



SENATOR PAUL BETTENCOURT

DISTRICT 7

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Senator Bettencourt Files SB 488: The Texas Ballot Integrity Act *Statewide solution in response to Houston's and other cities' missteps involving ballot clarity*

AUSTIN – Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) and Senator Eddie Lucio Jr. (D-Brownsville), who served as Chair of the Senate Intergovernmental Affairs Committee during the 84th Legislative Session, today filed Senate Bill 488, the Texas Ballot Integrity Act to prevent local governments from misleading voters at the polls with deceptive ballot language, spending taxpayer money to ignore lawfully collected petition signatures, and suppressing petitions signed by those they are sworn to represent. Among its provisions, SB 488 would do the following things:

- Require clear ballot language that accurately defines the proposition being placed before voters;
- Allow a court to rewrite ballot language if the court finds that the language is inaccurate;
- Create a standard form for use by residents for referendum or recall petitions;
- Remove overly broad and unfair restrictions on who may collect signatures;
- Create a "rocket docket" for expedited court review of ballot language to prevent the delay of local initiatives;
- Instill a "loser pay" measure to ensure that prevailing parties have access to legal fees.

"In some cases, Houston residents were required to spend more than \$300,000 of their own money just to get city officials to follow the law, and city officials openly ignored their duties in regards to lawfully collected petitions that were submitted to the city," said Senator Bettencourt. **"After hearing testimony from multiple citizens in multiple cities on multiple problems leading to multiple Supreme Court rulings, it became apparent that we needed to file this bill. Chairman Lucio has filed a series of bills on this subject after listening to this testimony as well."**

SB 488 would set a uniform process for local ordinance elections that would protect the integrity of citizen-driven petitions and referendums by providing home-rule municipalities a specific process to propose charter amendments, local initiatives or bond obligations.

During the interim, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick issued an interim charge to the Senate Intergovernmental Affairs Committee to review ballot integrity issues, which resulted in dozens of mistreated petitioners from around the state appearing before the Committee to share stories about the problems they have faced with ballot referendums in their respective voting jurisdictions. Petitioners in San Marcos, for example, were sued by the city for trying to use their right to initiative and referendum. The city of Houston's use of deceptive ballot language and continual erring on election procedure resulted in four court rulings against it, including three from the Texas Supreme Court.

"This abuse of taxpayers has to stop," Senator Bettencourt concluded. **"Part of having a free and fair election is ensuring that the ballot language a voter sees in the voting booth is clear. I am pleased to file this legislation and make sure there are no repeats of the horror stories that have happened across Texas."**

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