



Ohio Revised Code

Section 3501.38 General rules for petitions and declarations of candidacy.

Effective: April 9, 2025

Legislation: House Bill 74

All declarations of candidacy, nominating petitions, or other petitions presented to or filed with the secretary of state or a board of elections or with any other public office for the purpose of becoming a candidate for any nomination or office or for the holding of an election on any issue shall, in addition to meeting the other specific requirements prescribed in the sections of the Revised Code relating to them, be governed by the following rules:

(A) Only electors qualified to vote on the candidacy or issue which is the subject of the petition shall sign a petition. Each signer shall be a registered elector pursuant to section 3503.01 of the Revised Code. The facts of qualification shall be determined as of the date when the petition is filed.

(B) Signatures shall be affixed in ink. Each signer may also print the signer's name, so as to clearly identify the signer's signature.

(C) Each signer shall place on the petition after the signer's name the date of signing and the location of the signer's voting residence, including the street and number if in a municipal corporation or the rural route number, post office address, or township if outside a municipal corporation. The voting address given on the petition shall be the address appearing in the registration records at the board of elections.

(D) Except as otherwise provided in section 3501.382 of the Revised Code, no person shall write any name other than the person's own on any petition. Except as otherwise provided in section 3501.382 of the Revised Code, no person may authorize another to sign for the person. If a petition contains the signature of an elector two or more times, only the first signature shall be counted.

(E)(1) On each petition paper, the circulator shall indicate the number of signatures contained on it, and shall sign a statement made under penalty of election falsification that the circulator witnessed the affixing of every signature, that all signers were to the best of the circulator's knowledge and belief qualified to sign, and that every signature is to the best of the circulator's knowledge and belief



the signature of the person whose signature it purports to be or of an attorney in fact acting pursuant to section 3501.382 of the Revised Code. On the circulator's statement for a declaration of candidacy or nominating petition for a person seeking to become a statewide candidate, for a statewide initiative or a statewide referendum petition, or for a party formation petition described in division (A)(1)(b) of section 3517.01 of the Revised Code, the circulator shall identify the circulator's name, the address of the circulator's permanent residence, and the name and address of the person employing the circulator to circulate the petition, if any.

(2) As used in division (E) of this section, "statewide candidate" means the joint candidates for the offices of governor and lieutenant governor or a candidate for the office of secretary of state, auditor of state, treasurer of state, or attorney general.

(F) Except as otherwise provided in section 3501.382 of the Revised Code, if a circulator knowingly permits an unqualified person to sign a petition paper or permits a person to write a name other than the person's own on a petition paper, that petition paper is invalid; otherwise, the signature of a person not qualified to sign shall be rejected but shall not invalidate the other valid signatures on the paper.

(G) The circulator of a petition may, before filing it in a public office, strike from it any signature the circulator does not wish to present as a part of the petition.

(H) Any signer of a petition or an attorney in fact acting pursuant to section 3501.382 of the Revised Code on behalf of a signer may remove the signer's signature from that petition at any time before the petition is filed in a public office by striking the signer's name from the petition; no signature may be removed after the petition is filed in any public office.

(I)(1) No alterations, corrections, or additions may be made to a petition after it is filed in a public office.

(2)(a) No declaration of candidacy, nominating petition, or other petition for the purpose of becoming a candidate may be withdrawn after it is filed in a public office. Nothing in this division prohibits a person from withdrawing as a candidate as otherwise provided by law.



(b) No petition presented to or filed with the secretary of state, a board of elections, or any other public office for the purpose of the holding of an election on any question or issue may be resubmitted after it is withdrawn from a public office or rejected as containing insufficient signatures. Nothing in this division prevents a question or issue petition from being withdrawn by the filing of a written notice of the withdrawal by a majority of the members of the petitioning committee with the same public office with which the petition was filed prior to the sixtieth day before the election at which the question or issue is scheduled to appear on the ballot.

(J) All declarations of candidacy, nominating petitions, or other petitions under this section shall be accompanied by the following statement in boldface capital letters: **WHOEVER COMMITS ELECTION FALSIFICATION IS GUILTY OF A FELONY OF THE FIFTH DEGREE.**

(K) All separate petition papers shall be filed at the same time, as one instrument.

(L) If a board of elections distributes for use a petition form for a declaration of candidacy, nominating petition, or any type of question or issue petition that does not satisfy the requirements of law as of the date of that distribution, the board shall not invalidate the petition on the basis that the petition form does not satisfy the requirements of law, if the petition otherwise is valid. Division (L) of this section applies only if the candidate received the petition from the board within ninety days of when the petition is required to be filed.

(M)(1) Upon receiving an initiative petition, or a petition filed under section 307.94 or 307.95 of the Revised Code, concerning a ballot issue that is to be submitted to the electors of a county or municipal political subdivision, the board of elections shall examine the petition to determine:

(a) Whether the petition falls within the scope of a municipal political subdivision's authority to enact via initiative, including, if applicable, the limitations placed by Sections 3 and 7 of Article XVIII of the Ohio Constitution on the authority of municipal corporations to adopt local police, sanitary, and other similar regulations as are not in conflict with general laws, and whether the petition satisfies the statutory prerequisites to place the issue on the ballot. The petition shall be invalid if any portion of the petition is not within the initiative power; or

(b) Whether the petition falls within the scope of a county's authority to enact via initiative, including



whether the petition conforms to the requirements set forth in Section 3 of Article X of the Ohio Constitution, including the exercise of only those powers that have vested in, and the performance of all duties imposed upon counties and county officers by law, and whether the petition satisfies the statutory prerequisites to place the issue on the ballot. The finding of the board shall be subject to challenge by a protest filed pursuant to division (B) of section 307.95 of the Revised Code.

(2) After making a determination under division (M)(1)(a) or (b) of this section, the board of elections shall promptly transmit a copy of the petition and a notice of the board's determination to the office of the secretary of state. Notice of the board's determination shall be given to the petitioners and the political subdivision.

(3) If multiple substantially similar initiative petitions are submitted to multiple boards of elections and the determinations of the boards under division (M)(1)(a) or (b) of this section concerning those petitions differ, the secretary of state shall make a single determination under division (M)(1)(a) or (b) of this section that shall apply to each such initiative petition.