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POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY
I-940 must now go before voters, despite Legislature’s approval
BY ROGER WIDAGE
Seattle Timesollection

Amazon’s tax case aside, a less publicized but equally significant initiative is on the ballot for the first time this year: a $3 billion measure to implement a—Secretary of State Kim Wyman has repeatedly said a—office. Wyman and a coalition of attorneys general and law professors have brought a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the measure. The lawsuit was filed in federal court in 2018 and is currently pending.

The measure, called “Police Accountability Act,” was approved by the Washington Legislature in 2019. It requires the state to levy a tax on businesses with revenue over $2 million to fund a new police oversight body. The bill passed with bipartisan support, with the exception of the Washington State Police, whose members said the measure would undermine their ability to protect citizens.

The new police oversight body would have the power to conduct investigations of police misconduct and to impose penalties on officers found guilty of misconduct. But critics argue that the measure could lead to a decrease in police funding and a reduction in public safety.

A key provision of the measure is its requirement that the new police oversight body be led by a public advocate. The measure also requires that the advocate be appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate, and that the advocate be given a term of at least five years.

The measure has faced significant opposition from police unions and conservative groups, who argue that it would undermine police accountability and ability to protect citizens. But advocates argue that the measure is necessary to ensure transparency and accountability in the police department.

The measure is one of several police accountability initiatives that have been introduced in recent years. In 2015, a similar measure was introduced in Seattle, but it failed to pass. In 2019, a similar measure was introduced in Portland, Oregon, but it was defeated in a referendum. In 2020, a similar measure was introduced in Los Angeles, but it failed to pass.

The measure faces a number of legal challenges. In 2018, the Washington State Police sued the Governor to block the implementation of the measure, arguing that it violated the state’s constitution. The case is currently pending.

The measure has also faced opposition from the state’s largest police union, the Washington State Patrol Officers Association, which has filed a lawsuit challenging the measure’s constitutionality.

The measure will be decided by the voters in November. If approved, it would take effect on January 1, 2023.

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