



**THE GREATER
GOOD INITIATIVE**

Santa Clara County Petition Action and Review (PAR) Plan

**Implementation of a government-run platform open to Santa Clara County
residents to create, sign, and advocate for petitions that will require
government response.**

**The Greater Good Initiative
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POLICY BRIEF

The Bill of Rights guarantees each citizen of the United States the right to “petition the government for a redress of grievances¹.” The idea of a representative republic is that when it becomes apparent to those who have been elected as representatives that a current policy has failed, they will listen to the people and alter the policy accordingly. Providing a clear pathway for the voice of the people to be heard is integral to maintaining this Constitutional right. If the government cannot adequately understand and address the concerns of the populace, it cannot truly be representative of its constituents.

In recent decades, it has become a goal of both conservative and liberal policymakers to recenter government around localities. Conservatives have complained of bloated central government, while liberals take issue with an ineffectual and inefficient Congress. This dissatisfaction can be most clearly seen in public opinion polls. Across all spectrums and beliefs, Congress has a disapproval rating of over 70 percent², whereas local governments have an approval rating of 70% or higher³. It is clear that most Americans have more confidence in their local governments as compared to higher levels and the balance of participation should reflect that.

Through a government-run website, citizens can create and publish petitions that can be signed by anyone who wants to see an issue addressed. With very limited exceptions, the government will not suppress the subject of these petitions and will be obligated to respond once

¹ (n.d.). The Constitution - Full Text | The National Constitution Center. Retrieved July 30, 2020, from <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/full-text>

² (n.d.). Congress and the Public | Gallup Historical Trends - Gallup Poll. Retrieved July 30, 2020, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx>

³ (2018, October 8). Americans Still More Trusting of Local Than State ... - Gallup Poll. Retrieved July 30, 2020, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/243563/americans-trusting-local-state-government.aspx>

they meet the required number of signatures. It is this open-forum, easily-accessible route for public voice that ensures that when the public wants something to be done by the government, the government will have to respond.

It is easy to ignore the shortcomings of a system when those shortcomings benefit the majority. Lawmakers can find it easier to address the concerns of those who can gain access, but that does not invalidate the priorities of the rest of the population. By providing a direct resource for the creation of petitions that binds the government to the will of the people, legislators ensure that they do not fall into the trap of only hearing the loudest voices, who are often the political elite.

Local government is overwhelmingly popular, effective, and efficient, yet it receives little attention from their constituency. This policy seeks to amend this, putting power in the hands of the people at a local level. Rooted in the Constitution and sourced from a successful example of implementation, this policy is the clear solution to a disillusioned, apathetic, and discouraged populace that desperately wants progress but has been let down too many times by government officials that do not act, either as a result of ignorance or malice. Moving forward, neither will be an option, and that is what makes this policy so important.

PRELIMINARY REPORT

What is the problem that you're trying to fix?

In the light of recent political events across the nation, one of the most prevalent concerns among many citizens in Santa Clara County is the ability to exercise their First Amendment rights to directly petition their government. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 75% of adults believe that trust in the federal government has been shrinking.⁴ With trust in the national government rapidly declining⁵, it has become even more crucial for citizens to be able to petition the government. Citizens are currently limited to correspondence with their district or county representatives; and while this sometimes leads to streamlined and efficient discussions, it also often allows representatives to reroute concerns to others within their offices, effectively ignoring popular concerns while pursuing the agenda of the legislature. Notably, under the Obama administration, the White House opened a direct petition site on the national scale. However, that same effort has not been seen on a county-to-county basis.

Signing petitions not only persuades the target to take action but also engages citizens with politics and the cause.⁶ At a state level, twenty-six states have an initiative or referendum processes, including California.⁷ Popular referendum allows voters to gather signatures and demand a popular vote on that law if the voters do not approve. Initiative processes allow

⁴ Rainie, Lee, and Andrew Perrin. "Key Findings about Americans' Declining Trust in Government and Each Other." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 22 July 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/22/key-findings-about-americans-declining-trust-in-government-and-each-other/.

⁵ "Public Trust in Government: 1958-2019." Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy, 30 May 2020, www.people-press.org/2019/04/11/public-trust-in-government-1958-2019/.

⁶ Carpenter, Daniel. "Analysis | Yes, Signing Those Petitions Makes a Difference - Even If They Don't Change Trump's Mind." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 3 Feb. 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/03/yes-signing-those-petitions-makes-a-difference-even-if-they-dont-change-trumps-mind/.

⁷ "States with Initiative or Referendum." *Ballotpedia*, ballotpedia.org/States_with_initiative_or_referendum.

initiatives to go on a ballot and if the legislature rejects it, then they may submit a new proposal or take no action.⁸ However, petitions are rarely sent because not many citizens know of these processes.

Despite the processes already in place, engagement with local and state government is traditionally far less than federal politics. Citizens are drawn to the perceived importance of federal officeholders, but the fact is that far more of the laws that impact day-to-day lives are passed by local officials. The solution is to harness the forces that are already in place in localities. Petitions have garnered major attention and high rates of signing, they are only missing one thing: impact. This policy provides the force that most petitions sadly lack.

What is the solution proposed?

To address the growing concern of exercising First Amendment rights, Santa Clara County should establish an open-source, online platform where citizens can directly petition the Santa Clara County legislature advocating for issues of importance to them, mirroring the efficiency of the system in the United Kingdom (UK). These issues should be associated with specific private or local matters. The UK has a committee review procedure through which petitions are vetted before being posted. This review process could be implemented similarly.

What's the significance of this number? The We the People online petitioning system maintained under the Obama administration throughout the entirety of the US set the bar at 100,000 signatures. Santa Clara County residents comprise about 0.006% of the US population, so that's best-rounded to 600 signatures needed to successfully petition the county legislature -

⁸ Wendy Underhill; Talor Dybdahl, Lesley Kennedy. *Initiative and Referendum Processes*, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/initiative-and-referendum-processes.aspx.

this maintains roughly the same person-to-signature ratio used as the minimum standard in the nation at large.

Why was this specific issue chosen?

Many current issues that demand attention, such as the Black Lives Matter movement and issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to increased political participation among citizens, yet it has been difficult for them to ensure their voices are heard as issues such as voter suppression have made it difficult for some to vote⁹ and individuals who are unable to vote due to their age or citizenship status deserve to have an influential outlet too.

There are certainly going to be more issues in the future of this nature and since contacting representatives isn't always effective and physical protesting isn't always practical or safe, this would be an important system to have in place so people can voice their opinions and advocate for change in a way that is more likely to be constructive and will not potentially endanger them.¹⁰

What were the broad questions that guided research into this issue?

The questions that guided this project were all centered around the inevitable concern of how we ensure the highest rate of participation with the lowest rate of malfeasance. This central theme led to specific questions regarding security, efficiency, and sustainability. How do we create direct mechanisms for citizen influence in policymaking and government accountability?

⁹ (2020, June 12). Voter Suppression is Still Obstacle to a More Just America | Time. Retrieved June 27, 2020, from <https://time.com/5852837/voter-suppression-obstacles-just-america/>

¹⁰ (2020, June 3). 'Really scary': experts fear protests and police risk Retrieved June 27, 2020, from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/03/protests-police-covid-19-coronavirus-spread>

How do we ensure the validity, legitimacy, fairness, and security of the petitioning process? How will our policy impact the socio-economic landscape of civic engagement? The methods through which citizens can easily and effectively engage with local governments were thoroughly considered. The benefit of a petition system is that it will be easily accessible and will have a tangible impact on the success of Santa Clara County's government.

With these questions and guiding principles in mind, the team worked to research the current shortcomings of the petition system at the federal level, as well as the processes that have allowed this system to succeed both in America and abroad. This insight into how current systems look helped shine a light on how best to provide equitable access and needed security to a system that would otherwise be inaccessible or insecure, neither of which would be useful in the lens of increasing valid constituent participation.

What is the relevance of the issues to the (county at hand) and its citizens?

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the civil unrest resulting from the outrage against police brutality in this country, local voice has never been more prevalent or pressing. Many people want their opinion and voices to be heard by officials with the power to make change in their communities as they come to terms with the shortcomings that have for far too long been hiding just beneath the surface. These mandatory responses to petitions would allow grassroots movements to gain traction and attention from the relevant public officials and community shareholders that can actively implement the goals of the petition at hand.

While citizens may technically have the power of petition, this First Amendment freedom has not been fully realized. Citizens are able to petition, but there is no mechanism by which

legislators are held to the will of the people. This is especially true in localities, where voter turnout is far lower than federal elections. All of these factors coalesce into a central concern of restricted grassroots and other movements from gaining traction or creating any visible change within the government. Especially during such pressing times, citizens may feel as though they have no voice or power to make change, which is detrimental to the democratic values that the United States prides itself on.

The state will never be able to truly grasp the issues and concerns of the populace until government action can be unequivocally linked to constituency feedback. It is for this reason that such a system is necessary, and it is only under a system such as this one that real change can be realized in communities that have suffered from inaction and injustices perpetrated by their elected officials.

Why is this an issue that requires governmental response?

In situations where it is apparent that the voice of the people is being ignored or silenced, the government has a responsibility to provide a platform for its citizens to voice concerns and address injustices in their communities. Petitioning exists for this purpose, yet it is missing the key detail: impact. Regardless of the success, popularity, or virality of a petition, there is no required response or process to engaging with the needs addressed by them. If a government does not want to address the concerns presented by a petition, they are under no obligation to do so. Thus, there comes a point where these petitions just become buried or are briefly covered as a formality before being swept under the rug.

Government response would allow more significant interaction between constituents and representatives. It would directly hold officeholders accountable for the policies that are enacted or enabled during their time in office. No longer would the excuse of not being aware of an issue hold up. Furthermore, it would create accountability for actions affecting the general public. This is especially important as the ultimate goal of a representative republic is to reflect the will of citizens. Without the government itself instituting this kind of necessary reform, very little will happen. Without the government stepping up and fulfilling its obligation to their office and government, there is little hope for action. It is only when the government has committed itself fully to the cause of popular voice and accountability that real change can be made.

What are the arguments for the creation of the programmatic or policy response to issues that will be proposed?

The argument for a petition system that requires a governmental response is simple: it enhances the rights protected in the First Amendment and ensures that the public can hold its government accountable. It takes discretion out of the hands of stagnant public officials and back into the hands of the communities they are committed to representing. In far too many cases, the ideals and ideas of good politicians are silenced and outmatched by those of the people who only wish to stay in power. If we require politicians to tell us what they believe about an issue and act accordingly, we are making it clear what their priorities are. And if it becomes clear that they do not care for the people they are supposedly representing, the people will be able to see that and remove them from office when their term is up. This system enables increased transparency,

fairness, and accessibility to our government, and there is little reason not to push for it to be expanded nationwide.

The proposed web-based petition platform would create a central public forum for the discussion and advocacy of popular issues. Petitions created and supported by citizens would therefore be more accessible and would be taken more seriously by legislators as they are hosted by a government apparatus rather than by a third party. They also hold legislators to a commitment to at the very least respond to requests from the public, making sure that what is wanted by the community is reflected in real policy.

What is the basic form of your policy response?

The most basic form of this policy would be the government website acting as a forum for petitions created by the members of the Santa Clara community. These petitions would be available for signature by their neighbors and fellow members of the community. After passing a certain threshold of signatures, these petitions will be subject to response from the Board of Supervisors, either in the form of a statement, new policy, or referral to a specific sector of the County government. This allows for greater transparency between officeholders and their constituency while not unduly limiting the natural flow of the Board and the rest of the Santa Clara government.

What ongoing questions do you have?

Can this work at a local level? Will the populace engage with this program enough to justify the cost? Will the populace in Santa Clara engage with this policy? For all of these questions, the

answers can be based on what has happened in the past. On the local level, petitions on sites such as [change.org](https://www.change.org) have been wildly popular in localities, with people using them to urge their representatives to take action. When it comes to engagement, the government should be doing everything in its power to increase it, especially when it comes at little cost to the government. This policy has worked at a larger level, both in America and in the UK. The Greater Good Initiative is confident that by learning lessons from the policies already implemented, and by taking advantage of existing processes, this policy can be instrumental in reshaping the way people engage with their public officials for the better.

POLICY PROPOSAL AND ANALYSIS

What is the programmatic or policy response to the problem at hand?

In order to sufficiently respond to petitions set forth by the citizens of a locality, a streamlined website would be created to facilitate the creation of petitions and set standards requiring a minimum level of response¹¹. Firstly, Committee review would allow for more substantive discussion of petitions as committee members would have to make sure the given petitions follow guidelines before being published. Secondly, providing a platform for the voice of the general public to be heard would fulfill obligations set forth in the petitions clause of the First Amendment. Lastly, this system for petitions would make up for the economic gaps between the voices heard in politics. The current system allows for those with the greatest means and resources to have a disproportionate say in the actions (and more notably the inaction) of elected officials. A unified process would guarantee that a person or group's opinion can be voiced through their petition so long as they follow the guidelines set forth.

The basis of a free society is needing to justify the curtailing of rights, not the other way around. Unless it can be expressly proven that a certain limitation is necessary to ensure that the site will remain impactful, the voice of the people will remain largely unimpeded. These proposed limitations will be expressed clearly on this site and will be open to amendment as the government sees fit. The full list of these limitations can be found further in this document. Open to change before the site launch, this list acts as a preliminary guide for officials who are looking for direction in this policy.

¹¹ Lindner, R., & Riehm, G. (2009). Electronic Petitions and Institutional Modernization. International Parliamentary E-Petition Systems in Comparative Perspective. *Journal of Democracy and Open Government*, 1(1), 1-11.
<https://jedem.org/index.php/jedem/article/view/3>

Outline the process your policy proposal will take once implemented. Explain any systems that will be in place, administrative changes, agency authority changes, etc.

A state-sponsored website intended for citizens of Santa Clara County will need to be created that allows people to create localized petitions that members of that district can sign in agreement. Supplied by the general fund of the Santa Clara County budget, necessary funding for this site would be limited, as it requires little more than upkeep and monitoring costs. The proposed committees that would need to be created could be easily staffed either by independent monitors or be implemented in the form of an advisory board consisting of current officeholders. This second option, while providing marginally more responsibility to the selected officeholders, drastically reduces costs and provides a greater level of transparency between government agencies and the populace. GGI proposes a deferral of the makeup of this commission to the Board of Supervisors.

Upon reaching a proposed threshold of 600 signatures, the local government will be required to take action and issue a formal response. This threshold is based on the scale of the federal rules proposed in the “We the People” platform, which was initially introduced in 2011 by the Obama Administration.

In the spirit of ensuring the most open access to this platform while understanding the likelihood of spam and other mal-intentioned use of this program, there will need to be a moderation system in place. Consisting of a preset list of petitions that are not acceptable, as well as a human monitor to ensure that these petitions are screened out. This committee and its guidelines will be put in place to encourage the highest rate of use from the public, limiting as

little as possible. These rules can be similar to those that have been established for the UK petition site, such as not petitioning for something to be changed that it is not in the local government's power to change, not containing false statements or not publishing petitions that are clearly a joke¹².

There will also need to be a committee to handle petitions once they reach the threshold that requires a government response. At that point, it will need to be determined what the best path of action for that specific petition would be. Does it require policy change? If so, then it could be introduced in the local legislature. If it's not a legislative issue, it should be forwarded to the government group that could handle the problem best. Each petition will require different actions, so it is imperative that this committee exists. The petitions committee could also be responsible for actions such as asking the petition writers for more information about their intended goals if they are not clearly stated¹³. It is possible that the petition reviewing committee and the petition action committee could be combined into one committee, but it might be easier for those involved to separate these duties.

Why is this something that should be addressed at this level?

The vast majority of legislation is passed at the local level, yet it is this level that receives the least attention from constituents. This policy both enables and encourages more local political advocacy, awareness, and interest. Acting as a catalyst for involvement, this website will help to ensure that the people can always reach the legislators who play the most direct role

¹² (n.d.). How petitions work - Petitions - UK Government. Retrieved June 27, 2020, from <https://petition.parliament.uk/help>

¹³ (n.d.). How petitions work - Petitions - UK Government. Retrieved June 27, 2020, from <https://petition.parliament.uk/help>

in their lives, while still ensuring that these legislators can adequately address the needs and concerns of the populace.

Although implementing this policy at the state or even federal level is hypothetically possible, it remains far more effective at smaller levels of government. Political leaders, understandably, often prioritize popular opinion, and petitions do not always encapsulate that opinion. If a petition gets 10,000 signatures, that could either mean that it is overwhelmingly popular, or it could be that the potential population of signatures was much larger, and these 10,000 signers represent a vocal minority. At the local level, and at the right scale, this problem can be mitigated. Local leaders are able to understand their constituency far better than those in state or federal offices because they live in the same neighborhoods as the people who elected them. They see first hand the concerns of the people, and as such are far more likely to know what is a problem for the few and what is the problem for the many.

This facilitates more direct democracy which is integral to ensuring that people participate in all levels of government. People often dismiss the right to vote on the basis of claims such as “how could one vote make a difference” on the scale of a national election. But in localities, where often less than a quarter vote, one vote can make all the difference. This legislation validates that belief and actively pushes for more participation in the political system.

Are there alternative responses that should be taken into account?

Alternative responses could circumvent the need for a committee altogether and instead direct all petition action to individual legislators or the legislative body of the district in which a petition is created. This would potentially quicken the policy process and afford local

governments more flexibility in how they choose to respond to issues raised. Conversely, it would also allow local governments to respond to a petition in a way unsatisfactory to the demands made in said petition, creating tension between the government and its constituents and undermining the purpose of the policy proposal in the first place.

Another less expensive alternative would be to mandate action on petitions created through other existing services, such as *Change.org*, which would eliminate the need to manage a public website. However, there would more than likely be other costs that would need to be considered, including the inevitable contract costs between the local government and the private company that runs the website. Additionally, there are concerns regarding private platforms altering the access to petitioning, as well as what petitions are allowed on the site. Concerns of suppression or lack of access make private partnerships unlikely unless the issues associated with them can be adequately assuaged.

Why is the policy you have proposed the appropriate/best response to the problem you have identified?

There has been no shortage of attempts to increase voter turnout or participation in government in general. Most of these proposed solutions, however, fall short when it comes to implementation; they are either overly complicated and difficult to employ or are too simple and are subject to abuse. This policy strikes a necessary balance between these two issues, combining the simplicity of direct democratic appeal with the nuance and security of modern technology. Further, this solution benefits from the knowledge that it is both constitutional and effective. Similar to the UK system, this policy would be a viable alternative to other modes of appeal, and

similar to the federal petitioning system, it has been unchallenged thus far¹⁴. This team is confident in this policy's legal status based on the past success of similar measures at both the federal and local levels.

Although there is a federal system for petitioning in place, it is not without fault. It fails to address issues at the local level, which is a crucial step for making change and sustaining it. Many of the issues raised on this platform are not met with legislative action or even debate. Under the current system, petition responses have been reduced to little more than a formality. The vast majority of petitions result in a short few-sentence response that shows that they acknowledge the issue, but not much else.¹⁵ It's imperative that people have a platform to express their opinions about what needs to be changed locally so that action, or at least consideration, is possible.

While performing actions such as contacting one's representatives and participating in protests can be impactful, informative, and persuasive for citizens who may join the cause, they are not guaranteed to reach the attention of the person or group who has the power to actually enact change. With most emails sent to representatives, especially ones that were created from filling out a template, they are rarely read by the representative themselves, and often receive a generic automated response hastily written by the representative's staff. By enacting this policy, we can ensure that no issues will go unnoticed if there is a large enough group demanding change.

¹⁴ (n.d.). Petitions - whitehouse.gov - The White House. Retrieved June 27, 2020, from <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/>

¹⁵ (2018, March 20). The White House is answering online petitions ... - The Verge. Retrieved June 27, 2020, from <https://www.theverge.com/2018/3/20/17143536/white-house-we-the-people-online-petition-answers-back>

What are the resources that will be needed to carry out this programmatic or policy response?

The vast majority of the cost for this policy would stem from maintenance and the initial creation of resources. This would include funds to finance creation of a website (which also entails marketplace-related contracts, security software, data storage, website hosting, and interagency agreements). An additional maintenance cost would be the salary of any potential moderators, tech specialists, or other positions as necessary. Qualified members will occupy the newly founded Petition Action and Review Commission (PARC). If an alternative structure for this process is determined to be more efficient, this commitment of resources would need to be subsequently altered.

What criteria are you using to determine if your policy is successful?

The success of this policy would be demonstrated by an increase in local initiated statutes and general public satisfaction with the issues deliberated by local government (not satisfaction with how those issues are addressed). This can be quantitatively shown through a poll and analysis of petition participation. This policy would also encourage involvement at the local level, which is currently lacking across the United States¹⁶. An increase in the support of created petitions is another criterion for the success of this policy; it would imply that the public platform created to host petitions is effective and efficient. Furthermore, this policy will be considered unsuccessful if users continue to feel the government is unresponsive and the current cycle continues to happen.

¹⁶ *Who Votes for Mayor?* (2016). WhoVotesForMayor.org. <http://whovotesformayor.org/compare>

This policy is unique in that it cannot be immediately proven successful or not; it will require an extended period of implementation where the number of petitions written, signed, and subsequently addressed by the government will determine its efficacy. This policy will require a level of patience that is sadly uncommon in much of the government. Similarly to many successful initiatives, it will require dedication and buy-in from all parties, including the government officials that will introduce the policy and the populace that will benefit from it.

What would happen with the problem if no action is taken and the problem were to continue on unchanged and undisturbed?

If the current system continues, county governments will show preference in responding to the political elite. More specifically, this means that there will be less accountability as constituents will lose at least some amount of say in representatives' responses and actions to key issues.¹⁷ Furthermore, the ability to petition is clearly outlined by the First Amendment but there are minimal guidelines to how these should be handled or responded to. This means governments can continue to work with little or no interaction with constituents. Moreover, there is no liability and petitions become something that are given generic pre-written responses to, with minimal or no modification to legislative procedures. Without significant change, there is little ability to aid substantive discussions about policy plans.¹⁸

Historically, systems similar to this have allowed for increased material change. For example, a petition created through *We the People*, a White House run petition program, helped

¹⁷ (2014, July 1). When government fails its citizens - Chicago Tribune. Retrieved June 25, 2020, from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-oped-lipson-0701-20140701-story.html>

¹⁸ (2015, July 28). How We're Changing the Way We Respond to Petitions Retrieved June 25, 2020, from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/07/28/how-we-are-changing-way-we-respond-petitions>

to amend components of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.¹⁹ In the UK, petitioning is a key hallmark of their parliamentary system, and with good reason; it works. People file petitions often, and when they receive the requisite number of votes, the government responds promptly and comprehensively. This is something that could quite easily work locally, and it is for these reasons that The Greater Good Initiative advocates so strongly for its implementation.

¹⁹ (2015, July 28). How We're Changing the Way We Respond to Petitions Retrieved June 25, 2020, from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/07/28/how-we-are-changing-way-we-respond-petitions>

CONCLUSION

This act, upon passage, will serve as a vehicle by which citizens can exercise their First Amendment rights successfully and have tangible results when petitioning. In the light of recent political events across the nation, one of the most prevalent concerns among citizens is the ability to exercise their First Amendment right to petition the government. This act aims to provide counties with an online public platform to host citizen petitions and guarantees citizens action on issues of common concern by the arm of the local government most suited to address them. It would necessitate the creation of an administrative board to delegate the responsibility of responding to these petitions to different local government bodies, but would otherwise allow local government to continue operating. That is a structured option to bolster both the expression of citizen rights as well as local government autonomy and authority. The proposed policy aids the citizens in advocating for pressing issues in hopes of progress.

National government efforts are focused on mitigating the recent protests and movements through military retribution. The concerns and messages behind the protests are dismissed, as there has been no progressive action taken for these protests. Many Americans are experiencing the harsh effects of economic collapse and the coronavirus pandemic. With trust in the national government rapidly declining, it has become even more crucial to provide a clear pathway for the voice of the people to be heard. However, the current means of petitioning and raising awareness of pressing issues to public officials are not efficient. As the coronavirus pandemic continues, protestors and citizens can no longer visit offices and are forced to write emails and letters, which legislators hardly give a second thought to. Often, those who have the most to pay get their voices heard the most. Californians need a way to push for action that does not require great

economic or social privilege compared to their fellow citizens. This act provides opportunities for more civic engagement and development for countless Californians who have found themselves yearning for change.

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APPENDIX

PROPOSED STANDARDS FOR PETITION

Petitions must call for specific action from the County of Santa Clara government or the Board of Supervisors

Petitions must relate to a responsibility already defined for the government or Board of Supervisors

Petitions that meet one or more of the following conditions may be rejected at the discretion of the Petition Action and Review Commission (PARC)

Conditions for petition to be rejected:

- Redundancy
 - Another petition has already proposed similar changes or actions
 - Government is already set to discuss or resolve issue
- No clear request for action
- Outside of the scope of the Board of Supervisors or Santa Clara government
- Defamation, libel, or otherwise unfounded antagonism toward a group or individual
- Spam or otherwise obstructionary material
- Can be addressed through an existing process or law
- Relates to active legal matter that may be subject to court order or injunction

If a petition is rejected, it may still be published at the discretion of the PARC, although it will have no force or impact, and it will not hold the government to a response

Petitions that are rejected may be resubmitted with changes that correct their initial cause of rejection

The PARC may contact the creator of the petition for further information if needed

PRESS RELEASE

The Greater Good Initiative: “Petition, Action, and Review (PAR) Plan” Reaffirms First Amendment Freedoms and Ties Government Action to Will of the People

Following the death of George Floyd, there has been a surge in community activism, including the creation of petitions calling for changes in policing procedure, municipal budgets, and nearly every facet of government structure. Citizens are unhappy with how their government is being run, and they are voicing that displeasure in the form of petitions on sites such as change.org. These petitions, while wildly popular, lack the crucial impact of holding government officials accountable. The Greater Good Initiative seeks to change this with their new policy: the Petition, Action, and Review (PAR) Plan.

The PAR Plan takes inspiration from both the federal “We the People” platform and the Parliamentary petition program in the UK. This plan calls for the creation of a government-run site that would facilitate the creation and advocacy of petitions by the members of Santa Clara County to the Board of Supervisors. After receiving the requisite number of signatures, a petition will be subject to a formal response from the Government of Santa Clara. By directly tying public support to government action, PAR reaffirms the rights secured in the First Amendment and ensures that officeholders are held to the will of their constituents. The Greater Good Initiative urges the passage of PAR by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors to guarantee to each citizen the right to have their voice be heard by the people who represent them.

The Greater Good Initiative is a youth-led policy think-tank with the mission of promoting youth — Generation Z — engagement and mobilization in the policymaking process. Our goal is to autonomously create effective, sustainable, and bipartisan policy proposals and

advocate them to legislators at the local, state, and federal levels. Our team is crafting these proposals and connecting with legislators and special interest groups to garner support from both sides of the aisle. We believe that it is of vital importance to shine a light on the innovative fresh new thinking that comes out of young minds. By equipping young people with professional policy writing and advocacy skills, The Greater Good Initiative is working to bring new voices into the world of politics. **For more information, go to thegreatergoodinitiative.com.**