

Gay Rights Activists Publicly Display Names of Conservative Opponents

Opponents of Houston's proposed **gay rights** ordinance say that intimidation—not openness—is the motive behind supporters' move to publicize the names of more than 30,000 people who signed petitions asking that the measure be put on a referendum ballot.

With more than 30,000 "pre-verified" signatures collected favoring the referendum, opponents say that even if some are deemed fraudulent or to have come from people who are ineligible to vote, there will still be enough signatures to pass the threshold of 17,269 required to place the ordinance on the ballot for a public vote.

Gay rights supporters are asking citizens to pore through the paperwork and search for evidence of voter fraud.

"Was your name placed on the petition without your permission?" asks a headline on the homepage at [houstoncity.org](#), which backs the city's so-called equal rights ordinance. The measure was pushed through the city council by Mayor Annise Parker, an avowed lesbian. But church groups and others want the issue placed before the voters.

The ordinance would extend special legal protection to lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people and would apply to businesses that employ as few as 15 people.

The website claims it has found evidence that the petitions bear names of some voters who didn't actually offer their signatures. It also advises people who discover their names have been falsely placed on the petition to sign an affidavit and send it to the city secretary's office, according to an

online report by Houston television station KHOU.

"There is documented evidence of deliberate voter fraud that may actually put petition signers at risk of criminal prosecution," the website says.

Not so fast, opponents say.

"We submitted over 31,000 pre-verified signatures to the city secretary on July 3 and even presuming that among those are some that will be found unqualified, it is very clear that the minimum is met and the voters desire their say at the ballot box. All we have asked is for fair play and an honest, transparent process, and that is what we expect," said a statement from a church-led group of gay rights opponents called the No Unequal Rights Coalition.

The coalition also said it was the job of the city secretary, not the city attorney, to certify that only registered Houston voters had signed the petition for a referendum.

Its statement continued, "If the city reports that there are inadequate qualified signatures to meet the minimum of 17,269, we will immediately file a legal challenge and mount an aggressive investigation into every signature and every petition declared unqualified. We will scrutinize every action, depose every person involved and leave no stone unturned to give what we are confident is the majority of citizens in the city their day to have their voice heard."

Opponents of the ordinance, who found out about it during a city council committee meeting on the prospect of a referendum, suggested the people who set up the website had a more sinister motive.

"There was testimony today about, you know, 'You can find out if your neighbor is against the ordinance,'" said Jonathan Saenz of Austin-based Texas Values, which opposes the ordinance, according to the KHOU report. "So I hope we don't

see homosexual advocates start targeting people and trying to name them and trying to put pressure on them and force them out of their job and somehow cause a negative effect on their livelihood. We've seen that happen in other cases across the country. And I hope that's not what we see in Houston."