

OHIO CAPITAL JOURNAL

Ohio property tax repeal campaign preparing to collect signatures

By: [Nick Evans](#) - May 16, 2025 4:50 am



Ballot petition signature collection. Photo by WEWS.

In a short meeting, the Ohio Ballot Board signed off on a proposed constitutional amendment abolishing property taxes in the state. The only question before the board was whether the proposal contains one or multiple amendments.

Supporters contend lawmakers have been unwilling or unable to make significant enough changes as property taxes climb. But critics warn eliminating that revenue stream could cripple important services like schools and first responders.

Campaign reaction

The day after the ballot board meeting, Beth Blackmarr described her mood as ‘busy.’

“Busy, busy, busy,” she said, “I mean, here we go — we’ve got to hit the ground running.”

Blackmarr is part of the organization Citizens for Property Tax Reform which is leading the repeal campaign. With the ballot board’s decision, the group is now able to start gathering signatures to appear on the ballot.

To go before voters, they’ll need 10% of the electoral turnout from the last governor’s race (just shy of 415,000). Additionally, in 44 of Ohio’s counties, they’ll need signatures from at least 5% of the governor’s race turnout. In practice, campaigns turn in hundreds of thousands more signatures than necessary to make up for any rejections.

Blackmarr said they want to start collecting “as soon as humanly possible,” and work could begin as early as next week. Asked whether they’d work with paid circulators, she just laughed.

“Many of us are youthful at heart, but senior citizens that are just really working out of our pockets,” she said. “There’s no big money backing this at all. It’s all volunteer.”

The merits

Blackmarr argued Ohio’s current property tax system is broken. She points to other states like New Jersey and Texas that have far more generous initiatives to keep seniors, vets and the disabled in their homes.

“You can’t have senior citizens who have paid for their homes — fully paid for — having to move out because they can’t afford property tax,” she insisted.

Blackmarr contends those kinds of protections are low-hanging fruit. Lawmakers have had continual warnings and “ample opportunity” to act. Instead, she argued, they’ve dithered with changes at the margins.

“I suspect it’s because they built a wobbly tower of property tax law over these decades,” she said, “and they’re afraid to pull one of the blocks out, because they’re afraid the whole thing’s gonna come tumbling down.”

That ‘tumbling down’ is exactly the concern many critics voice about the plan. The most recent [annual report](#) from the Ohio Department of Taxation puts 2023 property tax collections at about \$18.5 billion. That’s an enormous amount of funding to just disappear. It’s roughly double the amount reported for state income taxes, and a billion more than Ohio’s sales and use tax.

Spread evenly, it would cost every single Ohioan more than \$1,500 to make up that gap in funding.

Blackmarr argued repeal will just force lawmakers “to come up with an alternative.” But that’s a big ask — particularly for Republicans allergic to tax increases.

Still she’s right about dramatic increases in property taxes. The same Department of Taxation report shows assessed values climbing almost 40% in five years while tax collections have risen more than 21%.

Legislature’s role

In a statement following the ballot board decision, House minority leader Allison Russo said the proposal “clearly demonstrates frustration by Ohioans on this issue” and blamed lawmakers for failing to act.

“However, this particular initiative concerns me because while it eliminates the property tax, it doesn’t explain how we’ll replace the funds that support police, fire departments, public education, and other critical services,” she said.

Russo argued Democrats have signed on to bipartisan legislation providing direct relief but Republican leaders haven’t prioritized those bills.

Blackmarr acknowledged that as their campaign gains steam, pressure will grow on lawmakers to pass legislation or propose their own ballot measure to undercut their efforts.

“At the end of the day it goes to the voters,” she said. “They have to make the decision for themselves.”

And if lawmakers’ intervention means voters have to choose between competing visions, that’s just fine with Blackmarr.

“Wouldn’t *that* be nice, you know?” she said.

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