



Poll: 72 percent of likely voters in Jacksonville oppose longer City Council term limits

By Christopher Hong

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As the Jacksonville City Council considers a referendum to increase term limits for local officials, a Washington, D.C.-based group Wednesday sent them a message: voters think eight years is enough.

The group, U.S. Term Limits, was referring to 72 percent of the 400 likely voters they recently polled who said they oppose increasing term limits for council members.

Next week, the council is set to vote on a referendum to ask voters to allow council members, the sheriff, members of the Duval County School Board and the city's constitutional officers to serve three consecutive four-year terms. If approved, the referendum would go on the August 2018 ballot.

Officials are currently bound by a two-term limit that was enacted with overwhelming support in a 1991 referendum.

Opponents of extending term limits say voters don't want elected officials tinkering with that decision.

"We're just hoping that with recent polling, people will realize that we need to stick with an eight-year term and stop trying to find ways to benefit themselves by increasing to 12-year terms," said Brandon Lind, a regional director for U.S. Term Limits, at a press conference Wednesday.

The referendum was proposed by Councilman Matt Schellenberg, who has said term limits force experienced officials, along with their institutional knowledge, out of office to the detriment of residents.

The council was supposed to vote on the referendum last month, but it postponed the vote after a lengthy debate. It's still unclear how the measure would fare in a final vote.

The group's poll, conducted last week, found 17 percent favored increasing term limits, 72 percent opposed it and 12 percent weren't sure.

The poll also found 71 percent of voters believed council members benefited more from increased term limits than residents, and that 52 percent would be less likely to support council members who voted to lengthen their own term limit. Twenty-four percent of those polled said the decision would have no impact on their vote, and 19 percent said they'd more likely vote for an official who increased their term limits.

Lind also commended Councilmen John Crescimbeni, Tommy Hazouri and Greg Anderson for their opposition to increasing term limits and presented them plaques at the sparsely attended event, which was held at the Downtown Jacksonville Library.

Anderson said he hopes his colleagues consider the poll results when they vote next week.

"I think it should have an impact. I think it validates some of the discussion that we had," Anderson said. "My feeling is, especially on the local level, it's important that we raise up new citizen leaders."