



March 23, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Florida State Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor DeSantis,

In the eleventh hour of the 2019 legislative session, Florida's legislature adopted new restrictions to the constitutional amendment process. Those changes have been challenged in court throughout the past year and have led to the failure of a number of citizen-led efforts. During the 2020 legislative session, Florida's legislature has taken another step towards stripping our constitution from the people and placing it into the hands of corporations, billionaires, and dark money with the passage of SB 1794.

The sad truth is that because of the legislature's efforts to restrict the Citizen Initiative process in the past, getting an initiative on the ballot has become a business. Citizen Initiative costs have been estimated to be \$6.5M-\$8M per issue. This provision, if signed into law, would increase those costs even more.

Arguments have been made in favor of SB 1794 because many believe that our ballots are too lengthy. While some may believe that, we'd like you to note that from 1969 through 2018, there have been a total of 185 constitutional amendments placed on the ballot and considered by Florida's voters. 116 of those 185 amendments were referred to the ballot by the Florida legislature. The Citizen Initiative process has only had 38 amendments since 1969 and of those, only 27 have passed. Lengthy ballots are not the fault of the Citizen Initiative.

We'd like to remind you that citizens have championed direct democracy in the past bringing positive change and shaping Florida's future with amendments on fair districts (2010), water and land conservation (2014), medical cannabis (2016) and restoring voting rights (2018). Constitutional amendments that pass do so with almost always a higher threshold than elected leaders. Why should we want to limit a citizen's ability to enact change? SB 1794 does exactly that.

In the midst of a global health crisis, any limitation to a citizen's right to direct democracy seems unjust. The disconnect felt between average citizens and their elected officials is often bridged by citizen initiatives. It is unwise to enact legislation that limits that power.

Ultimately, this proposal places undue burdens on the citizens of Florida. We ask you to please consider the ramifications of this legislation and the message it sends to those who seek change. Your veto of SB 1794 would signify that a citizens' right to participate in direct democracy should never be up for debate.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

League of Women Voters of Florida
1000 Friends of Florida
ACLU of Florida
Common Cause Florida
Florida AFL-CIO
Florida Conservation Voters
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
NAACP Florida State Conference
Organize Florida
Progress Florida
Sierra Club Florida
SPLC Action Fund
The New Florida Majority