



May 2021

Group Seeks Referendum On 5 Laws Lawsuit Filed Over Signature Gathering Law

[Arkansans for a Unified Natural State](#) want voters to have a say over several new laws adopted by state legislators during the 2021 legislative session.

The group filed three proposed veto referendums with the Arkansas Secretary of State's office this month. One of the proposals involves three separate laws, so if successful, the group would ask voters to decide the fate of five separate laws in the 2022 general election.

The Issues

Arkansans for a Unified Natural State submitted:

- [The Arkansas Absentee Voting Rights Protection Act](#) - This proposal would put up for a vote: [Act 736](#) concerning absentee ballots; [Act 727](#) concerning ballot privacy; and [Act 973](#) concerning deadlines for submitting absentee ballots in person.
- [The Arkansas Reasonable Duty To Retreat Before Using Deadly Force Act](#) - This proposal would put [Act 250](#) up for a vote. The law concerns the defense of a person with the use of physical force or deadly physical force, commonly called a "Stand Your Ground" law.
- [The Parental Right To Medically Care For Their Children Act](#) - This proposal would put [Act 626](#) up for a vote. Sponsors of Act 626 named their law the "Arkansas Save Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act."



How Referendums Work in Arkansas

Referendums ask voters whether they want to keep a state law recently passed by state legislators. A "FOR" vote on referendums allow the law to go into effect. An "AGAINST" vote would repeal a law.

The last time Arkansans voted on a referendum was in 1994. More recently, the Arkansas Supreme Court struck down a referendum on a 2019 law involving eye care before voting started.

Arkansans for a Unified Natural State has a shorter time frame to collect voter signatures for their ballot issues than most citizen groups because their measures are referendums. Petitions with voter signatures must be submitted to the Secretary of State's Office no later than 90 days of the legislature adjourning.

This year, state legislators decided to recess so they could come back later this fall to handle redistricting. An Attorney General's [opinion](#) issued May 20 says the 90th day is July 27 if legislators don't reconvene before then. Acts without emergency clauses would take effect July 28.

To place a referendum on the statewide ballot, a ballot issue group must collect and submit voter signatures equal to 6% of the number of people who voted in the last election for governor. This year, 6% equals 53,491 valid voter signatures.

Kwami Abdul-Bey, who formed the group after the session ended, said he has a goal of collecting voter

signatures by midnight on July 4. He described Arkansans for a United Natural State as a coalition of over a dozen different community and political organizations and nonprofits.

Abdul-Bey said they are already collecting signatures for the referendums and plan to file more proposals for the statewide ballot "that will all fall within our intended goal to galvanize all of the citizens of Arkansas to join together, en masse, to directly respond to obviously ill-intended partisan activist lawmaking that came out of the 93rd legislative session."

Multiple Lawsuits Filed

Several groups recently filed lawsuits to stop laws at the center of several referendums from going into effect.

Arkansas United and the League of Women Voters of Arkansas filed [lawsuit](#) in Pulaski County Circuit Court earlier this month over multiple new election laws. Their lawsuit (60CV-21-3138) includes Act 736 and Act 973.

Meanwhile, the American Civil Liberties Union has sued to stop Act 626. Their [lawsuit](#) (Case 4:21-cv-00450-JM) was filed in the U.S. District Court Eastern District.

Finally, another ballot issue group is involved in a lawsuit to stop a different election law. Arkansas Term Limits is one of several parties suing the state over Senate Bill 614, or Act 951. The new law added more restrictions on who can collect signatures for statewide ballot initiatives in Arkansas.

Tim Jacobs with Arkansas Term Limits confirmed that his group submitted a ballot title earlier this month with the Arkansas Secretary of State's Office to ask voters to reduce term limits for state legislators. The group has submitted several term limit proposals over the past decade. Their [lawsuit](#) (Case 4:21-cv-00460-JM) over Act 951 was filed in the U.S. District Court Eastern District on May 27.

2022 Arkansas Legislature Proposals

Arkansas legislators voted during the spring 2021 general assembly session to refer the three proposed constitutional amendments below to voters to decide on the November 2022 general election ballot. The three issues will appear on the ballot before any ballot initiatives submitted by citizens.

HJR1005

A constitutional amendment to reform certain measures presented to voters, to be known as the "Constitutional Amendment and Ballot Initiative Reform Amendment"

[Read the proposal](#)

[See the vote](#)

SJR10

A constitutional amendment to allow the General Assembly to convene in extraordinary session upon the issuance of a joint written proclamation of the speaker of the House of Representatives and the president pro tempore of the Senate or upon the submission of a written proclamation containing the signatures of at least 2/3 of the members of the House of Representatives and at least 2/3 of the members of the Senate to the speaker of the House of Representatives and the president pro tempore of the Senate requesting that the General Assembly convene in extraordinary session

[Read the proposal](#)

[See the vote](#)

SJR14

A constitutional amendment to create the "Arkansas Religious Freedom Amendment"

[Read the proposal](#)

[See the vote](#)

2022 Citizen Initiative Proposals



Arkansas is one of [15 states](#) where citizens have the right to put constitutional amendments, state laws and referendums on the ballot for voters to decide.

The citizen initiative process involves filing a ballot title with the Secretary of State's Office, collecting voter signatures across the state and submitting the petitions for verification. The Board of Election Commissioners also must approve the ballot title.

Referendums require voter signatures equaling 6% of the number of people who voted in the last governor's election. State laws require 8%, and constitutional amendments require 10%.

Submitted to the Secretary of State

Act 376 of 2019 requires ballot issue groups to submit a copy of their ballot title to the Secretary of State's Office before collecting voter signatures.

Ballot titles that have been filed for the 2022 ballot include:

May 25, 2021 - [Arkansas Cannabis Industry Amendment](#) - A proposal to make the cannabis industry legal in Arkansas was submitted by Clair Danner.

May 22, 2021 - [The Parental Right To Medically Care For Their Children Act](#)- A referendum on Act 626 was submitted by Arkansans for a Unified Natural State

May 22, 2021 - [The Arkansas Reasonable Duty to Retreat Before Using Deadly Force Act](#)- A referendum on Act 250 was submitted by Arkansans for a Unified Natural State.

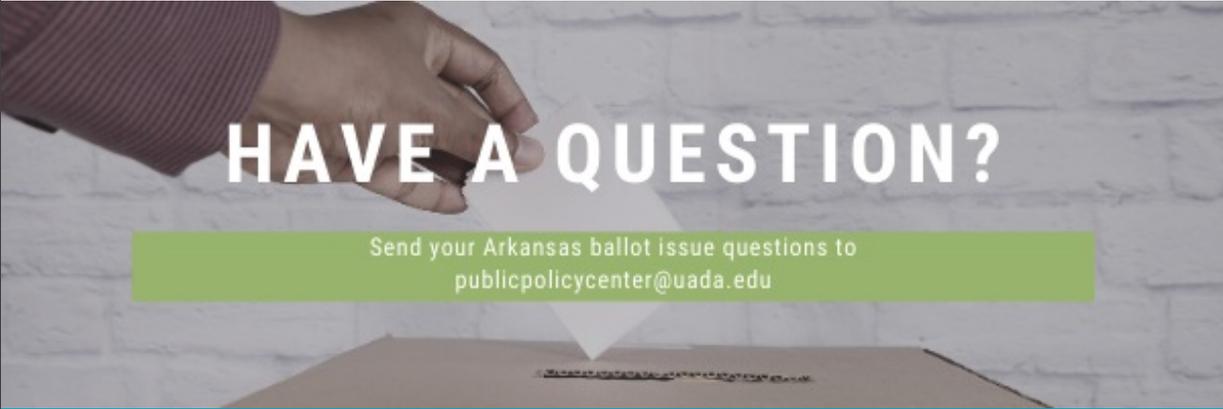
May 22, 2021 - [The Arkansas Absentee Voting Rights Protection Act](#)- A referendum on Acts 736, 727 and 973 was submitted by Arkansans for a Unified Natural State.

May 20, 2021 - [The Arkansas Term Limits Amendment](#) - A proposal to change term limits for state legislators was submitted by Arkansas Term Limits.

Feb. 4, 2021 - [The Arkansas Township Amendment of 2022](#) - A proposal that would create another layer of local government - township assemblies - among other things was submitted by Academy of Democracy.

Jan. 5, 2021 - [An Amendment Concerning Jurors' Rights](#) - A proposal that would impact the legislature's ability to pass laws regarding jury awards in lawsuits over injury or death was submitted. The person who submitted the proposal did not provide their contact information to the Secretary of State's Office.

May 22, 2020 - [The Arkansas Recreational Marijuana Amendment of 2022](#) - A proposal to legalize adult marijuana use and to allow certain marijuana convictions to be expunged was submitted by Arkansas True Grass.



HAVE A QUESTION?

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