



PRESS RELEASE

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Family Council Calls SJR16 “A Solution in Search of a Problem”

On Friday Family Council President Jerry Cox released a statement about a proposed constitutional amendment dealing with ballot initiatives.

“SJR16 amends our state constitution in such a way that it squelches citizens’ ability to place measures on the ballot in a statewide election,” Cox said. “Right now if you turn in petition signatures to place a measure on the ballot, the Secretary of State checks your signatures. If you don’t have enough signatures, the Secretary of State gives you thirty days to gather enough. Under SJR16, at least seventy-five percent of your signatures have to be good before you can even qualify for the extra thirty days.”

Cox said proponents of the measure are touting it as an anti-fraud amendment, but he believes it won’t have the intended effect. “People don’t turn in fraudulent petition signatures hoping they’ll qualify for an extra thirty days to circulate petitions. They turn in fraudulent signatures hoping no one will notice and their measure will make it to the ballot. SJR16 does not address fraud. It doesn’t level any new penalties for fraud. It doesn’t require any additional reporting or oversight to prevent fraud. All it does is make it harder for folks circulating petitions to put a measure on the ballot. The people committing fraud won’t be affected by that. It’s the honest folks trying to obey the law who will feel the squeeze. If anything, SJR16 provides an added incentive for fraud, because it makes it more difficult for sponsors to be both honest and successful.”

Cox said he believes SJR16 is intended to protect moneyed interests. “This is a sweetheart deal for big businesses. If you look at who is advocating SJR16, it’s wealthy corporations with a lot of money. This measure makes it harder for common people to place measures on the ballot. If SJR16 passes, petition drives will require more money and time, because the process will be more encumbered.”

Cox said if the legislature is serious about addressing petition fraud, they should start by encouraging prosecutors to enforce existing laws. “I keep hearing lawmakers talk about how many invalid signatures were turned in by petition sponsors last year. Petition fraud is already illegal. If those invalid signatures are evidence of fraud, then the sponsors or canvassers who gathered the signatures should be prosecuted. If those signatures were invalidated for other reasons—like illegible handwriting or technical errors with how the petition was notarized—then that’s not a crime. We already have laws dealing with petition fraud. SJR16 won’t add to them.

“Amendment Seven to the Arkansas Constitution gives everyday people the right to propose and pass their own laws. SJR16 threatens that right. It’s nothing more than a solution in search of a problem.”

Family Council is a conservative education and research organization based in Little Rock, Arkansas.

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