

Ohio local governance amendments certified by Attorney General Mike DeWine



Two proposed Ohio constitutional amendments aimed at strengthening Ohioans' rights at the local government level received initial approval Monday. (Lisa DeJong, The Plain Dealer, File, 2008)

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Efforts to give Ohioans more power to pass and enforce local laws that might conflict with state laws gained initial approval Monday.

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine on Monday certified petitions for two proposed amendments to the state constitution: the Ohio Community Rights Amendment and the Initiative and Referendum Amendment for Counties and Townships. DeWine's certification is the first in a long series of steps for the measures to appear on a statewide ballot.

The [community rights amendment](#) would establish a constitutional right to local community self-government for the "health, safety and welfare of community members." The [county and township amendment](#) would extend Ohio's constitutional right to initiative and referendum on state and city laws to county and township laws.

The amendments were drafted to address what supporters say is growing influence from the Ohio Statehouse on local, community decisions. The amendment is backed by the [Ohio Community Rights Network](#) and the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund.

Tish O'Dell, the legal defense fund's Ohio organizer, said communities should be able to pass local laws to regarding the environment, predatory lending, minimum wage, puppy mills and other issues without being preempted by state legislators.

“We believe people locally have the right to certain things,” O’Dell said. “Just because it isn’t in our federal constitution doesn’t mean we don’t have the right to expand our rights locally.”

Colorado and Oregon have passed community rights measures in recent years, according to amendment backers.

The amendments now go to the Ohio Ballot Board to determine whether each amendment is one or multiple issues. Once approved by the board, the group has to collect at least at least 305,591 signatures of registered Ohio voters, including a certain number in 44 of Ohio’s 88 counties, to qualify each measure for a statewide ballot.