

VOTER INFORMATION and INPUT for CITIZEN INITIATIVES in MAINE

Prepared by the LWVME [Citizen Initiative Study Committee](#)

This section discusses opportunities for voter input and available voter information throughout the initiative process. It uses the 2018 “Universal Home Care” initiative in examples and provides information on how other states deal with these issues.

1) How to start an initiative: The [Secretary of State \(SoS\) website](#) provides basic application information but no details about the process itself, financing or reporting requirements. Rules about campaign finance reporting must be accessed separately through the [Ethics Commission website](#) and there are no instructions on the SoS website indicating that this is necessary. Some states provide complete manuals with checklists. Massachusetts' on-line information includes specific ways citizens can be involved in the process.

2) Information available when a voter signs an initiative petition: Maine law requires voters have an opportunity to read the entire proposed law, a summary and fiscal impact statement before signing a petition. The 2018 Home Care petition included an 84-word Summary, a 606-word Fiscal Impact and 4-pages of the proposed legislation.

3) Public hearings: Public hearings are not required in Maine. However, when an initiative is referred to a Legislative Committee, a public hearing must be held. From 1975 to 2011, all initiatives were referred to Committee and public hearings were held. Since 2012, only 1 of 11 initiatives was referred, so 10 had no public hearings. LD 1209 currently before the legislature would require hearings for all initiatives certified by the SoS. Eight states with citizen initiatives require public hearings ranging from limited ones only on financial implications, to Utah's requirement of at least 7 public hearings *prior* to circulation of petitions.

4) Opportunity to comment on the *wording* of the ballot

question: In 2007, Maine law established a 30-day public comment period on the “content and form” of the ballot language. In 2018 the SoS received 120 public comments on the Home Care initiative, and changed the wording, enlarging the description of how the tax would be applied. [LD 534](#) before the current legislature would require 6th grade-level ballot wording and clearer information on the effect if adopted.

5) Citizen's Guide provided by Maine SoS: A 2005 Maine Legislative Study Report concluded that “Voter information regarding citizen initiatives should be more informative, accessible and easy to read.” Previous Guides included only a full copy of the proposed initiative and a one-paragraph summary. After the report, the Guide expanded. The [2018 Guide](#) included 10 single-spaced pages of the full Home Care law, 1 1/3 pages of “Intent and Content,” a single page of “Fiscal Impact,” and two Public Comments against the Initiative. Public Comments are limited to 300 words, 3 “pro” and 3 “con,” and submitters pay a \$500 filing fee. The Guide is published in English, available on-line or by request, and distributed to libraries and municipal offices.

Other initiative states that publish guides (5 do not) include additional languages, large print, braille and/or audio versions. Eleven states mail guides to every voter or household. Fees to submit a Public Comment are charged only in Arizona (\$75) and Oregon (\$1200, waived if 500 voters sign a petition).

6) Other sources of information: In 2018, LWVME distributed 60,000 copies of their Easy-to-read Voter Guide, with one-page on the initiative. In addition to media coverage of initiatives, in 2016 (no later data available) 15,937 ads about the 5 initiatives, were aired in Portland, Bangor, and Presque Isle television markets.