



# WASHINGTON STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

## SIGNATURE GATHERING



Every Washingtonian has the right to participate in the democratic process, including organizing, canvassing, registering people to vote, and collecting signatures. Threats, intimidation, and violence have no place in the political process. The law protects Washington voters' rights to participate in political activities.

Washington was one of the first states to adopt the initiative and referendum process, which provides voters the power to enact, change, or reject laws. Any registered voter can propose or sponsor an initiative or referendum. The sponsor must collect several hundred thousand signatures from registered voters for the measure to appear on the ballot or go to the Legislature. This resource provides an overview of the rights of signature gatherers as well as voters signing on to support ballot initiatives or referendums.



### RIGHTS OF SIGNATURE GATHERERS

In public places like sidewalks and city parks, signature gatherers generally do not need a permit to collect signatures or distribute literature. Businesses and private property owners can generally restrict whether, when, and where signature gatherers can operate.<sup>1</sup>

It is unlawful to destroy or attempt to destroy completed voter registration forms, signed ballot declarations, completed ballots, or signed petition sheets.<sup>2</sup> These forms must be returned to the state or county elections office by the applicable deadline.

People opposing a candidate, initiative, or referendum, can urge others not to sign a petition and provide literature, but ***you may not interfere or try to interfere with a voter's right to sign a petition.***<sup>3</sup> This includes blocking people from approaching a signature gatherer or forcing yourself between people.

### RIGHTS OF VOTERS TO SIGN BALLOT INITIATIVES

Every registered voter in Washington has the right to sign or not sign an initiative or referendum petition, or to vote for or against any state initiative or referendum. ***It is unlawful for anyone to attempt to interfere with your exercise of these rights.***<sup>4</sup>

If you are approached by a signature gatherer, before deciding whether to sign you can ask to read the petition or proposal, which is usually written on the back of the petition.<sup>5</sup> If you decide to sign, there is no practical way for you to remove your signature if you change your mind. You also may not sign petitions with a name other than your own,<sup>6</sup> and you may only sign a petition for a particular measure once.<sup>7</sup>

If you believe your rights as a signature gatherer or as a voter have been violated, contact your local law enforcement and county prosecuting attorney's office.

<sup>1</sup> Washington Secretary of State, [FAQs about Circulating Initiative and Referendum Petitions](#).

<sup>2</sup> RCW 29A.84.050; RCW 9A.48.090.

<sup>3</sup> RCW 29A.84.250(4); Washington Secretary of State, [FAQs about Circulating Initiative and Referendum Petitions](#).

<sup>4</sup> RCW 29A.84.250(4).

<sup>5</sup> RCW 29A.72.100; Washington Secretary of State, [FAQs about Circulating Initiative and Referendum Petitions](#).

<sup>6</sup> RCW 9.44.080; RCW 29A.84.230.

<sup>7</sup> RCW 29A.72.100; RCW 29A.84.230(2).