

Advocacy in Action



lutheran metropolitan ministry | July 2023

Ohio's Got "Issues"

Issue 1, an "initiated constitutional amendment" is currently on the ballot in Ohio. If approved by voters, some of Issue 1's provisions would take effect immediately, making it more difficult for Ohio voters to amend the state constitution. This would have immediate consequences as this November an issue related to abortion rights is on the ballot and advocates are in the final stages of securing enough signatures for an issue related to marijuana.



Ohio's "initiative and referendum" (I&R) process provides opportunities for Ohio residents to affect change outside the legislative process and through grassroots advocacy. However, Ohio voters did not always have these rights set in the Ohio Constitution. Rather, they were fought for by progressive advocates in the early 1900's. Reverend Herbert S. Bigelow of Cincinnati's Vine Street Congregational Church, is known as the leader of this movement. He attempted to pass "I&R" legislation in 1906 but it was vetoed by legislators in a secret conference committee.

In 1912, as part of the state Constitutional Convention, I&R legislation was again championed by progressives. Led by Rev Bigelow with the assistance of Mayor Brand Whitlock (D) of Toledo and Mayor Newton Baker (D) of Cleveland, it was 1 of 41 amendments submitted for voter approval in a special election. It passed with 57% of the vote, but it was not an easy win. Efforts to oppose the amendment by the business community, and even the Catholic Church, were described as "the most bitter and momentous struggle known in the state for a generation."

The passed initiatives and referendums amendment gave Ohio voters the right to initiate amendments to the Ohio Constitution, initiate new laws, overturn laws passed by the Ohio State Legislature, and approve legislatively referred constitutional amendments. Since 1913 – when the first amendment was on the ballot – until 2022, Ohio voters have voted 71 times on amendments to the constitution, with 20 passing and 51 failing.

Now, Ohio voters are being called on to protect their right to amend the state constitution as voters. This summer, LMM has provided an overview of Issue 1, including the arguments for and against it, shared the steps needed to register to vote, and the dates and locations for voting. LMM also recently shared the agency's opposition to Issue 1, which was agreed upon by the LMM Board of Director's Advocacy Committee.

Too many of the people LMM serves feel powerless and Cleveland residents vote at alarmingly low rates. Making it more difficult to amend the Ohio constitution will not encourage more Ohio residents to engage civically or vote. LMM will continue to engage with LMM staff partners and program participants to promote voter education and voter turnout through direct engagement, voter registration events, and e-communications, with the hope of increasing civic engagement and voter turnout.

*To learn more about Issue 1, skip to page 3, Policy Corner

Sources: https://ballotpedia.org/History_of_Initiative_%26_Referendum_in_Ohio
<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Legal/Ballot-Initiatives>
<http://www.iandrinstutute.org/states/state.cfm?id=21>

Democracy to Us: A Reflection from Gloria Craig



With an important special election around the corner, we have spent time reflecting on what democracy means to us and what motivates us to engage civically. At the most basic, democracy means voting. Not just for president, but for anyone who is an elected representative. This includes judges, local council members, governors and senators. Democracy is also a process. Bills are introduced, the facts are discussed, those elected vote for or against, and the side with the most votes wins. In this process, facts should be at their core, and those elected to represent us voting for what is in the best interest of the people they serve. And finally, democracy is fairness or justice. This is outlined most clearly in the 15th Amendment, that the right to vote not be denied by race and the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote.

These opinions of democracy are all accurate, if not fully reflective of the reality of our current political situation. As central as voting is to the electoral process, in many ways it is the bare minimum of what citizens should be doing to be civically engaged. Further, as much as we want to think that those in power are fully informed of the issue at hand, and voting for what is right for their constituency, that is simply not the case. The politicking associated with our political system at all levels is far more complex than most voters understand, even those of us who work in this space. And finally, this belief that our system is fundamentally fair and just, can also be easily debated. The new voter identification laws will make it harder for many of the people LMM serves is one example of hurdles that are put in place to make it more difficult to engage civically.

As you prepare to vote in August, and again in November, we hope you take time to reflect on what democracy means to you – and what we all need to do to create a system that more fairly serves us all.

- Gloria Craig, LMM Community Engagement Coordinator

Homeless to Housed



Three families who are homeless will be moving into housing with the help of Cuyahoga County, and LMM is excited to be the landlord they've been waiting for!

Local and state leaders and representatives joined LMM to celebrate another Breaking New Ground Affordable (BNG) Housing Initiative milestone on July 24. A ribbon cutting marked the completion of three more units in the St. Clair-Superior neighborhood.

Cuyahoga County utilized Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to pay for the purchase and renovation of five units total. The County's contribution to the campaign brought total funding to \$4.2 million for the project, above its original goal. Cuyahoga County is the only government funder to contribute to the 20 housing units campaign.

"We know that cost is one of the biggest barriers to getting families into sustainable permanent housing," said County Executive Chris Ronayne. "The County is proud to be able to provide the necessary funding to help close the gap for this innovative project and demonstrate our commitment to affordable housing options for all residents."

POLICY CORNER: Ohio's Issue 1



Issue 1 is a proposed amendment to Ohio's constitution that, if passed, would make it more difficult for citizens to amend the state constitution.

First, it would raise the threshold for proposed amendments to pass to 60%, making their approval nearly impossible. Currently, Ohio law requires a simple 50% + 1 majority for amendments to pass. And even so, only 20 out of 71 proposed amendments have passed since 1913. Next, Issue 1 would require that for proposed amendments to even get on the ballot, they would need to get signatures equal in amount to 5% of those that voted in the last gubernatorial election from all of Ohio's 88 counties. Currently, proposed amendments have the 5% requirement from only 44 of Ohio's counties. Finally, Issue 1 would shorten the window for petitioners to collect signatures for proposed amendments. Currently, if petitioners turn their signatures in to the Secretary of State's Office and are told they do not have enough valid signatures, they have 10 extra days to gather the required signatures.

Those who vote YES on Issue 1 support making it more difficult to amend the constitution. Supporters argue that this will prevent excessive influence on the process from groups outside Ohio. Those who vote NO oppose making the constitution more difficult to amend. They argue that Issue 1 strips power from Ohio citizens and would implement minority rule.

On July 20, LMM issued a statement sharing the agency's opposition to Issue 1. You can read it [here](#).

Early voting is underway at your county's board of elections, you still have roughly two weeks to request an absentee ballot, and you can vote at your local polling location on August 8th, which is Election Day. We urge you to make your voice heard!

Featured Advocacy Partner: VoteRiders



VoteRiders is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization. We were founded in 2012 as a direct response to the increasing number of voter ID laws across the country. Since then, our work has quickly grown into a national in-person and virtual effort that involves thousands of partner organizations and volunteers.

We are proud to be a trailblazer in this field, addressing voter ID laws in the states and communities that need our assistance the most. We can provide state-specific training with in-depth information on a particular state's voter ID laws or give a national-level overview of voter ID laws, VoteRiders' tools and services, and how they can be incorporated into your programming. This training provides an extra layer of voter education to your programming.

Beyond voter ID education, VoteRiders also provides individualized and in-the-moment support to voters to answer their ID questions, and offers fully-paid assistance to help voters who lack ID to obtain one. Our one-on-one ID assistance, either in-person, over the phone, or via Zoom, provides in-depth and customized support to voters in need, and covers all expenses associated with obtaining ID, including the cost of underlying documents such as birth certificates, ID costs and transportation to and from ID-issuing offices.

To learn more about VoteRiders visits, click here: <https://www.voteriders.org/partner/toolkit/>



**lutheran
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ministry**
listening. serving. empowering.

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Our Mission:

To promote shalom (peace, well-being) and justice (right relationships) through a Christian ministry of service and advocacy with those who are oppressed, forgotten and hurting.

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By the Numbers: Increases in Housing Costs

A shortage of inventory, increased interest rates, and an aging population who wants to stay in their homes, has led to an increase in housing costs across the County. Here are the numbers:

\$198,000

The median cost of a single-family home in Cuyahoga County in 2022.

\$10,000

The median single-family home value increased by this amount in 2022, the 10th straight year of gains.

3x

Between 2004 and 2020, the percentage amount of rental properties bought by non-individual investors increased from 7% to 21% percent.

250,000

The number of low-cost rentals in Ohio decreased by roughly this amount between 2011 and 2021.

11%

The asking price for a one-bedroom apartment in the Cleveland metro area increased by this amount in 2022.

In The News: The Stop Predatory Investing Act!

Earlier this month, U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), chair of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, & Urban Affairs, introduced the “Stop Predatory Investing Act.”

This legislation, if passed, would block investors who own 50 or more single-family rental homes from deducting interest or depreciation on those properties. The intent of this legislation is to limit tax breaks for big companies that purchase homes, drive up local housing prices and rents, and often leave the properties in a state of disrepair.



According to Brown’s Senate office, investment companies use technology and all-cash offers to out-compete first-time home buyers on affordable starter homes. These transactions can lead residents to be displaced due to increases in rental prices and due to an aversion to renting to those receiving housing assistance or housing subsidies.

What We’re Reading & Watching

- This American Life: *‘An Amerikan Family’ traces the legacy of Tupac Shakur’s influential family*
- 17th Annual Katz Policy Lecture: *Safe, Affordable, and Accessible Housing for Older Adults*
- Pastor Michael McBride: *Freedom, Justice, and Healing: Reducing Gun Violence in Our Communities*
- Next City: *Coffee Shops Like This Aid In Re-Entry, But Can Struggle To Find Their Own Stability*