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**News Release**

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**Gale praises passage of petition legislation**

LINCOLN – Secretary of State John Gale hailed the passage of legislation that he says makes needed changes in the petition process in Nebraska.

The Legislature on a vote of 31-14 gave final-round approval today to the bill, LB 39, which was introduced by Sen. DiAnna Schimek of Lincoln.

"The bill will help curb abuses in the petition process that have frustrated Nebraska citizens in recent years, and does so in a way that preserves the people's right to use the process," said Gale, the state's chief election officer.

The bill provides that only Nebraska citizens of voting age can collect petition signatures. This would stop the practice of using out-of-state petition circulators, which has come under widespread criticism, Gale said.

"It makes sense to require that petition circulators be Nebraskans who will be impacted by issues placed on the ballot," he said.

The bill also prohibits petition circulators from being paid by the signature. Paying by the signature can lead to abuses and a high rate of invalid signatures, according to Gale.

The impetus for the legislation was a controversial petition season in 2006, when there were 13 ballot proposals. Of those proposals, only three made the ballot and only one was approved by voters.

The petition efforts that year saw multiple lawsuits, aggressive tactics by circulators, the deployment of "blockers" to persuade people from signing petitions and disputes regarding where people could circulate petitions.

Gale said that he and his staff worked with Schimek to craft provisions that would bring "some common sense and reason" to the petition process.

"With LB 39, a proper balance will be restored between the rights of the petition circulators and the rights of the citizens," Gale added.

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