



Office of the Los Angeles City Attorney
Hydee Feldstein Soto

REPORT NO. R26-0341
JUNE 15 2026

REPORT RE:

**INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM SIGNATURE AND TIMING REQUIREMENTS
UNDER THE CITY CHARTER**

The Honorable City Council
of the City of Los Angeles
Room 395, City Hall
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, California 90012

Council File No. 26-0489

Honorable Members:

On June 12, 2026, the Rules, Elections and Intergovernmental Relations Committee (Committee) requested additional information regarding the signature and timing requirements of initiative and referendary petitions under the City Charter. This report summarizes the Charter's current provisions on the subject, describes the Committee's proposed changes, and responds to additional questions raised by Committee members.

Current City Charter Requirements

The City Charter contains specific signature and timing requirements for initiative and referendary petitions. Proponents of an initiative petition must collect valid voter signatures in an amount equal to 15% of the total votes cast in the last Mayoral election within a 120-day time frame – *i.e.*, for the November 2026 ballot, an initiative petition required 139,497 signatures collected on or after the 120th day immediately preceding

the date on which the initiative petition is filed with the City Clerk for signature verification.¹ If an initiative petition is filed and certified sufficient, the Council must either adopt the ordinance proposed by the initiative or place it on the ballot. (Charter Section 451.)

For referendary petitions, proponents must collect valid voter signatures in an amount equal to 10% of the total votes cast in the last Mayoral election within a 30-day time frame – *i.e.*, currently, a referendary petition requires 92,998 signatures collected on or before the 30th day immediately succeeding the publication of the ordinance. If a referendary petition is filed within the 30-day time frame, the challenged ordinance is suspended pending examination of petition signatures. And if the petition is certified sufficient, the ordinance remains suspended and the Council must either repeal the ordinance or place the ordinance on the ballot. (Charter Section 461.)

Committee's Proposed Changes to Referendum Signature Requirements

Rules Committee Recommendation Number 5 proposes increasing the signature requirement for referendary petitions so that referendary petitions require the same number of signatures as initiative petitions in order to qualify for the ballot – namely 15% of the total votes cast in the last Mayoral election.

State law provisions applicable to general law cities similarly provide that referendary petitions require the same number of signatures as initiative petitions. (See Cal. Elections Code Sections 9215 and 9237 [requiring initiative and referendum petitions be signed by 10% of the city's registered voters].) Notably, the State Elections Code's signature requirement of 10% of registered voters is higher than the City's requirement of 15% of the votes cast in the last Mayoral election.

At the June 12, 2026 Committee meeting, Committee members requested additional information regarding the timing for filing referendary petitions under the Charter and whether the signature collection period for referendary petitions could be increased to 120 days to match the collection period for initiative petitions.

The 30-day period for qualifying a referendary petition is linked directly to the legal requirement that a City ordinance does not become effective until 31 days after publication. (Charter Section 252.) The two rules – the 30-day referendary petition period and the 31-day legislative effective date requirement – operate together so that an ordinance becomes effective unless a referendary petition is filed before its effective date.

If the 30-day referendary petition period is extended to 120 days to be equivalent to the signature collection period for initiatives, then the effective date of City ordinances

¹ The 15% is of the votes cast in November 2022 Mayoral election, not of the votes cast in the primary just held on June 2, 2026, because the recent June primary resulted in a run off rather than in the election of a Mayor.

would also have to be extended to 121 days to accommodate the referendum period. An ordinance cannot become effective until the referendum period has elapsed because an essential component of the referendum power is the ability of voters to suspend an ordinance before it becomes effective and to require the City to either repeal the ordinance or submit it to the voters. (See Cal. Const., Art II, Section 9; Charter Section 461; *Lindelli v. Town of San Anselmo* (2003) 111 Cal.App.4th 1099, 1109 [holding that the ability of voters to stay legislation until the voters have had the opportunity to approve or reject it is essential to the referendum power].)

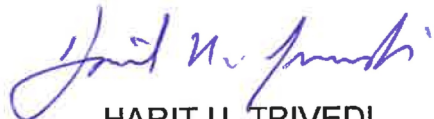
Delaying the effective date of ordinances for an additional three months, resulting in ordinances not becoming effective until 121 days after publication, would likely have significant impacts on the legislative process and implementation of City policies. The Committee may wish to consider whether this contemplated change merits further study.

We also note that the initiative and referendum provisions of the State Constitution and State Elections Code uniformly provide a period for collecting signatures for initiative petitions that is different than the period for referendum petitions, with the referendum period linked to the effective date of ordinances or statutes in the jurisdiction. (See Cal. Const., Art II, Sections 8 and 9 and Cal. Elections Code Section 9014 [180 days for state initiatives and 90 days for referendums regarding state bills]; Cal. Elections Code Sections 9208 and 9237 [180 days for initiatives in general law cities and 30 days for referendums regarding city ordinances].)

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Assistant City Attorney Harit Trivedi at (213) 978-7100. A member of this Office will be available when you consider this matter and answer questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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By 

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