

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Elections  
For SB 994

Compiled on: Thursday, April 27, 2023 10:50 PM

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Hearing Date: April 27, 2023 10:30 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Melanie Masten  
Self, Software Developer  
Cypress, TX

I oppose the passing of SB 994. Requiring a filing fee or a petition is an unnecessary burden to entry on the ballot for independents and smaller political parties. A fair government is one that gives everyone who wishes to run the same opportunity to be elected. The fees collected support the two large political parties in their primary elections, it's completely unfair to ask an independent or political party that selects their candidates by convention to fund their opponents. A petition is not a good substitute as it adds another layer on top of already difficult barriers to gain ballot access, it's just another way to cut out opposition from the two big parties. Voters should have more choice, not less. The burden is on the people to be informed and decide who they want to elect, not the government to biasedly decide who they believe is worthy for the people to have a choice at electing.

Kathy Haigler  
Self - election consultant  
Dale, TX

I SUPPORT SB 994. When I was a Primary Director in 2002, a candidate filed with a personal check on the next to last day of filing. The following Monday we received a notice of insufficient funds from our bank on his check. Because he filed without paying the filing fee in time, he was removed from the ballot. I think this bill provides clarification.

Brenda Patterson  
Republican  
Cypress, TX

This bill must be passed.

Gloria Thomas  
Self, Research Assistant  
Brownsville, TX

I would like to urge you all to oppose this bill. SB 994 would make it difficult for any working class person who cannot afford filling fees or the resources it takes to submit a petition to become a candidate! This bill is undemocratic and would make it harder for better representation in politics. This bill would make it harder for any candidate that represents working class, or those with diverse opinions. This bill would harm the legitimacy of a democratic government. How can you be for the people, when you are excluding them?

Alfred Molison  
Self/Contact Service Representative  
Houston, TX

I oppose SB 994 because it destroys the right of the public to choose their candidates for public office. The limits placed on candidates make it extremely difficult or impossible for anyone outside of the two major parties to run for office. Additional limits make it extremely difficult or impossible for candidates who aren't wealthy or well connected to run for public office too. SB 994 helps destroy democracy.

David Collins, Mr.  
Green Party of Texas  
Houston, TX

I submit this comment in vehement opposition to SB 994, specifically the portion amending Section 145.003(f) of the Election Code. The imposition of filing fees on individual convention-party candidates, levied for the purpose of administering primary elections for the two "major" parties, is anti-democratic. It constitutes not only an undue burden on these candidates but essentially an extortion of funds from smaller political parties to the larger parties. It will have the effect of making only wealthy individuals (and very skilled fundraisers) able to run for most public offices. Gathering petition signatures in lieu of fees can be just as costly.

The filing fee provisions passed in the 86th Legislature and modified in the 87th should be rolled back so that Texas voters are not limited to two choices. It's already excessively anti-democratic to have Legislative districts so thoroughly gerrymandered that about half of them have major-party nominees running unopposed, rendering our votes meaningless in Legislative and Congressional races.

Julian Villarreal, Dr.  
Green Party of Texas  
San Antonio, TX

I urge the members of the House Elections committee to oppose SB 994. This bill unfairly burdens minor parties and independent candidates by forcing them to pay exorbitant filing fees or collect hundreds (or even thousands) of petition signatures on paper in order to simply apply for nomination. I am a former Green Party candidate, and I am certain this bill would do serious harm to future Green Party candidates because the filing fee requirement places a substantial burden on the ability of my party's candidates to run for office. This bill would suppress our party's candidates, most of whom do not have the resources to pay the filing fees or collect petition signatures in lieu of fees. These barriers to ballot access have a disparate negative impact on minor parties and independents. SB 994 continues a dangerous precedent of partisan legislators enacting laws that suppress candidates from competing parties by preventing candidates of those parties from appearing on the ballot, which does serious harm to the democratic process. This bill would require the unelected Secretary of State to disqualify certain candidates seeking nomination. Voters, not unelected bureaucrats, should decide which parties and candidates appear on the ballot. Furthermore, a recent US District Court ruling in *Miller v. Hughes* (Case 1:19-cv-00700-RP) found that Texas' paper-based process for nominating petitions represents an unconstitutional burden to minor parties and independent candidates. The Democrat and Republican parties which nominate by primary require vast sums of public money in order to administer their primary elections, and the filing fees that their candidates pay help to offset those costs. The Green Party, in contrast, holds nominating conventions that are run by party volunteers in accordance with the Election Code and funded with small-dollar donations from ordinary party members. We do not burden state coffers with millions of dollars in costs to conduct primary and run-off elections. Two different sets of rules for primary-nominating versus convention-nominating parties are laid out in The Election Code, and these rules provide a path for the growth of smaller parties. But, SB 994 would cut off that path to growth by holding smaller parties to the same standards of the bigger parties that have access to major donors to fund their elections and campaigns. In addition, the Election Code requires our party's nominees to obtain 2% in any statewide race in order to remain on the ballot in future elections. Because SB 994 would suppress our candidates' ability to file in those statewide races to begin with, we would eventually lose the right to have our candidates on the ballot entirely. Green Party voters like me should be free to exercise our right to choose the candidates of our own party and have their names placed on the general election ballot without onerous burdens. SB 994 would undermine that right which is fundamental to the democratic process.

Sylvia Coulson  
Self  
Waxahachie, TX

I support this bill.

Randy Bellomy, Mr.  
Self retired  
Ovilla, TX

As Ellis County Republican Party Chairman I believe this is very necessary bill.

Patricia Snyder, Ms  
myself  
Richmond, TX

Passing this bill could help get qualified candidates.

George Brian Vachris, P.E.  
self / retired  
Humble, TX

I support this bill.

Teresa McCollum

self

Borger, TX

I support this bill.

Patrick Mitchell

Self - Tech Support

Victoria, TX

I want to voice my objection to this bill. I don't find it to be a wise action to place who can and can't be on a ballot in the hands of an unelected position. Also, a candidates ability to pay a filling fee shouldn't determine whether they are able to be on the ballot or not. This bill would just limit voter choices, and for that reason I oppose this bill. We need more choice, more competition, not less.

Carter Fanning

Libertarian Party of Texas

San Antonio, TX

I strongly oppose SB 994. Allowing an unelected bureaucrat appointed by the governor in power to remove candidates from the ballot is asking for problems.

Ballot eligibility is generally verified by the courts, when challenged. This process is much more fair and removed from partisan agendas.

Jessi Cowart

Self - Project Manager

Conroe, TX

I urge the committee to vote AGAINST SB 994. Candidate filing fees are put into the General Fund and used to pay for Republican and Democratic primaries. Conversely, convention parties get none of this funding to help pay for our TEC-mandated conventions. Convention parties are 100% self-funded in the State of Texas. As such, some convention party candidates opt not to pay the filing fees in protest because convention parties should not be forced to fund their political opposition -- and rightfully so, as was discussed on in this committee during 87th Legislature. In fact, the Libertarian Party of Texas has an ongoing federal suit on this point. This is clearly targeted at convention parties and their candidates in an effort to make it easier for them to be "knocked off the ballot."

Rep. Dustin Burrows, a member of this committee, said in a tweet last year that it was a 'dereliction of duty" that Republicans failed to knock Libertarians off of ballots. As he's made his partisanship and inclination toward voter suppression publicly known, I would urge this committee to insist that Rep. Burrows abstain from this vote. Similarly, Rep. Valoree Swanan lied on the House floor last session when she said that primary parties get no additional benefit from filing fees when compared to convention parties, which as I've stated above, is patently false (and she knows it). She too, should be recused from this vote.

Finally, the Secretary of State is an appointed official -- not an elected one. It is highly inappropriate for a Governor-appointed official to have the power to decide who should or should not remain on a ballot. The Texas Legislature should stay out of the affairs of private political parties and stop trying to hinder political competition and suppress voter choice.

Voltaire Veloso

Self

Dallas, TX

Is this Texas or California? Why are you acting like democrats? Please vote, NO on this atrocity of a bill. Thank you

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Ernestine Weiser

Self

Gainesville, TX

All would be candidates should file required fees.