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**Senator Bettencourt's SB 488, the Texas Ballot Integrity Act, Wins Senate Approval 24-6**  
*Senators approve statewide solution to cities' mishandling of petition and referendum ballot issues*

**AUSTIN** – The Texas Senate today gave its approval to Senate Bill 488, the Texas Ballot Integrity Act, by Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston), 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. **“Voters should not be faced with the prospect of a city simply refusing to follow the law on ballot initiatives and charter challenges,”** Senator Bettencourt said. **“The Texas Ballot Integrity Act will return transparency and accountability to the voting booth to ensure uniform and fair elections.”**

Among its provisions, SB 488 would do the following things:

- Requires clear ballot language that accurately defines the proposition being placed before voters;
- Creates a standard form for use by residents for referendum or recall petitions;
- Removes overly broad and unfair restrictions on who may collect signatures;
- Creates a "rocket docket" for expedited court review of ballot language to prevent the delay of local initiatives and allows a court to rewrite ballot language if the court finds that the language is inaccurate;
- Provides a "bad actor" provision by removing home-rule municipalities' authority to write their own ballot language for a period of four years if they have been found in the past to continuously act in bad faith; and
- Instills a "three strikes, you're out" provision that allows a registered voter to challenge ballot language if, following a Secretary of State (SOS) review, a city is still not writing language objectively. After the third strike, the ballot language will be drafted by the SOS.

**“Over the interim, we heard from citizens from at least six different cities in the state about major problems with the petition process in their own home-rule city,”** said Senator Bettencourt. **“Chairman Lucio provided an amendment to make sure that the voters are not misled,”** he added.

The city of Houston has now been overturned in court a total of five times for putting misleading language on the ballot and errantly handling petitions that were lawfully submitted by the citizens of Houston. Three major defeats for the city came in opinions from the Texas Supreme Court with a fourth coming from a state district judge, and there is currently a fifth case pending. Dozens of mistreated petitioners statewide have personally incurred legal expenses to enact petitions when home-rule city councils ignored state guidelines regarding ballot initiatives. Petitioners in San Marcos, for example, were sued by the city for trying to use their right to initiative and referendum. Residents in San Antonio, Richmond, Sugar Land and Bastrop all faced challenges with ballot referendums in their respective voting jurisdictions.

**“Court cases of cities repeatedly ignoring election law have surfaced statewide, making ballot integrity a widespread issue for the state to address,”** Senator Bettencourt said. **“The Texas Ballot Integrity Act will hold cities accountable for the ballot language they use and respect the language authored by the citizens in initiative and referendum issues,”** he concluded.

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