

# Ohio Activists Push Amendments to Restore Community Rights



**Ohio activists are joining ballot efforts around the country that supporters say are aimed at restoring rights to communities to challenge a growing list of corporate incursions. The oil-and-gas industry says their amendment would devastate Ohio's economy.**

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By JULIE CARR SMYTH, Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Activists in [Ohio](#) are joining efforts around the country that supporters say are aimed at restoring rights to communities to challenge a growing list of corporate incursions.

The campaign to pass an Ohio Community Rights Amendment stems from mounting frustration among environmental groups that have failed for years to push anti-fracking measures onto local ballots. But the latest effort is broader, said spokeswoman Tish O'Dell.

State laws are making it increasingly difficult for communities to regulate predatory lending, puppy mills, wireless equipment location, minimum wages, pesticide treatments and a host of other issues, O'Dell said.

"Only a century ago, we the people wrote laws that corporations followed," said O'Dell, a community organizer with the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund. "That's what it should be again: The people should be writing laws that corporations follow, non-living entities. It's like we've created a Frankenstein that we now can't control."

Two constitutional amendments proposed in Ohio would prevent further setbacks from election officials, courts and the state's Republican-led state Legislature, O'Dell said. Similar efforts are underway in [Oregon](#) and [New Hampshire](#). An earlier attempt failed in [Colorado](#).

The first would extend the right of initiative and referendum enjoyed by residents of municipalities to those living outside them, in counties and townships. The second, dubbed the Ohio Community Rights Amendment, would secure localities' rights to self-government on issues of the health, safety and welfare of humans and the environment.

Republican Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine certified petitions for both amendments Monday, sending them next to the state ballot board.

If the proposed amendments make it onto ballots, they will face broad opposition, said Ohio Oil & Gas Association Executive Vice President Shawn Bennett. The group has fought similar local efforts as both illegal and unconstitutional.

“The implications of what this means to the entire business community in Ohio are scary,” Bennett said. “It essentially gives anyone the right to ban economic development that they don’t see fit in the state of Ohio.”

He said the community rights amendment would not only affect oil-and-gas development, but also the state’s coal, manufacturing and agriculture industries, as well as local gun laws.

“By giving ecosystems rights, it makes it very difficult for having economic development to take place without the threat of being taken to a court of law,” he said