

Sign on the crooked line

The state is investigating signature gatherers working on an initiative to repeal Oregon's sanctuary status after reports they are telling voters it would do the opposite

BY EMILY GREEN
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As Robin Fisher walked across Portland State University's campus on her way to class in the early afternoon of Feb. 5, a man gathering signatures called out to her.

A sociology major, Fisher said she's "pretty politically active," so she walked over to see what his petition was all about.

The canvasser, a man working for Ballot Access LLC, explained to her he was collecting signatures for "a ballot initiative to protect the sanctuary-state status of Oregon, and stop Donald Trump from making decisions for Oregonians," she told Street Roots.

When he showed Fisher where to sign, she saw that what he was talking about was Initiative Petition 22. She had heard about IP 22 through the Oregon Student Equal Rights Alliance, and the way he described it to her didn't seem right. She told him she would do a little research and get back to him.

As she walked away, she looked up IP 22 on her phone and realized it would do the exact opposite of what the signature gatherer had told her it would do; it would repeal Oregon's sanctuary-state status, not protect it.

The actual ballot title for the initiative reads: "Repeals law limiting use of state/local law enforcement resources to enforce federal immigration laws."

Knowing that many students at Portland State University are eager to help Oregon's immigrant communities and would likely be fooled into signing a petition for an initiative they actually opposed, Fisher decided to turn on her phone's video recording feature and confront the signature gatherer who misled her.

The recording revealed the Ballot Access LLC employee appeared to have no idea what IP 22 would actually do. He even said he was against repealing the state's sanctuary status and usually collected signatures for "simpler" issues related to marijuana and GMO labeling.

Fisher told the Secretary of State's Office in a written complaint submitted three days later that 16 other PSU students told her they had signed the petition after being told it was "to protect Oregon's sanctuary state status." Many more said they were also told it was for a pro-sanctuary initiative but didn't sign it because they were suspicious, she said. She included a link to the video in her complaint.

In response, the Oregon Secretary of State's office has opened a formal investigation into Ballot Access LLC, according to a spokesperson for the office, Debra Royal, Secretary of State Dennis Richardson's chief of staff.

In Oregon, making false statements to

anyone who signs a petition or makes requests of information about it can result in a felony conviction and fines of up to \$125,000.

Fisher also claimed the two signature gatherers working on campus told her off-camera they were being paid \$2 per signature – also illegal in Oregon when signatures are being gathered for an initiative.

As of Feb. 12, Royal said, the Oregon Secretary of State's Office had received four requests from people who said they had signed a petition for IP 22 but, after reading more about it, wanted their names removed. But, she said, Fisher's is the only official complaint related to the actual signature gatherers for IP 22 her office has received.

But the problem appears to extend far beyond the downtown college campus.

Our Oregon, a union-backed political advocacy organization, has received complaints from seven people who reported hearing canvassers in the Portland area misleading the public in order to get signatures for IP 22.

Katherine Driessen, spokesperson for Our Oregon, said that's "a lot of complaints," considering how early in the election cycle it is.

"It sounds like it's pretty consistent, where they are just wildly misrepresenting – implying that the ballot measure does the exact opposite of what it actually does," she said. "Folks really only report signature gatherers when the behavior they encounter is really egregious."

North Portland resident Sunny Petit was one of the people who reached out to Our Oregon to complain. Petit told Street Roots she encountered a signature gatherer, this time a woman, in the Kenton neighborhood the morning of Feb. 7.

Petit said the woman was talking to

people as they came and went from Posies Bakery and Café, telling them that if they didn't want the Trump agenda, they should sign her proposal.

"I thought it was fishy," she said.

When Petit got home, she checked online to see if there was some other alternative sanctuary initiative that perhaps this woman was collecting signatures for, rather than the initiative to repeal the state's sanctuary status, as Petit suspected. There wasn't.

"It was totally, totally misleading," she said.

"There was a line of people around me who were all coming up to sign it," she said. "It was ridiculous. They were all super liberal people wanting to do the right thing, including me."

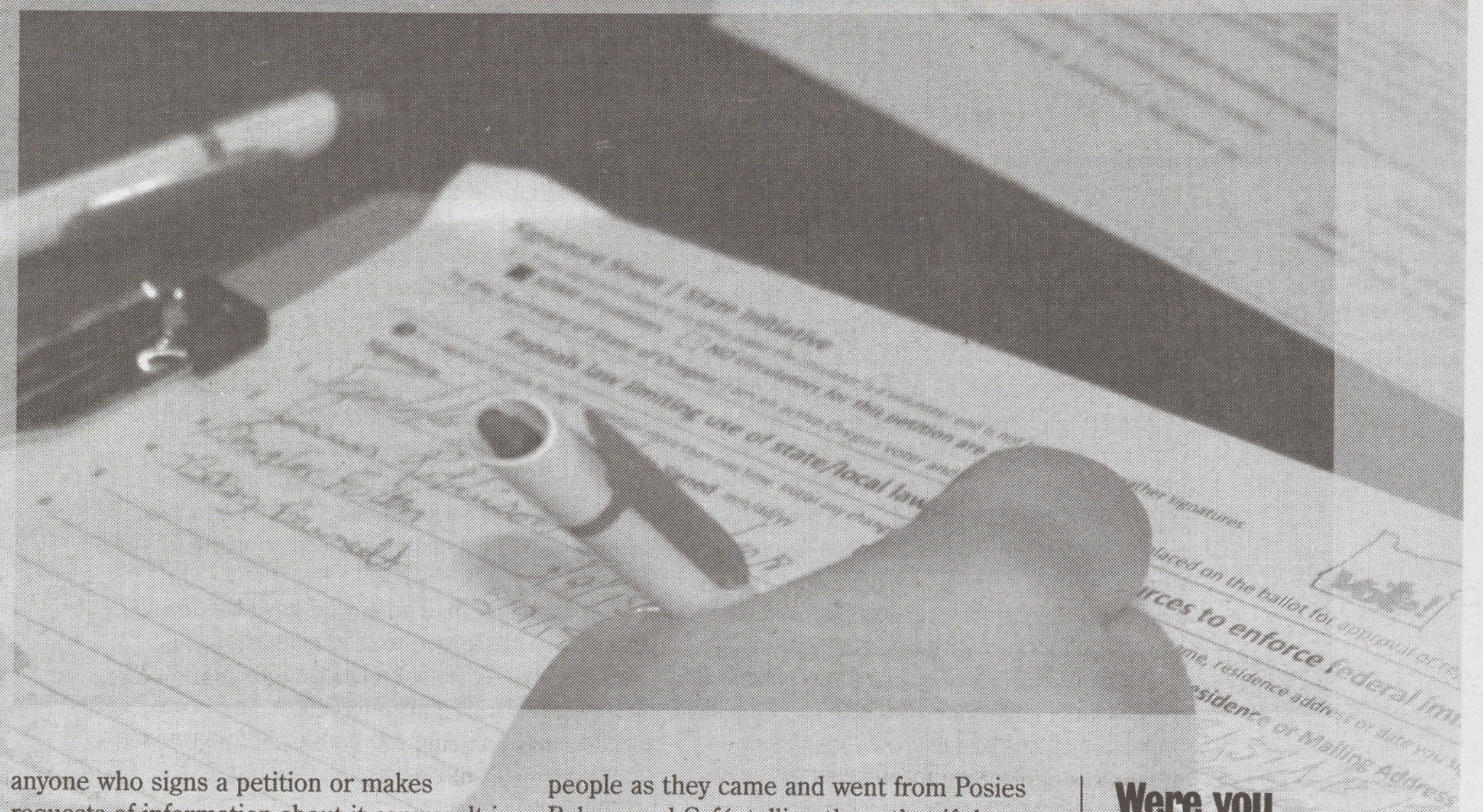
There have also been unverified reports of fraudulent information being used outside of Portland to gather signatures for the anti-sanctuary initiative.

Fisher's "isn't the first incidence we've heard of signature gathering gone wrong," said Joel Iboa, who coordinates One Oregon, a coalition of advocacy groups united on protecting Oregon's immigrant populations. (Street Roots is a nonactive member of One Oregon.)

"We heard it in Southern Oregon, heard about it in other counties as well," Iboa said.

Fisher told Street Roots, and included in her complaint to the Secretary of State's Office, that a conversation with the other signature gatherer working on her campus that day revealed that he, too, was misrepresenting the nature of IP 22. Both men told her they had never read the initiative and didn't really know what it did, she said.

Fisher said that when she approached this second canvasser, a woman was signing



Were you tricked into signing?

Anyone who believes they were tricked into signing a petition and would like their name removed can call the Secretary of State's Elections Division at 503-986-1518 or toll free at 866-673-8683.

Above: A voter signs a petition supporting IP 22, which would put a measure on the state's November ballot to repeal Oregon's sanctuary-state status.

PHOTO BY JOANNE ZUHL

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