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## House votes to bar paying signature collectors per name

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PHOENIX — A divided House of Representatives voted Wednesday to prohibit groups trying to put measures on the ballot from paying petition circulators on a per-signature basis.

The preliminary approval of HB 2338 came over the objections of several Democrats. Rep. Tom Prezelski, D-Tucson, said his Republican colleagues were throwing roadblocks into the path of citizens who want to propose their own laws.

But Rep. Kirk Adams, D-Mesa, said no one's rights were being trimmed.

### **Incentives to cheat**

Adams said the problem with pay-per-signature arrangements is they provide an incentive for circulators to cheat.

He pointed out that Maricopa County Elections Director Karen Osborne testified that her office has found petitions where it appears that circulators simply copied names out of a phone book.

Rep. Steve Gallardo, D-Phoenix, did not dispute that.

He said, though, the high number of signatures required makes it virtually impossible for an all-volunteer effort to put a measure on the ballot.

Adams, however, countered that nothing in his legislation prohibits some organization with money from hiring circulators. The only difference is they would have to be paid by the hour and not by the name, he said.

But Gallardo said that works against groups with limited funds.

The state constitution always has allowed voters to propose and approve their own laws when legislators do not act. But they have to get the signatures of a certain percentage of people who voted.

This past year that figure was 122,612 for a statutory change and 183,917 for a constitutional amendment. But given the number of signatures that get disqualified for one reason or another, most groups get at least a 25 percent cushion.

The result has been the use of paid circulators.

Some supporters of the measure acknowledged that they would, in fact, like to make it harder for voters to propose their own laws. Rep. Bob Robson, R-Chandler, said voter-crafted laws can create unforeseen problems.

As proof, he cited the recently approved Proposition 202, which imposes a \$6.75 an hour minimum wage.

Robson called that a "flawed piece of legislation" because it did not contain an exemption for people who are mentally or physically disabled.

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