

HCS HJR 102 -- INITIATIVE PETITIONS

SPONSOR: Simmons

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elections and Elected Officials by a vote of 5 to 2. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Legislative Oversight by a vote of 7 to 3.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HJR 102.

Upon voter approval, this Constitutional amendment modifies provisions for initiative petitions and referendums for Constitutional amendments by requiring that the petitions be signed by 8% of the registered voters in each of two-thirds of the counties, including the City of St. Louis, and changing the required vote for passage of the measure from a majority to two-thirds of the votes cast. However, if a measure becomes effective prior to November 3, 2020, with a majority vote, a repeal of such measure would require only a majority vote.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the Missouri Constitution has grown too big. It is much larger than the United States Constitution and is now like a statute book. The initiative petition process has outgrown the laws governing it and is no longer just a grassroots tool. Today, it is exploited by special interest groups. Legal voters are those who voted in the last governor's race. The bill changes it to all registered voters, making it easier to check signatures.

An amendment will be offered that adds a grandfather clause, fixes what was left-out of the original bill, changes Congressional districts to counties, and adds St. Louis as a county. It is easier to make a determination between what county rather than what Congressional district. We don't need to change the constitution willy-nilly.

Testifying for the bill was Representative Simmons.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that this bill renders it almost impossible to change the Constitution. We like the grandfather clause that will be added. The US Constitution is small because it can't be amended and therefore includes the Supreme Court rulings. Missouri has an initiative petition process

now and this bill removes the public from decision making and takes away their ability to make change. This is taking away the public engaging in policies that effect their lives by making it more expensive and harder for groups because of fear of lawmakers making changes after an initiative petition is passed. The public is losing its voice. The Missouri Constitution is getting larger because lawmakers continue trying to undermine the voters.

Initiative petitions are not respected by lawmakers. Most changes to the Missouri Constitution come from HJRs. This bill requires increased signatures and hinders the grassroots efforts to get something on the ballot.

Testifying against the bill were Missouri Coalition for the Environment; John Meinzenbach, Sierra Club Missouri Chapter; Missouri AFL-CIO; American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri; Missouri National Education Association; United Steelworkers; American Federation of Teachers; Cozad Company, LLC and First Rule.