

Group says it has enough signatures to get Jackson County charter measures on ballot

By Casey Valentine of the Daily Courier

A group that wants to make Jackson County government nonpartisan said Monday it has collected more than enough signatures to make the May primary ballot.

The deadline to turn in at least 8,351 valid signatures to qualify for the ballot is Wednesday. The group, Jackson County For All, said it collected 25% more signatures than required to ensure a buffer.

"We've collected over 11,000 signatures for each measure, more than enough to get these on the May ballot," said Denise Krause, campaign manager for the group.

The measures would rewrite the county charter and change the commissioner positions to nonpartisan, increase the number of commissioners from three to five, and decrease the pay rate for the commissioners.

Laura Ahearn, a petition circulator for the group, said 44% of the voters in Jackson County are nonaffiliated or belong to minor parties, and that the campaign collected enough signatures to make elections nonpartisan in just five months.

"Our measure addresses this discrimination that if they are not a Republican or Democrat they don't have a say — May's election should have a record turnout," she said.

The county clerk's office, which runs elections in Jackson County, has 30 days to verify the signatures.

The measures haven't even been placed on the ballot and the fighting has already started.

Krause recently filed a grievance with the county that accused the Board of Commissioners of violating Oregon's public meetings law by improperly discussing a partisan strategy against the measures during a public meeting and during the attendance of Commissioner Rick Dyer and Commissioner Dave Dotterer at a Jackson County Republican Committee meeting last month.

Last Thursday, Jackson County Administrator Danny Jordan disputed the group's claims regarding the commissioners' salaries and the hoped-for cost savings involved with the measures.

Dyer has accused JCFA of misleading people during the petition signature drive.

The Jackson County charter proposal is similar but not identical to the one in Josephine County, which will be on the May ballot as Measure 17-116.

Measure 17-116 increases the size of the Josephine County Board of Commissioners from three full-time commissioners to five part-time commissioners, reduces their pay, ensures that all county offices are nonpartisan, and adds a professionally trained county manager.

Jackson County commissioner candidates are currently partisan. Josephine County candidates are nonpartisan, but there has been talk in Republican circles of making the positions partisan.

Krause said once the county clerk's office verifies the signatures, the next step is to "share the message and spread the word to as many people as possible."

"These measures will be on everyone's ballot," she said, "and we want to bring as much participation to May's election as we can and have a great turnout."

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