

## BALLOT PROPOSITIONS (INITIATIVES)

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 1999

*Reviewed by Board of Managers March 2013*

- WHEREAS, The initiative process through which ballot measures are submitted to the electorate of California is an important and valued component of the democratic process; and
- WHEREAS, Many ballot propositions deal with the health, education and welfare of children and youth, which is the proper concern of PTA; and
- WHEREAS, Many ballot propositions may be unclear because of the complexity and ambiguity of the wording which often overrides the understanding of the issue; and
- WHEREAS, Most voters learn about ballot issues through election campaigns which do not explain the complexities of measures, but seek to influence the electorate with emotional pleas and sound bites; and
- WHEREAS, Many propositions are prepared by special interest groups, are poorly drafted, or are challenged in court following passage; and
- WHEREAS, The California State PTA must spend both human and financial resources in attempts to defeat initiatives that are not in the best interests of children, youth and families; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA participate in statewide efforts to educate the public about the initiative process in general and about specific initiatives as they appear on the ballot; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support efforts to provide the public with clear and understandable information on ballot propositions and encourage full discussion of the issues; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA encourage all efforts to ensure full disclosure during petition signature gathering and election campaigns of supporters on both sides of any ballot measure, including specific sources of funding for all facets of initiative campaigns; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA support legislation that would mandate full campaign disclosure on ballot measures.

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## BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Increasing use of the initiative process in recent years has been one of the most startling changes in California's system of governance. In the 88 years since the initiative process was established by vote of the electorate in 1911, only 272 initiative petitions have actually qualified for a statewide ballot; forty percent (109) of these appeared in the 20 years between 1978 and 1998. In just the last six statewide election years, Californians voted on 79 measures placed on the ballot by initiative petition.

The initiative process was born of citizen discontent and frustration with the domination of special interests over all of California government and politics in the early 1900s. It was a major feature of the government reform package placed on the ballot by then Governor Hiram Johnson and a group of progressive California legislators. The initiative process provides the people with a mechanism to bypass the Legislature and to place an issue of concern directly on the ballot for voter approval or rejection. By gathering the required number of signatures of qualified voters in the state, any group of citizens may propose changes in statutory law or the California constitution.

In recent years many citizens have complained that the initiative process itself seems to have become a tool of special interests. Anyone with enough money can hire paid signature gatherers to circulate petitions and to produce slick marketing and public relations campaigns to effectively promote or defeat any ballot measure. "For most voters, initiative campaigns are a blur of slogans and misleading advertising...leaving voters feeling confused and frustrated rather than informed and empowered" (Jim Shultz, *The Initiative Cookbook*).

Despite increasing voter frustration with special interests' manipulation of the initiative process, polls show that very few voters would abandon the process. However, many would welcome certain reforms. Two of the most promising steps toward reform include requiring more complete and open disclosure of the support and opposition for each measure, and providing the public with better sources of information about the actual content and consequences of the measure.