



June 10, 2015

Senator Ben Allen
Chair, Elections & Constitutional Amendments Committee
State Capitol, Room 2203
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Oppose AB 1100 (Low and Bloom) Ballot initiatives: filing fees.

Dear Senator Allen,

Consumer Watchdog opposes AB 1100 because it will inhibit the public's ability to participate in the initiative process and create yet one more obstacle for direct democracy.

AB 1100 increases the fee to submit a proposed state ballot initiative to the Attorney General to an exorbitant \$8,000. While some increase may be needed, the steep fee proposed in AB 1100 would raise a significant hurdle to citizen initiatives ever getting off the ground. This is especially true for grassroots initiatives that may need to be submitted multiple times before they successfully qualify for the ballot.

While the bill was prompted by an unconscionable proposal that targeted gays and lesbians, it will do nothing to prevent similar frivolous initiatives. Instead, it will concede even further the already expensive initiative process to well-funded special interest groups and corporations.

We find it especially ironic that Assemblyman Bloom has co-authored this bill. In his previous position as a Santa Monica city council member, he and fellow members sought to overturn a conflict of interest law, enacted by citizen ballot initiative, by placing their own initiative, Proposition W, on the 2006 city ballot.

Proposition LL, the Taxpayer Protection Amendment drafted by Consumer Watchdog, qualified for the ballot with the signatures of over 12,000 Santa Monica residents collected by volunteers, and was enacted by 59% of the voters in 2000. The law prevents city officials from accepting campaign contributions, gifts or employment from entities that benefit from the official's decisions (for example, through the award of a city contract or zoning variance). The prohibition begins when the public benefit is approved and ends six years later, or two years after the official leaves office, whichever is first.

Prop. W was placed on the ballot with no signatures from Santa Monica voters and cost the council members nothing. It was a cynical attempt to deceive Santa Monica voters into repealing Prop. LL, one of the toughest conflict of interest laws in the nation. Despite the support of Bloom and others, Prop. W was defeated.

Assemblyman Bloom had no issues with using the initiative process for free in 2006 to promote his own cause but now believes that increasing the initiative fee to raise hurdles for citizen initiatives is acceptable. We disagree with this double standard.

The ballot initiative process is the public's last resort when common sense reforms are stymied by special interests' stranglehold in Sacramento. AB 1100's exorbitant fee increase creates one more obstacle to this direct democracy. It will not prevent the kind of offensive ballot initiative that spurred the bill's introduction. It will help increase dominance of the initiative process by a handful of moneyed interests seeking to buy more power for themselves and their companies. Some fee increase may be reasonable; however, \$8,000 is over the top. For these reasons, Consumer Watchdog must oppose AB 1100.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carmen Balber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Carmen Balber
Executive Director