



March 2020

Signature Canvassing Opportunities Disappear As Events Cancel Across Arkansas This Month

Canvassers who rely on spring festivals and events to collect voter signatures needed to put constitutional amendments and state laws on the ballot are seeing these opportunities disappearing in light of COVID-19.

One group, Arcade Arkansas, started collecting signatures in September for its gaming proposal. A spokesperson told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette on Tuesday that the spread of COVID-19 has complicated the signature-gathering effort.



Other groups are updating their volunteers through Facebook, urging alternatives for collecting voter signatures.

Arkansas True Grass organizers have told people on their Facebook group to request a petition to be mailed to them, hoping people will get them signed and notarized before sending them back. They're also asking for donations to help cover the cost of the unexpected printing and postage.

"I wished we could somehow get legislators to provide a way for people to sign a petition electronically," said Mary Lou Berry with Arkansas True Grass. "It would be much safer and would help the voices of those shut in that don't go out, who do vote by absentee ballots. Why not provide the people a way to sign electronically?"

Berry helped write another proposed constitutional amendment, The Arkansas Digital Petition Signing Option Act, to allow voters to sign petitions electronically. However they haven't started collecting any signatures for the ballot measure yet.

Another group seeking to legalize marijuana for personal use and to address past criminal convictions related to marijuana has also urged people on Facebook to take caution and to take measures to keep themselves healthy and not spread the virus.

"Your lives and your family's life is much more important than signatures," Melissa Fults posted on the Drug Policy Education Group-Arkansas page.

In an email, Fults told the Public Policy Center that signature gathering has drastically slowed due to the precautions for the coronavirus.

"We are at 15,000 [signatures] right now, but if it breaks by May 1 we should [b]e able to gather the required number of signatures," Fults said.

Thirteen proposed constitutional amendments and state laws have been filed with the Secretary of State's Office for the November ballot. In addition, Arkansas legislators have referred three amendments to voters and a group collected enough signatures for a referendum on a 2019 state law.

Ballot issue groups have until July 3 to submit the required 89,151 voter signatures for amendments and

71,321 voter signatures for state laws. Those signatures must come from at least 15 different counties.

See our "Signature Collecting: What's Circulating?" section below for a list of the 13 ballot measures filed with the Secretary of State's Office. There is one additional proposal since our February newsletter, [The Arkansas Citizen's Redistricting Commission Amendment](#). If passed, the amendment would create a nine-member commission responsible for establishing the boundaries of legislative and Congressional districts after the Census occurs every 10 years.

[Read U of A Extension COVID 19 Resources](#)

In the Courts: Act 579 Referendum



Read For Yourself

Act 579 amended three existing state laws regarding the scope of practice for optometrists. Supporters of a referendum collected voter signatures to put the issue on the ballot. A new lawsuit to stop the referendum was filed Feb. 28 with the Arkansas Supreme Court.

[Read the new law](#)

[Read the proposed referendum title](#)

[Follow the court case online](#)

On the November 2020 Ballot: Constitutional Amendments from the Legislature



Arkansas senators and representatives put three constitutional amendments on the 2020 ballot for voters to decide. We will publish our neutral voter guide on these proposed amendments along with any from the citizen-initiated process closer to Election Day 2020.

Issue 1 - Continuing Sales Tax for Road Construction (HJR1018)

Labeled Issue 1 by its supporters, this is an Amendment to the Arkansas Constitution Continuing a One-Half Percent (0.5%) Sales and Use Tax for State Highways and Bridges; County Roads, Bridges and Other Surface Transportation; and City Streets, Bridges, and Other Surface Transportation After the Retirement of the Bonds Authorized in Arkansas Constitution, Amendment 91.

[Read the full text of the proposal](#)

The Arkansas Department of Transportation is hosting public meetings across the state about the proposed sales tax. Find more information about those meetings [here](#).

Issue 2 - Changing Legislative Term Limits (SJR15)

A Constitutional Amendment to Amend the Term Limits Applicable to Members of the General Assembly, to be Known as the "Arkansas Term Limits Amendment"

[Read the full text of the proposal](#)

Issue 3 - Changing the Citizen-Initiated and Legislative Ballot Issue Process (HJR1008)

A Constitutional Amendment To Amend The Process For The Submission, Challenge, And Approval Of Proposed Initiated Acts, Constitutional Amendments, And Referenda

[Read the full text of the proposal](#)

Signature Collecting: What's Circulating? Ballot Proposals from the Public



Arkansas is one of 15 states where citizens have the right to put a constitutional amendment or a state law on the ballot for voters to decide.

The initiative process includes filing a ballot title with the Secretary of State's office, collecting thousands of signatures from around the state, and submitting the signatures for verification.

New this election cycle is a requirement for the Arkansas Election Commission to certify the ballot title.

Submitted to the Secretary of State

Act 376 of 2019 requires ballot issue groups to submit a copy of their ballot title with the [Arkansas Secretary of State](#) before collecting signatures.

Ballot titles that have been filed include:

March 14, 2019 - [Arkansas Term Limits Amendment](#) - A proposal to lower the number of years state legislators can serve in office was submitted by a group known as Arkansas Term Limits BQC.

July 19, 2019 - [Arkansas Adult Use Cannabis Amendment](#) - A proposal to legalize adult use of marijuana was submitted by Melissa Fults.

July 19, 2019 - [Arkansas Marijuana Expungement Amendment](#) - A proposal to allow certain marijuana convictions to be expunged was submitted by Melissa Fults.

July 22, 2019 - [The Arkansas Recreational Marijuana Amendment of 2020](#) - A proposal to legalize adult marijuana use and to allow certain marijuana convictions to be expunged was submitted by William Barger.

Aug. 29, 2019 - The Coin Operated Amusement Machine Amendment to Article 19, Section 14 of the Arkansas Constitution - A proposal to amend the state's lottery amendment to allow coin operated machines was submitted by a group called [Arcade Arkansas](#).

Nov. 20, 2019 - The Arkansas Felon Voting Restoration Amendment of 2020- A proposal to restore voting rights of all felons who are not incarcerated. The proposal would exclude people convicted of a felony sexual offense or murder, who could regain their voting rights after they prove they've completed all time sentenced and paid all associated fines, fees and restitution. Roderick Greer Talley of Little Rock submitted the proposal.

Nov. 25, 2019 - The Arkansas Recall and Removal of Governor and All Elected State Officers, Members of the General Assembly, Judges of the Supreme and Circuit Courts, Chancellors and Prosecuting Attorneys Amendment - A proposal to provide a method for recalling all statewide elected officials was submitted by Roderick Greer Talley of Little Rock.

Nov. 25, 2019 - Amendment to Prohibit Levying a State Sales Tax and Tax on Personal Income and Impose a Fixed County and Municipal Tax - A proposal for the General Assembly to enact laws prohibiting any tax on incomes and to impose a limit on county and city sales tax rates was submitted by Roderick Greer Talley of Little Rock.

Nov. 25, 2019 - The Arkansas Abolishment of Slavery and Involuntary Servitude as Punishment for a Crime Amendment - A proposal to eliminate a section of the state's existing Constitution that specifically allows slavery and involuntary servitude as punishment for crime was submitted by Roderick Greer Talley of Little Rock.

Dec. 17, 2019 - The Arkansas Digital Petition Signing Option Act - A proposal to allow voters the option to sign petitions for ballot measures digitally through a secure online portal was submitted by Briana Boling.

Jan. 27, 2020 - Arkansas Cannabis Industry Amendment - A proposal to make the cannabis industry legal under state law and set up a Bureau of Cannabis Control, among other things. The amendment was submitted by Clair Danner.

Feb. 21, 2020 - An Act to Reduce the Used Car Sales and Use Tax - A proposal to eliminate sales tax on used cars sold for \$20,000 or less was submitted by Reps. Laurie Rushing and Jim Sorvillo.

March 16, 2020 - The Arkansas Citizens' Redistricting Commission Amendment - A proposal to create a nine-member citizens' commission to establish legislative and congressional boundaries was submitted by David Couch of Little Rock. Wording for the proposal was filed March 5 but the complete petition paperwork was filed with the Secretary of State on March 16.

[Click Here for the Arkansas 2020 Election Calendar](#)

#ARballot

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The Public Policy Center was established in 2004 to provide Arkansans with timely, credible, unaligned and research based information and education about public issues. Public issues are defined as pressing and emerging issues that involve multiple points of view and have widespread consequences.

Our goals are to:

- Increase citizen knowledge, awareness and understanding of public issues;
- Enhance public participation in decisions regarding public issues, and
- Help citizens craft, evaluate and implement alternative solutions to public issues.

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