



## 104TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### State of Illinois

2025 and 2026

HB5579

Introduced 2/13/2026, by Rep. Jennifer Sanalitra

#### SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

New Act  
5 ILCS 430/5-15.5 new

Creates the Local Referendum Neutrality and Taxpayer Protection Act. Provides that a public body may only expend public funds related to a local referendum for specified purposes. Provides for the designation of an official committee in favor and the official committee opposed to the local referendum. Provides for the preparation of arguments in favor of or in opposition to the local referendum by the committees. Provides that an election authority shall review the arguments and publish the arguments in a voter information package. Sets forth provisions concerning conduct by public employees and public bodies. Amends the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act. Provides that activities intended to influence voter support for or opposition to a referendum or potential referendum, when conducted using public funds, public facilities, or employee compensated time, constitute prohibited political activity. Effective immediately.

LRB104 19468 SPS 32916 b

1 AN ACT concerning elections.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**  
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Local  
5 Referendum Neutrality and Taxpayer Protection Act.

6 Section 5. Definitions. As used in this Section:

7 "Advocacy" means any communication or activity reasonably  
8 designed to influence voter support in favor of or in  
9 opposition to a referendum or potential referendum.

10 "Election authority" means the county clerk or board of  
11 election commissioners having jurisdiction over the election  
12 in which the local referendum will appear on the ballot.

13 "Local referendum" means any ballot proposition initiated  
14 by or on behalf of a unit of local government, school district,  
15 or special district that authorizes a tax increase, tax  
16 extension, levy, or bond issuance.

17 "Neutral explanatory statement" means factual, descriptive  
18 information limited to the legal effect, duration, and  
19 standardized fiscal impact of a referendum, presented without  
20 advocacy, persuasive framing, value judgments, or  
21 exhortations.

22 Section 10. Permitted communications.

1 (a) A public body may only expend public funds related to a  
2 local referendum for the following purposes:

3 (1) preparation of a neutral explanatory statement  
4 describing the legal effect and operation of the  
5 referendum, prepared by the election authority or its  
6 legal counsel;

7 (2) preparation of a standardized fiscal impact  
8 statement using uniform assumptions prescribed by the  
9 election authority;

10 (3) publication of the ballot language as certified;  
11 and

12 (4) distribution of the argument in favor and argument  
13 in opposition submitted in accordance with subsection (c).

14 (b) Any referendum-related communications not authorized  
15 by subsection (a) using public funds, public facilities, or  
16 employee compensated time are prohibited.

17 (c) If one or more political committees are properly  
18 registered under the Election Code for or against a local  
19 referendum, the election authority shall designate as the  
20 official committee in favor and the official committee opposed  
21 whichever committee on each side submits the most verified  
22 voter endorsements from registered voters residing in the  
23 jurisdiction of the public body submitting the referendum.

24 Section 15. Voter endorsement requirements. A voter  
25 endorsement considered under subsection (c) of Section 10

1 shall be considered valid only if it:

2 (1) is submitted by a natural person registered to  
3 vote in the jurisdiction;

4 (2) includes the voter's name and residential address;  
5 and

6 (3) contains the following attestation: "I am a  
7 registered voter residing in this jurisdiction and I  
8 designate this committee as the official author of the  
9 argument in favor of [or opposition to] the proposed  
10 referendum for purposes of the official voter  
11 information".

12 Section 20. Limitations on endorsements and committee  
13 participation.

14 (a) A voter may endorse only one committee in favor or one  
15 committee opposed to a referendum.

16 (b) No person may simultaneously participate in, direct,  
17 or act on behalf of both a committee in favor and committee in  
18 opposition.

19 (c) No officer, employee, contractor, or agent of the  
20 public body submitting the referendum may participate in,  
21 direct, or act on behalf of either the committee in favor or  
22 the committee in opposition.

23 Section 25. Endorsement collection period. The election  
24 authority shall establish an endorsement collection period of

1 not less than 30 days after the certification of the  
2 referendum question. The election authority shall only  
3 consider endorsements submitted during this period.

4 Section 30. Tie resolution. If 2 or more committees on the  
5 same side submit an equal number of verified endorsements, the  
6 election authority shall resolve the tie by conducting a  
7 public lottery.

8 Section 35. Absence of endorsements. If no committee  
9 submits endorsements on one side of the referendum, the  
10 election authority shall solicit volunteers from registered  
11 voters residing in the jurisdiction and select committee  
12 members by random draw. If no volunteers come forward, the  
13 voter information package shall state: "No argument was  
14 submitted in favor of [or in opposition to] this proposition".

15 Section 40. No exclusive speech rights; scope of  
16 designation. Designation or nondesignation of a committee  
17 under this Section shall not be construed to confer any  
18 exclusive right to speak, campaign, fundraise, associate, or  
19 otherwise advocate for or against a referendum. This Section  
20 only controls participation in the official voter information  
21 package prepared and distributed by the election authority.

22 Section 45. Personal-capacity advocacy by public

1 employees. Nothing in this Section shall prohibit an officer,  
2 employee, contractor, or agent of a public body from engaging  
3 in referendum advocacy in a personal capacity, provided that  
4 no public funds, public facilities, public resources, or  
5 employee compensated time are used for the advocacy.

6 Section 50. Prohibited conduct. No public body shall  
7 expend public funds, use public facilities, or use employee  
8 compensated time to engage in any activity reasonably designed  
9 to influence voter support for or opposition to a referendum  
10 or potential referendum, including, but not limited to:

11 (1) public opinion polling or surveying of voters  
12 regarding support, opposition, tax tolerance, or message  
13 receptivity;

14 (2) message testing, scenario testing, or framing of  
15 funding levels for electoral viability;

16 (3) development, production, or dissemination of  
17 promotional materials highlighting benefits of passage or  
18 defeat without equal presentation of opposing  
19 considerations;

20 (4) strategic communications planning related to a  
21 referendum campaign;

22 (5) social media advocacy, targeted outreach, or  
23 audience segmentation related to a referendum;

24 (6) press releases, presentations, speeches, websites,  
25 newsletters, or public messaging advocating for passage or

1 defeat;

2 (7) engagement of consultants whose services include  
3 referendum campaign strategy, voter persuasion, opposition  
4 research, or campaign management;

5 (8) internal planning or coordination intended to  
6 transition public resources, data, or messaging to a  
7 political committee advocating passage or defeat; and

8 (9) organizing, facilitating, funding, or conducting  
9 polling, focus groups, listening sessions, message  
10 testing, or other voter research activities intended to  
11 refine messaging, assess electoral viability, identify  
12 supporters or opponents, shape narratives, or otherwise  
13 plan, develop, or support referendum campaign strategy or  
14 infrastructure.

15 Section 55. Timing requirements.

16 (a) An election authority shall designate the official  
17 committee in favor and the official committee opposed no later  
18 than 80 days before the election at which the referendum will  
19 appear.

20 (b) The official committee in favor and committee in  
21 opposition shall have a protected writing period of not less  
22 than 14 days after the final designation. The official  
23 argument in favor and argument in opposition shall be  
24 submitted to the election authority no later than the  
25 statutory deadline for certification of ballot questions

1 applicable to that election, as provided in this Code. No  
2 argument submitted after the certification deadline shall be  
3 accepted or published.

4 Section 60. Review and publication. The election authority  
5 may review the argument in favor and argument in opposition  
6 solely for compliance with uniform formatting requirements,  
7 equal word limits, and prohibitions on obscenity or libel. No  
8 substantive edits to advocacy arguments shall be made. All  
9 materials shall be certified and published as a single voter  
10 information package.

11 Section 65. Enforcement and official misconduct.

12 (a) Any elector residing in the jurisdiction of the  
13 referendum may seek declaratory or injunctive relief to  
14 enforce this Act.

15 (b) Any officer, employee, or agent of a public body who  
16 knowingly authorizes, directs, or participates in a violation  
17 of this Act commits an act in excess of lawful authority for  
18 the purposes of Section 33-3 of the Criminal Code of 2012.

19 Section 90. The State Officials and Employees Ethics Act  
20 is amended by adding Section 5-15.5 as follows:

21 (5 ILCS 430/5-15.5 new)

22 Sec. 5-15.5. Referendum-related political activity. Public

1 opinion polling, voter surveying, message testing, strategic  
2 communications, or other activities intended to influence  
3 voter support for or opposition to a referendum or potential  
4 referendum, when conducted using public funds, public  
5 facilities, or employee compensated time, constitute  
6 prohibited political activity. Nothing in this Section limits  
7 investigation or prosecution under Section 33-3 of the  
8 Criminal Code of 2012 or any other applicable law.

9 Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon  
10 becoming law.