

SB 1544, Citizens Initiative Review (Healthy Democracy Oregon)

[Note: I carried the original enabling legislation in 2011, HB 2634]

SB1544 updates the work of the Citizens' Initiative Review Commission to make it more efficient, increase participation by citizen panelists, and remove the sunset.

The Legislature created the Citizens' Initiative Review Commission, or CIR, in 2011. As our colleague and a Chief Sponsor of this bill, the Representative from West Salem might describe it, it's an innovative and uniquely Oregon process. It's a completely citizen-led review of measures. It brings together a panel of 24 randomly selected, and demographically balanced Oregonians, and gives them the time and resources to review a ballot measure.

The citizens hear from proponents and opponents of a ballot measure, hear from neutral experts in the field, and deliberate.

Then they publish their findings in the Voters Guide.

Over half of Oregon voters read a CIR statement in in the 2012 Voters Guide, and two-thirds said it was helpful.

The CIR was recognized by project of the year in 2012 by the International Association for Public Participation.

And finally, The CIR is a semi-independent agency **supported entirely by charitable donations**, solicited by a non-partisan, non-profit organization, Healthy Democracy.ⁱ

Closing

[As one panelist from Phoenix (OR) wrote, "Being a member of the panel gave me a chance to sit down with regular folks like myself and have an honest, thoughtful discussion about the future of our state." Ensuring that these honest, thoughtful discussions help inform our elections is what the Citizens' Initiative Review is all about.]

The CIR has passed the start-up phase. As it matures, this bill brings a few changes that will help its work in providing voters with quality, unbiased information about measures they will be voting on.

I ask for your Aye vote.

The three changes

Allow for Increased Efficiency. Each CIR is required by statute to convene on five consecutive days. This allows the commission to test a shorter version, (3-4 days) to increase efficiency and reduce costs so that eventually more measures can be considered.

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The bill states that the panel will meet for not fewer than three or more than five days, and allows the Commission to set the compensation for panelists (currently set at Oregon's average daily wage).

Increase Panelist Representation on CIR Commission. Increase the number of former citizen panelists on the CIR Commission to six (from four), and decrease the number of former moderators to two (from four). This gives the citizen panelists more control over the process.

Remove Sunset. The Commission was given a 2015 sunset date so the legislature could ensure that it achieved fully functional status as a semi-independent agency. Semi-independent agencies do not typically operate under a sunset clause, and its removal will give more confidence to donors about the Commission's status.

More info

First established in the organization and budget under the Health Licensing Agency, it is moving to Portland State University which offers curriculum and programs related to citizen participation and nonprofit management.

Their results are published as a one page "Citizens' Statement" to supplement other information in the Voters' Guide. – and contrasts with the blizzard of paid radio, TV, social media, and print ads that voters receive in the weeks heading into an election.

How many measures do they review? The CIR has resources to do two measures for each general election, every other year. 2010 as a pilot project: 2. In 2012, first year as official semi-independent agency: 2.

ⁱ Donations come from over 200 individuals, national foundations, and Oregon foundations like Meyer Memorial Trust, the Ford Family Foundation, and Velma and Carol Saling Foundation.)