

Apportionment and Districting Commission

Number: PETITION

Date: November 29, 2005

The Honorable Barbara J. Pariente Chief Justice, and Justices of
The Supreme Court of Florida
The Supreme Court Building
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1925

Dear Chief Justice Pariente and Justices:

In accordance with the provisions of Article IV, section 10, Florida Constitution, and section 16.061, Florida Statutes, it is the responsibility of the Attorney General to petition this Honorable Court for a written opinion as to the validity of an initiative petition circulated pursuant to Article XI, section 3, Florida Constitution.

On August 30, 2005, this office received from the Secretary of State an initiative petition seeking to amend the Florida Constitution to create an independent nonpartisan Apportionment and Districting Commission. The full text of the proposed amendment states:

"Full Text:

Delete current Article III, Section 16, and insert the following:

'Section 16. Apportionment and Districting Commission.—.

'(a) APPORTIONMENT AND DISTRICTING COMMISSION. In the year following each decennial census or when required by the United States or by court order, a commission shall divide the state into not less than 30 or more than 40 consecutively numbered single-member senatorial districts of convenient contiguous territory, not less than 80 or more than 120 consecutively numbered single-member representative districts of convenient contiguous territory as provided by this constitution or by general law and shall divide the state to create as many congressional districts as there are representatives in congress apportioned to this state. Districts shall be established in accordance with the constitution of this state and of the United States and shall be as nearly equal in population as practicable.

'(1) On or before June 1 in the year following each decennial census, or within 15 days after legislative apportionment or congressional districting is required by law or by court order, 15 commissioners shall be certified by the respective appointing authorities to the custodian of records. The president of the senate and the speaker of the house of representatives each shall select and certify three commissioners. Members of minority parties in the senate shall elect one from their number who shall select and certify three commissioners. Members of minority parties in the house of representatives shall elect one from their number who shall select and certify three commissioners. On or before June 1 of the same year, the chief justice of the supreme

court shall select three members of the commission, each of whom shall be a registered voter who for the previous two years was not registered as an elector of either of the two largest political parties in the senate and the house of representatives. The chief justice shall select commissioners from recommendations made by the chief judge of each district court of appeal. Each chief judge shall recommend three individuals who otherwise meet the requirements of this section and who reside in that district. From the individuals recommended by chief judges of the district courts of appeal, the chief justice shall select and certify three commissioners. No two commissioners selected by the chief justice shall reside in the same appellate district.

(2)a. No commissioner shall have served during the four years prior to his or her certification as an elected state official, member of congress, party officer or employee, paid registered lobbyist, legislative or congressional employee, and no commissioner shall be a relative, as defined by law, or an employee of any of the above.

'b. As a condition of appointment, each commissioner shall take an oath affirming that the commissioner will not receive compensation as a paid registered lobbyist, or seek elected office in any legislative or congressional district for a period of four years after concluding service as a commissioner.

'(3) The commission shall elect one of its members to serve as chair and shall establish its own rules and procedures. All commission actions shall require 10 affirmative votes. Meetings and records of the commission shall be open to the public and public notice of all meetings shall be given.

'(4) Within 180 days after the commission is certified to the custodian of records, the commission shall file with the custodian of records its final report, including all required plans.

'(5) After the supreme court determines that the required plans are valid, the commission shall be dissolved.

'(b) FAILURE OF COMMISSION TO APPORTION; JUDICIAL APPORTIONMENT. If the commission does not timely file its final report including all required plans with the custodian of records, the commission shall be dissolved, and the attorney general shall, within five days, petition the supreme court of the state to make such apportionment. No later than the sixtieth day after the filing of such petition, the supreme court shall file with the custodian of records an order making such apportionment.

'(c) JUDICIAL REVIEW OF APPORTIONMENT. Within 15 days after the final report of the commission is filed with the custodian of records, the attorney general shall petition the supreme court to review and determine the validity of the apportionment. The supreme court, in accordance with its rules, shall permit adversary interests to present their views and, within 30 days from filing the petition, shall enter its judgment.

'(d) EFFECT OF JUDGMENT IN APPORTIONMENT. A judgment of the supreme court determining the apportionment to be valid or ordering judicial apportionment shall be binding upon all citizens of the state. Should the supreme court determine that the apportionment made by the commission is invalid, the commission, within 20 days after the ruling, shall adopt and file

with the custodian of records an amended plan that conforms to the judgment of the supreme court. Within five days after the filing of an amended plan, the attorney general shall petition the supreme court of the state to determine the validity of the amended plan, or if the commission has failed to file an amended plan, report that fact to the court.

'(e) JUDICIAL APPORTIONMENT. Should the commission fail to file an amended plan or should the supreme court determine the amended plan is invalid, the commission shall be dissolved, and the supreme court shall, not later than 60 days after receiving the petition of the attorney general, file with the custodian of records an order making such apportionment."

The ballot title for the proposed amendment is "INDEPENDENT NONPARTISAN COMMISSION TO APPORTION LEGISLATIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS WHICH REPLACES APPORTIONMENT BY LEGISLATURE." The summary for the proposed amendment states:

"Creates fifteen member commission replacing legislature to apportion single-member legislative and congressional districts in the year following each decennial census. Establishes non-partisan method of appointment to commission. Disqualifies certain persons for membership to avoid partiality. Limits commission members from seeking office under plan for four years after service on commission. Requires ten votes for commission action. Requires Florida Supreme Court to apportion districts if commission fails to file a valid plan."

Article XI, section 3, Florida Constitution, provides in relevant part:

"The power to propose the revision or amendment of any portion or portions of this constitution by initiative is reserved to the people, provided that, any such revision or amendment, except for those limiting the power of government to raise revenue, shall embrace but one subject and matter directly connected therewith."

The single-subject provision "is a rule of restraint designed to insulate Florida's organic law from precipitous and cataclysmic change." *Advisory Opinion to the Attorney General--Save Our Everglades*, 636 So. 2d 1336, 1339 (Fla. 1994); *Advisory Opinion to the Attorney General--Tax Limitation*, 644 So. 2d 486, 490 (Fla. 1994).

To comply with the single-subject requirement, an initiative must manifest a "logical and natural oneness of purpose." *Fine v. Firestone*, 448 So. 2d 984, 990 (Fla. 1984). This Court stated in *Advisory Opinion to the Attorney General--Restricts Laws Related to Discrimination*, 632 So. 2d 1018, 1020 (Fla. 1994), that "[t]o ascertain whether the necessary 'oneness of purpose' exists, we must consider whether the proposal affects separate functions of government and how the proposal affects other provisions of the constitution."

Section 101.161(1), Florida Statutes, provides in relevant part:

"Whenever a constitutional amendment . . . is submitted to the vote of the people, the substance of such amendment . . . shall be printed in clear and unambiguous language on the ballot . . . The wording of the substance of the amendment . . . shall be an explanatory statement, not exceeding 75 words in length, of the chief purpose of the measure. . . . The ballot title shall consist of a caption, not exceeding 15 words in length, by which the measure is commonly

referred to or spoken of."

This Court has stated "that the ballot [must] be fair and advise the voter sufficiently to enable him intelligently to cast his ballot." *Askew v. Firestone*, 421 So. 2d 151, 155 (Fla. 1982), *quoting, Hill v. Milander*, 72 So. 2d 796, 798 (Fla. 1954). While the ballot title and summary must state in clear and unambiguous language the chief purpose of the measure, they need not explain every detail or ramification of the proposed amendment. *Carroll v. Firestone*, 497 So. 2d 1204, 1206 (Fla. 1986). The ballot, however, must give the voter fair notice of the decision he must make. *Askew v. Firestone, supra* at 155. This Court has stated that the purpose of section 101.161, Florida Statutes, is to ensure that voters are advised of the amendment's true meaning.

Therefore, I respectfully request this Honorable Court's opinion as to whether the constitutional amendment, proposed by initiative petition, complies with Article XI, section 3, Florida Constitution, and whether the amendment's ballot title and summary comply with section 101.161, Florida Statutes.

Sincerely,

Charlie Crist
Attorney General

CC/ts

cc: Ms. Glenda Hood
Secretary of State

The Honorable Jeb Bush
Governor, State of Florida

The Honorable Tom Lee
President, Florida Senate

The Honorable Allan G. Bense
Speaker, Florida House of Representatives

Mr. Mark Herron, Esquire
Committee for Fair Elections

Director, Division of Elections