



AUMC'S JUSTICE IN ACTION COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS A "NO" VOTE ON AMENDMENT 85

Approved by committee vote on September 15, 2026

AMENDMENT 85 – PLAIN LANGUAGE BALLOT QUESTIONS

WHAT THIS INITIATIVE WOULD DO

If passed, this measure would amend the Colorado constitution to provide that ballot questions are to be in "plain language" and written at no more than an 8th-grade reading level. No statute may require more complex language by mandating certain language precede, be in, or come after a ballot title.

Because this measure would amend the Colorado constitution, it requires a vote of 55% to pass.

[Text of the initiative](#) (previously referred to Initiative #234)

ARGUMENTS FOR THE INITIATIVE

Proponents argue that the recently passed Colorado law requiring that state ballot titles use "plain language that is accessible to the broadest possible audience" is not precise enough. Instead, the state should tie its plain language requirement to a specific grade reading level.

Supporters: [Advance Colorado](#)

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE INITIATIVE

The state already has plain language requirements in statute, and nothing prevents the state from using grade level reading standards to ascertain whether ballot issues are written in plain language as defined by the statute. There is no reason to pass this, let alone put it in the state constitution.

Opponents: [Colorado League of Women Voters](#)

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

2026 Colorado Election Blue Book – Amendment 85 (mailed to voters)

[Ballotpedia](#)

JUSTICE IN ACTION COMMITTEE POSITION ON THIS INITIATIVE

As a committee and pursuant to a consensus vote, **we oppose this initiative and urge United Methodists to vote against it**

OUR REASONS FOR THIS POSITION

Colorado’s current law on ballot titles (HB26-1320) requires that ballot titles (the portion of the ballot issue that appears on the ballot) use accessible language, defined as “plain language that is understood by the widest possible audience.” In determining whether ballot title language is accessible, the secretary of state may consider a wide variety of factors defined in the statute, all tailored at ensuring that voters understand what they are voting on. This seems to be a reasonable approach, and we questioned why proponents thought it was critical to spend the amount of funding necessary to run a ballot initiative as well as place this requirement in the constitution.

Alas, our research has led us to believe that ballot accessibility is not proponents’ goal here. In 2021, the Colorado legislature passed the Ballot Measure Fiscal Transparency Act (HB21-1321), which imposed requirements for language to precede measures involving tax increases and decreases. By doing so, the legislature chose to address a provision of TABOR that requires all proposed tax increases to include the following formatted phrase: SHALL TAXES BE INCREASED IN THE AMOUNT OF \$____?” TABOR, which was brought by a vocal opponent of taxes, clearly intended to use this mandatory language to dissuade voters from passing tax increases.

The Ballot Measure Fiscal Transparency Act sought to qualify the mandated TABOR language by requiring additional language so that the preceding language for tax increase requests would now ask whether taxes should be increased “in order to increase or improve levels of public services ...” Similarly, legislators chose to require language preceding requests for decreases in taxes to read: “Shall funding for [public services] be impacted by a reduction of \$____?” With this requirement, requests for tax increases and decreases are tied both to actual dollar amounts and potential impacts on public services.

Proponent Advance Colorado, a conservative organization that adamantly opposes tax increases, immediately sued the state, arguing that the law constituted “government-compelled speech.” In 2024, the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Advance Colorado, allowing the law to stand. Advance Colorado promptly appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case.

Amendment 85 would be a constitutional provision, and its less-publicized provisions on “preceding language” would knock out most of what the legislature intended with the Ballot Measure Fiscal Transparency Act. Given that we already have statutes directing ballot issues to be accessible to the broadest range of voters, Amendment 85 is not needed; instead, the hidden intent of Amendment 85 appears to be to accomplish through initiative what Advance Colorado could not accomplish legislatively or in the courts.

Our Social Principles do not talk specifically about the wording of ballot issues. But they do call for “responsible political action” that operates for the betterment of society. For these reasons, our faith does not allow us to endorse or even remain silent on an attempt to trick voters into delivering a particular result contrary to their own interests.

WHAT WE CONSIDERED IN TAKING THIS POSITION

UMC sources considered:

- Relevant provisions of the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church (attached)
- Committee discussions

External sources considered:

- [History](#) and [text](#) of the ballot initiative available from the Colorado Secretary of State
- [Ballotpedia resources and analysis](#)
- [HB26-1320](#)
- [Advance Colorado v. Griswold](#), (10th Cir. 2024).
- [Who is Advance Colorado?](#) Colorado Times Recorder
- Reports and analyses:
 - Caven, E. “[An Informed Ballot; The Case for Measurable Ballot Readability Standards.](#)” Advance Colorado Institute, August 2026.

UMC SOCIAL PRINCIPLES 2025-28 – EXCERPTS RELEVANT TO AMENDMENT 85

Para. 163 **IV. THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY**

PREFACE

...

Our involvement in political systems is rooted in the gospel imperative to love our neighbors, to do justice, and to care for the vulnerable. As United Methodists, we acknowledge that love requires responsible political action and engagement aimed at the betterment of society and the promotion of the common good...

And from Psalm 101:7

...No one who practices deceit
Shall remain in my house;
No one who utters lies
Shall continue in my presence.