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5 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
6 WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
7 AT TACOMA

8 JOHN DOE #1, an individual; JOHN
9 DOE #2, an individual; and PROTECT
10 MARRIAGE WASHINGTON,

11 Plaintiffs,

12 v.

13 SAM REED, in his official capacity as
14 Secretary of State of Washington; and
15 DEBRA GALARZA, in her official
16 capacity as Public Records Officer for the
17 Secretary of State of Washington,

18 Defendants.

CASE NO. C09-5456BHS

ORDER GRANTING
PLAINTIFFS' MOTION FOR
PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION

19 This matter comes before the Court on the Plaintiffs' motion for preliminary
20 injunction (Dkt. 3). The Court has considered the pleadings filed in support of and in
21 opposition to the motion and the remainder of the file, and hereby grants the motion for
22 the reasons stated herein.

23 **I. BACKGROUND**

24 **A. PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND**

25 On July 28, 2009, Plaintiffs filed a complaint and motion for temporary restraining
26 order and preliminary injunction, seeking to enjoin the Secretary of State of Washington
27 ("Secretary of State") from any public release of documents showing the names and
28 contact information of those individuals who signed petitions in support of Referendum

1 Measure No. 71 (“R-71”). Dkts. 2 (Plaintiffs’ Complaint) and 3 (Motion for Temporary
2 Restraining Order and Preliminary Injunction).

3 In Count I of the complaint, Plaintiffs allege that the Washington Public Records
4 Act, RCW 42.56.001, violates the First Amendment as applied to referendum petitions
5 because the act is not narrowly tailored to serve a compelling governmental interest. Dkt.
6 2 at 10. In Count II, Plaintiffs allege that the Public Records Act is unconstitutional as
7 applied to R-71 because “there is a reasonable probability that the signatories of the R-71
8 petition will be subjected to threats, harassment, and reprisals.” *Id.*

9 On July 29, 2009, the Court granted Plaintiffs’ motion for temporary restraining
10 order, scheduled a preliminary injunction hearing for September 3, 2009, and set a
11 briefing schedule. Dkt. 9. On August 14, 2009, Defendants filed a response. Dkt. 25. On
12 August 21, 2009, Plaintiffs filed a reply. Dkt. 31. The Court held a preliminary injunction
13 hearing on September 3, 2009. Dkt. 62.

14 At the hearing, the Court entered the following rulings: (a) Pursuant to Federal
15 Rule of Civil Procedure 24(b) (permissive intervention), the Court granted the motions to
16 intervene filed by Washington Families Standing Together (“WFST”) and Washington
17 Coalition for Open Government (“WCOG”); (b) the Court denied the motion to intervene
18 filed by Mr. Arthur West because no motion was on the docket; and (c) the Court denied
19 Plaintiffs’ motion to consolidate the preliminary injunction hearing with a trial on the
20 merits. Dkt. 62.

21 **B. WASHINGTON’S REFERENDUM PROCESS**

22 In Washington, while legislative authority is vested in the state legislature, the
23 people reserve to themselves the power to reject any bill or law through the referendum
24 process. Wash. Const., art. II, § 1 and 1(b).¹ A referendum petition against any bill passed
25 by the legislature must be filed with the Secretary of State within 90 days after
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28 ¹ The state constitution provides some exceptions to the people’s power to reject laws
passed by the legislature that do not apply in this case.

1 adjournment of the legislative session at which the bill was enacted. *Id.*, § 1(d); RCW
2 29A.72.160; *see also* WAC 434-379-005 (filing of proposed referendum with Secretary
3 of State).

4 In order to initiate the referendum process, the state constitution requires the filing
5 of petitions with the Secretary of State that contain the valid signatures of Washington
6 registered voters in a number equal to four percent of the votes cast for the Office of
7 Governor at the last gubernatorial election preceding the filing of the text of the
8 referendum measure with the Secretary of State. Wash. Const., art II, § 1(b); *see also*
9 RCW 29A.72.150. Referendum petition sheets must include a place for each signer to
10 sign and print his or her name, and the address, city, and county at which he or she is
11 registered to vote. RCW 29A.72.130.

12 Once the referendum petition has been filed, the Secretary of State verifies and
13 canvasses the names of the legal voters on the petition. RCW 29A.72.230. The signature
14 on a petition sheet must be matched to the signature on file in state voter registration
15 records. WAC 434-379-020. In order to determine whether a petition is valid, the
16 Secretary of State may employ statistical sampling techniques. RCW 29A.72.230; WAC
17 434-379-010. In addition, under state statute,

18 [t]he verification and canvass of signatures on the petition may be observed
19 by persons representing the advocates and opponents of the proposed
20 measure so long as they make no record of the names, addresses, or other
21 information on the petitions or related records during the verification
22 process except upon the order of the superior court of Thurston county. The
secretary of state may limit the number of observers to not less than two on
each side, if in his or her opinion, a greater number would cause undue
delay or disruption of the verification process. Any such limitation shall
apply equally to both sides.

23 *Id.*

24 Upon completion of this verification and canvassing process, the Secretary of State
25 must issue a determination as to whether a referendum petition does or does not contain
26 the requisite number of valid signatures. *See* RCW 29A.72.240. Any citizen dissatisfied
27 with the Secretary of State's determination may file an action in state superior court for a
28 citation requiring the Secretary of State to submit the petition to the state court "for

1 examination, and for a writ of mandate compelling the certification of the measure and
2 petition, or for an injunction to prevent the certification thereof to the legislature, as the
3 case may be.” *Id.* Within five days of the state superior court’s decision, the party may
4 seek review by the Washington Supreme Court. *Id.*

5 If it is ultimately determined that a petition contains the requisite number of valid
6 signatures, the referendum is submitted for vote at the next general election. Wash.
7 Const., art. II, § 1(d).

8 **C. WASHINGTON’S PUBLIC RECORDS ACT**

9 Washington’s Public Records Act generally makes all public records available for
10 public inspection and copying. RCW 42.56.070.² The term “public record” is defined as
11 “any writing containing information relating to the conduct of government or the
12 performance of any governmental or proprietary function prepared, owned, used or
13 retained by any state or local agency.” RCW 42.56.010(2). The Public Records Act
14 provides that “[i]n the event of conflict between the provisions of [the Public Records
15 Act] and any other act, the provisions of [the Public Records Act] shall govern.” RCW
16 42.56.030. Exemptions to the Public Records Act must either be included in the act itself,
17 or clearly expressed in another statute. RCW 42.56.070(1).

18 The Public Records Act also contains the following language:

19 The people of this state do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies that
20 serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public
21 servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is
22 not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that
23 they may maintain control over the instruments that they have created. This
24 chapter shall be liberally construed and its exemptions narrowly construed
25 to promote this public policy and to assure that the public interest will be
26 fully protected.

27 RCW 42.56.030.

28 ² While the Public Records Act exempts specific categories of records from public disclosure, the parties appear to agree that no exemption applies in this case.

1 **D. OTHER RELEVANT STATE LAW**

2 Under RCW 29A.08.720(2), “poll books, precinct lists, and current lists of
3 registered voters are public records and must be made available for public inspection and
4 copying under such reasonable rules and regulations as the county auditor or secretary of
5 state may prescribe.”³ State law provides certain “fundamental rights” for voters,
6 including “the right of absolute secrecy of the vote.” RCW 29A.04.206(2). In addition,
7 “no voter may be required to disclose political faith or adherence in order to vote.” *Id.*

8 The parties have not identified any Washington State law that specifically
9 addresses whether personally identifying information provided by the signers of
10 referendum petitions may be publicly disclosed.

11 **E. REFERENDUM MEASURE NO. 71**

12 On May 18, 2009, the Washington Governor signed Engrossed Second Substitute
13 Senate Bill 5688 (“SB 5688”). This bill expands the rights, responsibilities, and
14 obligations accorded state-registered domestic partners to be equivalent to those of
15 married spouses.

16 On or about May 4, 2009, Larry Stickney, the Campaign Manager for Protect
17 Marriage Washington (“Protect Marriage”), filed notice with the Secretary of State of his
18 intent to circulate a referendum petition on SB 5688. Dkt. 2 at 4 (Verified Complaint).
19 The proposed referendum was assigned the title R-71 by the Secretary of State. If referred
20 to the next general election ballot, R-71 would ask voters to either accept or reject SB
21 5688.

22 On May 13, 2009, Protect Marriage was organized as a state political action
23 committee pursuant to RCW 42.17.040. *Id.* According to Plaintiffs’ complaint, Protect
24 Marriage’s major purpose is to collect the requisite number of signatures necessary to
25 place R-71 on the ballot and to encourage Washington voters to reject SB 5688. *Id.*

26 On July 25, 2009, Protect Marriage submitted a petition containing over 138,500
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28 ³It is unclear whether records of voter signatures are available to the public.

1 signatures to the Secretary of State for verification and canvassing. *Id.* at 7. According to
2 Nick Handy, Director of Elections for the Secretary of State, the petition sheets were
3 delivered in an “open, public forum,” with R-71 supporters and opponents in attendance.
4 Dkt. 26 at 2 (Declaration of Nick Handy). The Elections Division began the process of
5 counting and verifying individual signatures shortly after the petition sheets were filed.
6 *Id.* at 3.

7 The petition appears to conform with Washington state’s formatting requirements
8 set out in RCW 29A.72.130 and contains the following language:

9 To the Honorable Sam Reed, Secretary of State of the State of Washington:

10 We, the undersigned citizens and legal voters of the State of
11 Washington, respectfully order and direct that Referendum Measure No. 71
12 . . . shall be referred to the people for their approval or rejection at the
13 regular . . . election to be held on the 3rd day of November, 2009; and each
14 of us for himself or herself says: I have personally received this petition, I
15 am a legal voter for the State of Washington, in the city (or town) and
16 county written after my name, my residence address is correctly stated, and
17 I have knowingly signed this petition only once.

18 Dkt. 27 at 2 (Declaration of Catherine S. Blinn); *id.*, 3-12 (Exhibit A) (R-71 petition).

19 In addition, as required by RCW 29A.72.140, the petition contains a warning that:
20 “Every person who signs this petition with any other than his or her true name, knowingly
21 signs more than one of these petitions, signs this petition when he or she is not a legal
22 voter, or makes any false statement on this petition may be punished by a fine or
23 imprisonment or both.” *Id.*

24 The petition included a table, which requested the following information: (1) the
25 printed name of the registered voter, (2) the signature of the voter, (3) the voter’s home
26 address, (4) the voter’s city and county, and (5) the voter’s email address. Dkt. 27 at 4.

27 The petition indicated that inclusion of the voter’s email address was “optional.” *Id.*

28 As of August 20, 2009, the Secretary of State has received public record requests
of the Referendum 71 petition from the following individuals or entities: (1) Brian
Murphy of WhoSigned.org (Dkt. 23 at 10); (2) Toby Nixon, President of the Washington
Coalition for Open Government (*id.* at 12); (3) Arthur West (*id.* at 14); (4) Brian Spencer,

1 on behalf of Desire Enterprises (Dkt. 30 at 9); and (5) Anne Levinson, on behalf of
2 Washington Families Standing Together (*id.* at 11).⁴

3 On or about June 9, 2009, the groups Whosigned.org and KnowThyNeighbor.org
4 issued a joint press release, stating that the groups intended to publish the names on the
5 internet of every individual signing the Referendum 71 petition. Dkt. 2 at 6; *see* Dkt. 4-5
6 (Exhibit 4). Plaintiffs maintain that some of the public record requesters have publicly
7 stated that they intend to publish the names of the petition signers on the internet and
8 make the names searchable. *Id.* Plaintiffs also claim that the purpose of placing the names
9 on the internet is to “encourage individuals to contact” and to have a “personal and
10 uncomfortable conversation” with any person who signed the petition. *Id.*; Dkt. 3 at 9.

11 **II. PLAINTIFFS’ MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION**

12 As a threshold matter, the following opinion addresses only an individual’s right to
13 participate in a political process and the government’s authority to intrude on that right.
14 Once narrowed to these two issues, the Court finds it unnecessary to address the content
15 of SB 5688 or the content of R-71.

16 Here, pursuant to the Washington Public Records Act, Defendants requested that
17 the Secretary of State disclose the contents of petitions filed to refer R-71 as a measure
18 for the next ballot, a proposed measure to undo SB 5688. Plaintiffs argue that such
19 disclosure would be unconstitutional, as it would violate their fundamental right to free
20 speech. The issue before the Court is limited to whether Plaintiffs have such an
21 individual right and, if so, whether the government is entitled to intrude on that right in
22 this instance.

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26 ⁴ Ms. Levinson’s request excluded “any and all information subject to [this Court’s July
27 29, 2009] temporary restraining order” (Dkt. 30-11) which restrained Defendants from releasing
28 “the names, addresses, or other contact information of those individuals who signed the
Referendum 71 petition” (Dkt. 9 at 4).

1 **A. PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION STANDARD**

2 The basic function of injunctive relief is to preserve the status quo pending a
3 determination of the action on the merits. *Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Comm'n v.*
4 *Nat'l Football League*, 634 F.2d 1197, 1200 (9th Cir. 1980). To obtain preliminary
5 injunctive relief, the moving party must show: (1) a likelihood of success on the merits;
6 (2) a likelihood of irreparable harm to the moving party in the absence of preliminary
7 relief; (3) that a balance of the equities tips in favor of the moving party; and (4) that an
8 injunction is in the public interest. *Winter v. Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc.*, ___ U.S.
9 ___, 129 S. Ct. 365, 376, 172 L. Ed. 2d 249 (2008). Traditionally, injunctive relief was
10 also appropriate under an alternative “sliding scale” test. *The Lands Council v. McNair*,
11 537 F.3d 981, 987 (9th Cir. 2008). However, the Ninth Circuit overruled this standard in
12 keeping with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Winter*. *American Trucking Ass'ns Inc. v.*
13 *City of Los Angeles*, 559 F.3d 1046, 1052 (9th Cir. 2009) (holding that “[t]o the extent
14 that our cases have suggested a lesser standard, they are no longer controlling, or even
15 viable”).

16 **1. Likelihood of Success**

17 Plaintiffs contend that it is unconstitutional for Defendants, acting under authority
18 of the Public Records Act, to comply with public record requests for referendum petitions
19 that contain identifying information of those who support referral of a referendum to the
20 next ensuing general election. Dkt. 3 at 9. Plaintiffs argue that releasing these petitions
21 and the information contained therein would violate the signers’ fundamental, First
22 Amendment right to freedom of speech. *Id.* at 9-10. To succeed on this motion for
23 preliminary relief, Plaintiffs must first establish that it is likely that supporting the referral
24 of a referendum should be considered protected political speech.

25 **a. Individual Right**

26 Plaintiffs assert that the signers of the referendum petition are likely entitled to
27 protections under an individual’s fundamental, First Amendment right to free speech. *Id.*
28

1 The type of free speech in question is anonymous political speech. As the Honorable
2 Thomas S. Zilly, United States District Judge, has previously stated:

3 The right to speak anonymously was of fundamental importance to
4 the establishment of our Constitution. Throughout the revolutionary and
5 early federal period in American history, anonymous speech and the use of
6 pseudonyms were powerful tools of political debate. The Federalist Papers
7 (authored by Madison, Hamilton, and Jay) were written anonymously under
8 the name “Publius.” The anti-federalists responded with anonymous
9 articles of their own, authored by “Cato” and “Brutus,” among others. *See*
10 *generally* [*McIntyre v. Ohio Elections Comm’n*, 514 U.S. 334, 341-342, 115
11 S. Ct. 1511, 131 L. Ed. 2d 426 (1995)]. Anonymous speech is a great
12 tradition that is woven into the fabric of this nation’s history.

13 When speech touches on matters of public political life, such as
14 debate over the qualifications of candidates, discussion of governmental or
15 political affairs, discussion of political campaigns, and advocacy of
16 controversial points of view, such speech has been described as the “core”
17 or “essence” of the First Amendment. *See McIntyre*, 514 U.S. at 346-47.

18 *Doe v. 2TheMart.com Inc.*, 140 F. Supp. 2d 1088, 1092-93 (W.D. Wash. 2001).

19 The First Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that “Congress
20 shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.” U.S. amend. I.⁵ The Supreme
21 Court has consistently held that a component of the First Amendment is the right to
22 anonymously participate in a political process. *See e.g., Buckley v. American*
23 *Constitutional Law Found.*, 525 U.S. 182, 200, 119 S. Ct. 636, 142 L. Ed. 2d 599 (1999)
24 (invalidating, on First Amendment Grounds, a Colorado statute that required initiative
25 petition circulators to wear identification badges); *McIntyre*, 514 U.S. at 357 (overturning
26 an Ohio law that prohibited the distribution of campaign literature that did not contain the
27 name and address of the person issuing the literature, holding that “[u]nder our
28 Constitution, anonymous pamphleteering is not a pernicious, fraudulent practice, but an
29 honorable tradition of advocacy and dissent. Anonymity is a shield from the tyranny of
30 the majority.”); *Talley v. California*, 326 U.S. 60, 65, 80 S. Ct. 536, 4 L. Ed. 2d 559
31 (1960) (invalidating a California statute prohibiting the distribution of “any handbill in
32 any place under any circumstances” that did not contain the name and address of the

⁵ The First Amendment is applicable to the states through the Fourteenth Amendment. *Stromberg v. People of the State of California*, 283 U.S. 359, 368, 51 S. Ct. 532 (1931).

1 person who prepared it, holding that identification and fear of reprisal might deter
2 “perfectly peaceful discussions of public matters of importance”).

3 In this case, the Court must determine whether it is likely that referendum petitions
4 that were submitted to the Secretary of State should be considered protected political
5 speech. Defendants argue that petition signers waived any First Amendment protections
6 because the signers supported the referral of the referendum in an open and public forum.
7 Dkt. 25 at 7-10. But Defendants have neither cited nor submitted any authority in support
8 of this proposition. Moreover, the Court is unaware of any authority, including the
9 Washington Constitution or RCW Chapter 29A.72, which stands for the proposition that
10 signatures in support of a referral must be obtained in a public forum. Therefore, at this
11 time, the Court is not persuaded that waiver of one’s fundamental right to anonymous
12 political speech is a prerequisite for participation in Washington’s referendum process.

13 Defendants do assert that Washington’s Constitution requires public disclosure of
14 the personally identifying information provided when a person signs a referendum
15 petition. Dkt. 25 at 8. But Washington’s Constitution states only that “all such petitions
16 shall be filed with the secretary of state,” and it does not state that the information
17 contained on the petition must also be considered public information. *See Wash. Const.*,
18 *art. II, § 1(d)*. In fact, both the Supreme Court and the Washington Supreme Court have
19 previously held that an initiative process falls within the protections of political speech.
20 *Meyer v. Grant*, 486 U.S. 414, 421, 108 S. Ct. 1886, 100 L. Ed. 2d 425 (1988);
21 *Alderwood Associates v. Washington Environmental Council*, 96 Wn.2d 230, 239 (“It is
22 undisputed that gathering initiative signatures in some manner, at some place, is a
23 constitutionally guaranteed practice. It is at the core of both the First Amendment and
24 Const. art. 1, s 5.”).

25 Defendants also argue that participation should not be considered protected
26 political speech because the petition signers act as quasi-legislators. Dkt. 25 at 10-11.
27 Defendants reason that because the referendum and initiative processes are reserved
28 powers by the people to legislate, the petition signer acts like a legislator with such action

1 being inherently public. *Id.* To support this argument, Defendants rely on *State ex rel.*
2 *Heavey v. Murphy*, 138 Wn.2d 800, 808, 982 P.2d 611 (1999), and *Amalgamated Transit*
3 *Union Local 587 v. State*, 142 Wn.2d 183, 204, 11 P.3d 762 (2000). Dkt. 25 at 10. But
4 both of these cases are distinguishable. First, the *Heavey* court addressed the question of
5 whether a writ of mandamus should issue against a state officer when the officer defended
6 the constitutionality of a referendum. 138 Wn.2d at 803-804. While the *Heavey* court did
7 state that referendum and initiative measures involve the people in their legislative
8 capacity, it was only to note that such legislation “remain[s] subject to the mandates of
9 the Constitution.” *Id.* at 808. The court did not hold that a “quasi-legislative” action
10 requires waiver of a fundamental right to anonymous political speech.

11 Second, in *Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587*, the court addressed a challenge
12 to the constitutionality of a statute enacted through the initiative process. 142 Wn.2d at
13 193-199. The court did not address the issue of the political nature of the initiative
14 process itself. Therefore, the Court is not persuaded by Defendants’ “quasi-legislative”
15 arguments.

16 In this case, it is important to note that the Court is unaware of any authority that is
17 directly on point for the question before the Court. The weight of authority, however,
18 counsels toward the finding that supporting the referral of a referendum is likely protected
19 political speech. For example, in *Meyer*, the Court noted that, of necessity, “the
20 circulation of an initiative petition . . . involves both the expression of a desire for
21 political change and a discussion of the merits of the proposed change.” 486 U.S. at 421.
22 In fact, the Court explicitly stated that the “record in this case demonstrates that the
23 circulation of appellees’ petition involved political speech.” *Id.*, n.4. Moreover, in
24 *Buckley*, the Court held that petition circulation is “core political speech,” because it
25 involves “*interactive* communication concerning political change.” 525 U.S. at 187
26 (quoting *Meyer*, 486 U.S. at 422) (emphasis added). The *Buckley* Court also noted that
27 “First Amendment protection for such *interaction* . . . is at its zenith.” *Id.* at 187 (internal
28 quotations omitted) (emphasis added). It would seem that if the circulator is protected by

1 the First Amendment and the process is at the core of the First Amendment, then the
2 people signing the petition in support of referral of the referendum would also be entitled
3 to the protections of the First Amendment. In fact, the *Buckley* Court touched upon the
4 protection of the “interaction” in the circulation process, which involved a “political
5 conversation” and the “exchange of ideas.” *Id.* at 192. By necessity, an interaction
6 involves the circulator as well as one who may support the referral of a referendum.
7 Based on these authorities, the Court finds that it is likely that an individual who supports
8 the referral of a referendum is entitled to protection under the First Amendment.

9 Therefore, the Court finds that Plaintiffs have established that it is likely that
10 supporting the referral of a referendum is protected political speech, which includes the
11 component of the right to speak anonymously. The next step in the Court’s analysis is
12 based on the fact that the right to freedom of speech is not absolute.

13 The Supreme Court has recognized that “there must be a substantial regulation of
14 elections if they are to be fair and honest and if some sort of order, rather than chaos, is to
15 accompany the democratic processes.” *Id.* at 187 (quoting *Storer v. Brown*, 415 724, 730,
16 94 S. Ct. 1274, 39 L. Ed. 2d 714 (1974)). In other words, the government is not without
17 an interest in the integrity of the referendum process. As such, the government may
18 infringe on an individual’s right to free speech but only to the extent that such
19 infringement is narrowly tailored to achieve a compelling governmental interest. *See*
20 *McIntyre*, 514 U.S. at 346-47 (holding that governmental restrictions on core political
21 speech are entitled to “exacting” scrutiny, and upheld only where they are narrowly
22 tailored to serve an overriding state interest.”).⁶

25 ⁶ Some of the relevant cases discuss a level of review called “exacting” scrutiny. *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S.
26 1, 96 S. Ct. 612, 46 L. Ed. 2d 659 (1976) (a compelled disclosure case). But “exacting” scrutiny is “strict” scrutiny.
27 *See McIntyre v. Ohio Elections Comm’n*, 514 U.S. 334, 347 (1995) (citing *First Nat’l Bank of Boston v. Bellotti*, 436
28 U.S. 765, 786 (1978) (equating “exacting” scrutiny with “strict” scrutiny). *See also Fed. Elec. Comm’n v. Public*
Citizen, 268 F.3d 1283, 1286 (11th Cir. 2001) (reiterating *McIntyre*’s holding that “exacting” scrutiny is applied to
determine whether the law is narrowly tailored to serve an overriding state interest and applying “strict” scrutiny to a
federal campaign statute).

1 **b. Governmental Interest**

2 Under a strict scrutiny analysis, the Court must first identify the asserted
3 compelling governmental interest. In this case, Defendants argue that “[a] state
4 indisputably has a compelling interest in preserving the integrity of its election process.”
5 Dkt. 25 at 17 (citing *Eu v. San Francisco Cy. Democratic Cent. Comm.*, 489 U.S. 214,
6 231, 109 S. Ct. 1013, 1024, 103 L. Ed. 2d 271 (1989) (citing *Rosario v. Rockefeller*, 410
7 U.S. 752, 761, 93 S. Ct. 1245, 1251-52, 36 L. Ed. 2d 1 (1973))). The Court agrees with
8 Defendants on this point as it is undisputed that the State must employ some measures to
9 prevent fraud in the referendum process. What is disputed, however, is the extent of the
10 government intrusion on the individual’s right to anonymously participate in a political
11 activity, i.e., whether the Public Records Act is narrowly tailored to accomplish the
12 interest of preserving the integrity of the referendum process.

13 It is important to reiterate two points: (1) for the purposes of preliminary relief, the
14 Court must determine only whether Plaintiffs are likely to succeed on the merits of their
15 claim (*see Winter, supra*); and (2) Plaintiffs are only challenging the Public Records Act
16 that requires disclosure of public documents and are not challenging the requirement of
17 RCW 29A.72.130 that those who sign in support of referral of the referendum disclose
18 identifying information. Based on the record before the Court, the Court finds that
19 Plaintiffs have established a likelihood of success on the claim that the Public Records
20 Act is not narrowly tailored to achieve the compelling governmental interest of preserving
21 the integrity of the referendum process.

22 In *Buckley*, the Court addressed a challenge to several statutes that were enacted by
23 Colorado’s Legislature that regulated the state’s initiative and referendum petition
24 process. *Id.* at 187-189. One particular statute, of relevance to the present matter, required
25 initiative-petition circulators to wear a badge identifying their name. *Id.* at 187. The
26 Court stated that:

27 We have several times said no litmus-paper test will separate valid ballot-
28 access provisions from invalid interactive speech restrictions; we have
 come upon no substitute for the hard judgments that must be made. But the

1 First Amendment requires us to be vigilant in making those judgments, to
2 guard against undue hindrances to political conversations and the exchange
3 of ideas. We therefore . . . are satisfied that . . . the restrictions in question
4 significantly inhibit communication with voters about proposed political
change, and are not warranted by the state interests (administrative
efficiency, fraud detection, informing voters) alleged to justify those
restrictions.

5 *Id.* (internal citations and quotations omitted). The Court held that the law violated the
6 petition circulators' First Amendment free speech guarantee. *Id.* at 205. In reaching this
7 conclusion, the Court separated what it considered necessary or proper ballot-access
8 controls from restrictions that unjustifiably inhibit the circulation of ballot initiative
9 petitions. *Id.* at 192-93. The Court noted that evidence was presented that “demonstrated
10 that compelling circulators to wear identification badges inhibits participation in the
11 petitioning process.” *Id.* at 197-98 (internal citations omitted).

12 In this case, the State argues that its “interest in the public availability of the
13 Plaintiffs’ names outweighs any alleged First Amendment interest” Dkt. 25 at 16.

14 The State further argues as follows:

15 Absent access to the names of persons who signed referendum petitions, the
16 public would not be able to independently examine whether the State acted
17 properly in determining whether a referendum measure qualified for the
18 ballot. Without access to the names of signers, the public would not be able
19 to even verify the gross number of signatures submitted, whether the State
accepted duplicate signatures, or whether the State accepted signatures from
persons disqualified from voting. Public access to the signature petitions
thus provides an important check on the integrity of the referendum election
process.

20 Dkt. 25 at 17. The State’s argument would be more persuasive if there was not a more
21 narrowly tailored signature verification procedure. *See* RCW 29A.72.230

22 Under RCW 29A.72.230, the Secretary of State must “verify and canvass the
23 names of the legal voters on the petition.” The statute also provides for public access to
24 that verification process:

25 The verification and canvass of signatures on the petition may be observed
26 by persons representing the advocates and opponents of the proposed
27 measure so long as they make no record of the names, addresses, or other
28 information on the petitions or related records during the verification
process.

1 *Id.* Moreover, the Washington Supreme Court has held that statutory referendum
2 provisions “evidence an intent on the part of the Legislature to make them the only
3 safeguards looking to the prevention of fraud, forgery, and corruption, in the exercise of
4 this constitutional right by the people” *State v. Superior Court of Thurston County*,
5 81 Wn. 623, 647, 143 P. 461 (1914).

6 In light of the State’s own verification process and the State’s own case law, at this
7 time the Court is not persuaded that full public disclosure of referendum petitions is
8 necessary as “an important check on the integrity of the referendum election process.”

9 In the alternative, Defendants assert that there exists a second “compelling”
10 interest in favor of disclosure. Dkt. 25 at 17. Defendants argue that the electorate is
11 entitled to know “who is essentially lobbying for their vote, and thus, who likely will
12 benefit from the measure.” *Id.* (citing *California Pro-Life Council v. Getman*, 328 F. 3d
13 1088, 1105-07) (9th Cir. 2003). But this argument is unavailing because neither the
14 Court nor the parties have the ability to identify whether an individual who supports
15 referral of a referendum to the next ensuing general election actually supports the content
16 of the referendum or whether that individual simply agrees that the referendum should be
17 placed before the voting public. In other words, the identity of the person who supports
18 the referral of a referendum is irrelevant to the voter as the voting public must consider
19 the content of the referendum and be entitled to a process by which it can ensure that the
20 petitions are free from fraud.

21 Therefore, the Court finds that Plaintiffs have established that it is likely that the
22 Public Records Act is not narrowly tailored to achieve the compelling governmental
23 interest of preserving the integrity of the referendum process.

24 **c. Conclusion - Likelihood of Success**

25 The Court finds that Plaintiffs have established that it is likely that supporting the
26 referral of a referendum is protected political speech. The Court also finds that Plaintiffs
27 have established that it is likely that the Public Records Act is not narrowly tailored to
28 achieve the compelling governmental interest of preserving the integrity of the

1 referendum process. Therefore, the Court concludes that Plaintiffs have established that
2 they are likely to succeed on the merits of their claim that the Public Records Act is
3 unconstitutional as applied to the disclosure of referendum petitions. At this time, the
4 Court need not reach the merits of Plaintiffs' second claim for relief.

5 **2. Likelihood of Irreparable Harm in the Absence of Preliminary Relief**

6 Plaintiffs contend that the denial of their request for a preliminary injunction will
7 cause them irreparable harm. Their claim is premised on the argument that their First
8 Amendment right to free speech will be violated, irreparably, if the State complies with
9 the public record request. *See* Dkt. 3 at 29.

10 “Deprivations of speech rights presumptively constitute irreparable harm for
11 purposes of a preliminary injunction: “The loss of First Amendment Freedoms, even for
12 minimal periods of time, constitute[s] irreparable injury.” *Sumnum v. Pleasant Grove*
13 *City*, 483 F.3d 1044 (10th Cir. 2007) (quoting *Elrod v. Burns*, 427 U.S. 347, 373, 96 S.
14 Ct. 2673, 49 L. Ed. 547 (1976); *See also Brown v. Cal. Dept. of Transportation*, 32 F.3d
15 1217, 1226 (9th Cir. 2003) (noting that a risk of irreparable injury may be presumed when
16 a plaintiff states a colorable First Amendment claim; *Chaplaincy of Full Gospel Churches*
17 *v. England*, 454 F.3d 290, 301 (D.C. Cir. 2006) (“Where a plaintiff alleges injury from a
18 rule or regulation that directly limits speech, the irreparable nature of the harm may be
19 presumed.”). Because this court finds that referendum petitions are likely to be protected
20 under the First Amendment, Plaintiffs are entitled to the presumption that they will be
21 irreparably harmed absent preliminary relief. Defendants have failed to overcome this
22 presumption.

23 Therefore, the Court finds that Plaintiffs have established that they are likely to
24 suffer irreparable harm in the absence of preliminary relief.

25 **3. Balance of the Equities**

26 In determining whether to grant or deny a motion for preliminary injunction, the
27 court must balance the equities of the respective parties' interests. *Winter, supra*. Where
28 a case raises serious First Amendment questions, a court is compelled to find the potential

1 for irreparable harm, “or that at the very least the balance of hardships tips sharply in [the
2 moving party’s] favor” *Summartano v. First Judicial District Court, in and for County of*
3 *Carson City*, 303 F. 3d 959, 973 (9th Cir. 2002) (internal quotations and citations
4 omitted). Because this Court finds that Plaintiffs have established that this case likely
5 raises serious First Amendment questions in regard to protected speech and this Court
6 thereby presumes irreparable injury, under *Summartano*, this court also finds that the
7 equities tip in favor of the Plaintiffs. *See id.*

8 **4. Public Interest**

9 Plaintiffs argue that granting the preliminary injunction is in the public’s interest.
10 In *Sammartano*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held “it is always in the public
11 interest to prevent the violation of a party’s constitutional rights.” *Id.* at 974. The
12 *Sammartano* court went on to state that the public’s interest in protecting First
13 Amendment rights may sometimes be overcome where there is “a strong showing of other
14 competing public interests.”


15 In this case, Defendants have failed to make a strong showing of other competing
16 public interests. Therefore, the Court finds that granting the preliminary injunction is in
17 the public’s interest to prevent the likely violation of Plaintiffs’ First Amendment rights.

18 **III. ORDER**

19 Therefore, it is hereby

20 **ORDERED** that Plaintiffs’ motion for preliminary injunction (Dkt. 3) is
21 **GRANTED.**

22 DATED this 10th day of September, 2009.

23
24 
25 BENJAMIN H. SETTLE
26 United States District Judge
27
28