

Initiative 234: Plain Language Ballot Titles

Placed on the ballot by citizen initiative • Passes with 55 percent of the vote

Initiative 234 proposes amending the Colorado Constitution to:

- require that ballot titles be in plain language, written at no more than an eighth grade level; and
- prohibit laws that require specific language in ballot titles, if the laws interfere with plain language in the ballot title.

What Your Vote Means

YES

A “yes” vote on Initiative 234 requires that ballot titles be written in plain language, and prohibits any law from interfering with this requirement.

NO

A “no” vote on Initiative 234 maintains current law for the preparation of ballot titles.

Summary and Analysis of Initiative 234

How do measures appear on the ballot and how are ballot titles written?

A person may propose a new law or change to existing laws through the initiative process. Through this process, the change may be placed on the ballot if the person collects enough signatures from registered voters.

Before collecting signatures, every initiative receives a ballot title written by the state Title Board. The board is made up of representatives from the Attorney General’s office, the Secretary of State’s office, and the legislature’s legal office. The ballot title is a brief statement intended to fairly and accurately represent the intent and meaning of an initiative. The board must write titles without legal, technical, or specialized terminology when possible.

The legislature may also refer measures to the ballot. When the state legislature refers a measure to the ballot, the legislature writes the ballot title.

What does Initiative 234 do?

Initiative 234 requires that all ballot titles be in plain language, written at no more than an eighth grade reading level. The measure does not define plain language or designate who will determine if ballot titles meet the standard. An eighth grade reading level is described as one that is easily and fully understood by a majority of people. This typically includes short sentences, familiar words, and a conversational tone.

Initiative 234 also prohibits laws requiring citizen initiatives to include language in the ballot title that may interfere with the plain language requirement. There are several current laws that require additional language in ballot titles. For example, if a citizen initiative raises or lowers state taxes, the initiative's title must include specific language describing the changes and the impact on taxpayers. For citizen initiatives that reduce tax collections, the title must include an estimate of potential state spending reductions, and the areas of government that could be impacted. The ballot titles for measures referred by the state legislature are not subject to this prohibition.

Argument For Initiative 234

- 1) Requiring plain language in ballot titles will help voters better understand the changes they are voting on, since voters often navigate complicated technical or legal language to understand the impact of their vote. Prohibiting the legislature from passing laws that complicate ballot titles is necessary to ensure that voters are given a clear description about measures that affect the state.

Argument Against Initiative 234

- 1) Initiative 234 may result in voters missing important context about ballot measures. Ballot titles for citizen initiatives are already required to be written as plainly as possible. Current law requires information be included in some ballot titles, such as how much taxes may increase or decrease, that allow voters to better understand a measure's impact. These requirements, which convey important information about complex policy choices, may be invalidated by Initiative 234.

Information about the organizations supporting and opposing this measure is available on the Colorado Secretary of State's website:

www.coloradosos.gov/pubs/elections/Initiatives/ballot/contacts/2026.html

Fiscal Impact of Initiative 234

A fiscal impact statement will be included in the second draft.