circulates or submits a petition is not  
8 required to use a petition form prescribed by the secretary of state  
9 or a home-rule city. A petition that does not use an officially  
10 prescribed form must contain the substantial elements required to  
11 be provided on the officially prescribed form.

12 SECTION 9. Chapter 277, Election Code, is amended by adding  
13 Subchapter B to read as follows:

14 SUBCHAPTER B. SUBMISSION OF CERTAIN CITY PETITIONS

15 Sec. 277.031. APPLICABILITY OF SUBCHAPTER. This subchapter  
16 applies to a home-rule city that has a procedure requiring the  
17 governing body of the city to hold an election on receipt of a  
18 petition requesting the election that complies with the applicable  
19 requirements.

20 Sec. 277.032. CONFLICTS WITH CITY CHARTER OR OTHER LAW. The  
21 provisions of this subchapter apply notwithstanding any city  
22 charter provision or other law.

23 Sec. 277.033. DETERMINATION OF VALIDITY. The city  
24 secretary shall determine the validity of a petition submitted  
25 under this subchapter, including by verifying the petition  
26 signatures, not later than the 30th day after the date the city  
27 receives the petition.

1        Sec. 277.034. COLLECTOR REQUIREMENTS PROHIBITED. A city  
2 may not restrict who may collect petition signatures.

3        SECTION 10. Sections 9.004(a) and (c), Local Government  
4 Code, are amended to read as follows:

5        (a) The governing body of a municipality on its own motion  
6 may submit a proposed charter amendment to the municipality's  
7 qualified voters for their approval at an election. The governing  
8 body shall submit a proposed charter amendment to the voters for  
9 their approval at an election if the submission is supported by a  
10 petition signed by a number of registered ~~qualified~~ voters of the  
11 municipality equal to at least five percent of the number of  
12 registered ~~qualified~~ voters of the municipality on the date of  
13 the most recent election held throughout the municipality or  
14 20,000, whichever number is the smaller.

15        (c) Notice of the election shall be published in a newspaper  
16 of general circulation published in the municipality. The notice  
17 must:

18            (1) include a substantial copy of the proposed  
19 amendment in which language sought to be deleted by the amendment is  
20 bracketed and stricken through and language sought to be added by  
21 the amendment is underlined;

22            (2) include an estimate of the anticipated fiscal  
23 impact to the municipality if the proposed amendment is approved at  
24 the election; and

25            (3) be published on the same day in each of two  
26 successive weeks, with the first publication occurring before the  
27 14th day before the date of the election.

1           SECTION 11. Section 277.004, Election Code, is repealed.

2           SECTION 12. Not later than January 1, 2020, the secretary of  
3 state shall adopt a petition form as required by Section 277.005,  
4 Election Code, as added by this Act.

5           SECTION 13. The changes in law made by this Act apply only  
6 to a petition submitted on or after January 1, 2020.

7           SECTION 14. This Act takes effect September 1, 2019.