

## Why Initiatives Matter

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One of the checks [Missouri](#) voters have on the power of state politicians is in jeopardy: Sen. Jolie Justus (D-[Kansas](#) City) is taking aim at the initiative-petition process, which allows Missourians to band together to put laws and constitutional amendments on the statewide ballot.

This is incredibly important, because some policy changes that would greatly benefit [Missouri](#) can be so politically unviable that politicians won't propose them. Petitions circulating this year would limit eminent domain and impose term limits on top state officials.

Why would Justus want to restrict this process further, so that only the most wealthy individuals and groups can participate?

The initiative process already is extremely difficult. To begin to change state law, groups must get tens of thousands of legal voters in two thirds of the state's congressional districts to sign a petition. [Missouri](#) has more than 4 million registered voters, so any group trying to get an initiative on the ballot must collect more than 100,000 signatures.

And it's expensive. Paul Jacob, president of Citizens in Charge, a nonprofit group dedicated to preserving and advancing the ability of U.S. citizens to petition state government directly, estimates that the minimum cost for signature collection in [Missouri](#) is more than \$2 per signature, and can be significantly higher. A group of people trying to change government for the better likely would need at least \$300,000 even to attempt to bring a state law change before [Missouri](#) voters.

In fact, most groups that have attempted to change state law with the current initiative petition process have failed. In recent years, [Missouri](#) Citizens for Property Rights, a group attempting to strengthen safeguards against the abuse of eminent domain, managed to gather more than 160,000 signatures from registered [Missouri](#) voters but still fell short.

Justus' proposal will make it at least 50 percent harder (and that much more expensive) for Missourians to bring an issue to statewide voters. She proposes requiring that groups collect signatures from registered voters in all congressional districts. That would mean, at minimum, signatures from an additional 45,000 registered [Missouri](#) voters and at least another \$100,000 in expenses.

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According to the St. Louis Business Journal, Justus hopes that the proposed law will make it more difficult and costly for people and organizations to "buy laws and constitutional amendments." She is certainly right — her proposal will make it more difficult. But her proposal will make it more difficult for any group to impact state government directly, not only those she suspects of trying to "buy" laws.

One of the greatest strengths of American government is the number of checks and balances at the federal, state, and local levels limiting the ability of any one branch of government to abuse its power. The initiative petition process is one of those checks on power, and restricting it further will serve only to erode Missourians' ability to limit legislators by initiating good — but politically difficult — policy change.