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## House Committee Substitute for HB575 & 551

### Initiative Petitions and Referendums in Missouri

#### Overview

HCS for HB575 & 551 is a Missouri state bill that amends the process for initiative petitions and referendums by repealing and replacing twelve sections of existing law (RSMo 116.030, 116.040, 116.050, 116.080, 116.090, 116.110, 116.130, 116.153, 116.190, 116.200, 116.332, and 116.334). The bill aims to standardize petition forms, enhance transparency, and strengthen election integrity while imposing stricter requirements on petition circulators and signature verification.

#### Key Provisions and Their Locations

- **Petition Forms and Transparency**
  - *Sections 116.030, 116.040, 116.045, 116.050*: Standardize referendum and initiative petition forms, requiring the full text of the measure and specific formatting (e.g., 12-point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins).
- **Circulator Requirements**
  - *Section 116.080*: Petition circulators must be U.S. citizens, at least 18 years old, Missouri residents, or physically present in the state for at least 30 consecutive days prior to collecting signatures, and registered with the Secretary of State. Circulators cannot be paid based on the number of signatures collected.
- **Fraud Prevention**
  - *Section 116.090*: Defines petition signature fraud (e.g., signing another's name, knowingly signing multiple times, or accepting payment for signatures) and imposes penalties (Class A misdemeanor: up to one year in jail or a \$10,000 fine).
- **Signature Withdrawal**
  - *Section 116.110*: Allows voters to withdraw their signatures from a petition before it is filed with the Secretary of State. False withdrawal statements are punishable as a Class A misdemeanor.
- **Signature Verification**
  - *Section 116.130*: Establishes timelines and methods (random sampling or full verification) for election authorities to verify petition signatures. Signatures must be checked against voter registration records.
- **Challenges to Ballot Titles and Certification**
  - *Section 116.190*: Missouri registered voters can challenge the official ballot title or fiscal note in the circuit court of Cole County within ten days of certification.

- *Section 116.200*: Any Missouri registered voter can challenge the secretary of state's certification of a petition's sufficiency within ten days.
- **Public Input and Summary Statements**
  - *Section 116.332*: Requires sample petition sheets to be submitted to the Secretary of State and posted online for public comment for 15 days.
  - *Section 116.334*: The Secretary of State must prepare a concise summary statement (not exceeding 100 words) for each measure, which the attorney general must approve.

## **Implications for Missourians**

- **Strengthened Election Integrity**
  - Penalties for petition signature fraud (Section 116.090) and standardized verification processes (Section 116.130) aim to prevent abuse and ensure only valid signatures are counted.
- **Increased Transparency**
  - Requiring the full text of measures on petitions (Section 116.050) and public comment periods (Section 116.332) provides voters with more information to make informed decisions.
- **Constitutional Alignment**
  - The bill operates within the framework of the Missouri Constitution (Article III, Sections 28, 49, 50, 51, and 52(a)), ensuring that the petition process remains consistent with state law.

## **Conclusion**

HCS for HB575 & 551 focuses on improving the integrity and transparency of Missouri's initiative and referendum petition process. The bill introduces important safeguards against fraud and enhances voter awareness.