Senate Bill 5 would place limits on collective bargaining, changing the way more than 350,000 public workers have negotiated contract terms for nearly three decades. The new law also prohibits strikes and enables state and local governments and schools to base employee pay decisions on performance.

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

Its official, Senate Bill 5 is headed to the November ballot. The Ohio Ballot Board will meet next month to finalize the Senate Bill 5 language to be presented to voters. Secretary of State Jon Husted certified that petitioners seeking a referendum on Senate Bill 5 (SB5) have collected 915,456 valid signatures, meeting the necessary requirements to place the issue on the 2011 November ballot.

Petitioners needed 231,147 signatures or six percent of the total vote cast for Governor in 2010. Cuyahoga and Franklin counties topped the state in terms of valid signatures submitted, with 131,625 and 104,301, respectively. Summit County had the fifth-highest signature total, with 42,362. Mahoning County was No. 7, with 31,251, followed by Stark County with 29,235.

As part of the total number of signatures needed to place the measure on the ballot, petitioners also needed to collect signatures from at least 44 of Ohio's 88 counties, and within each of those counties, to collect enough signatures equal to three percent of the total vote cast for governor in the most recent gubernatorial election, 2010. SB 5 petitioners met this requirement in all 88 counties.

Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge OH-11 has been speaking out against SB5 since it started. "The vast number of signatures gathered to place a repeal measure on the ballot says it all. People are fired up for good reason. S.B. 5 is a terrible overreach by Ohio Republicans to strip public workers of their collective bargaining rights. Voters deserve the right to decide its fate," said Congresswoman Fudge.

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Proponents say the changes are needed to enable public offices to better control their costs. But it is clear the working class people think different.

A.J. Stokes, executive director of We Are Ohio, an organized effort to repeal S.B. 5, hailed the results of the petition drive in a fundraising email Thursday. "But now the real fight starts. Out-of-state special interest groups are going to spend tens of millions of dollars to deceive the voters of Ohio, and we must be ready to combat their lies," he said.

"Together, we will show the special interests that we will not let this attack on Ohio's middle class stand," he added. "We can finally get beyond the process of putting a referendum on the ballot and start focusing on the merits of these reasonable reforms," said Jason Mauk, spokesman for Building a Better Ohio, the campaign to retain S.B. 5.

"Ohio voters now have a choice to make. We can keep the unfair, unsustainable policies that are bankrupting our communities, or we can change direction and give them the tools they need to create jobs and get spending under control. It's that simple," he continued. Ohioans have made clear higher taxes aren't an option, and S.B. 5 offers "responsible alternatives that will protect vital public services and the people who provide them, while respecting the ability of taxpayers to foot the bill."

The We Are Ohio campaign hit the 3 percent (and then some) in every county. Roughly more than 69 percent of the signatures submitted by “We Are Ohio” were validated.

Labor unions have already invested heavily in the effort to repeal SB 5 are expected to spend big on the campaign to convince the people of Ohio to vote the law down. Given that public sector union busting has becoming something of a national trend over the past year, this referendum will be one of the most elections of 2011, that change the dynamics related to similar laws in other states going forward.