

Fighting Local Anti-Abortion Laws In Ohio: A Toolkit For Reproductive Freedom



Introduction

Anti-abortion extremists are crisscrossing the state, pressuring Ohio municipalities to adopt ordinances that would criminalize abortion in our communities and within city and town limits in the event that *Roe v. Wade* was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court. Lebanon, Ohio was the first city to pass the proposed local abortion ban. After hours of listening to testimonies, the city council voted unanimously to outlaw abortion.

This hyper-local strategy is another attempt by anti-abortion extremists to stigmatize and ban abortion in Ohio, and these extreme laws may be coming to your city or town.

It's imperative that we collectively fight to keep abortion accessible and legal at the federal, state, and local levels. We are doing our best to fight against these bans, but we need you to join us as well.

That is why, together with our coalition partners and fellow affiliates, we developed this Toolkit for Reproductive Freedom so Ohioans can take action and fight back.

In this toolkit you will find:

- ▶ Six steps to fight extreme anti-abortion restrictions in your community
- ▶ Guidelines on how to have a successful office visit with your city council members
- ▶ Guidelines on how to talk about abortion
- ▶ Sample testimony for city council town hall meetings

Browse the toolkit below and share the link with others or download, save, and share for when you're offline. The resources included in this toolkit were produced in collaboration with our partners:

- ▶ ACLU of Ohio
- ▶ NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio
- ▶ Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
- ▶ Ohio Women's Alliance
- ▶ Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio
- ▶ Preterm
- ▶ Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
- ▶ Women Have Options Ohio



Action steps:

1 Monitor your city and county council agendas

We encourage people in all 247 cities and 88 counties in Ohio to engage with their city council and monitor county government meetings. To gain information on your city council, be sure to visit your municipality government website or contact your mayor's office for a schedule of upcoming meetings.

It's imperative to start monitoring the agendas of your city, county, and other cities in your area to make sure no reproductive or abortion rights items appear. Meeting agendas are sometimes posted online.

Hopefully, this will only take five minutes of your time every two weeks. Consider setting a recurring alarm every two weeks as a reminder.

If an abortion related item appears on your city council's meeting agenda, please notify us right away at: repro@acluohio.org and let us know what is going on.

2 Recruit your rapid response team

The more people from your community that can engage in this fight, the better. Your elected officials will respond if they feel like there is a ground-swell against the ordinance from the community. It only takes a few voices in opposition to make a big impact.

Here are a few ideas on how to recruit and retain people for your Rapid Response Team:

Ask your family and friends. The best way to start is with the people closest to you in the community. Let your family and friends know what you are up to and they'll be excited to help you out.

Talk about abortion rights in community spaces. Are you a member of a local civic organization, do you attend a place of worship regularly, or are you involved with a local sports team? Any one of these places could be an opportunity to find an ally. By dipping your toe in the water in these spaces with people you already know, you might be surprised at how many like-minded people you find.

Identify other pro-abortion leaders in your community. Many people that care about abortion are also involved in advocacy around other local issues or may be interested in particular political or social justice organizations. Identifying a geographically and culturally diverse group of committed pro-abortion leaders in your community is invaluable when convincing local elected officials to protect abortion access. Starting the conversation and sharing the toolkit are great ways to make a connection with other local activists.

Make it fun. Consider hosting a house party or happy hour with the people you identify for your Rapid Response Team. This is a great opportunity to share the goals and resources from this toolkit with your team and get them excited about making a real difference in their communities. It's also an opportunity to have a little fun in the process.

Keep them connected. Consider starting a Facebook group, WhatsApp group, or email chain with your Rapid Response Team members. Share advocacy materials and updates from the movement, post local events that might be of interest, and consider organizing regular check-ins or meetups. The goal is to keep everyone informed and engaged. *Note: If you decide to do regular meetups, this is a great opportunity to invite guest speakers, prepare for council visits, share your personal stories, and brainstorm testimony ideas as a group.*

Encourage action. Although some local allies may prefer to remain vigilant watching your city council for anti-abortion agenda items, there are plenty of actions you should encourage the Rapid Response Team to take immediately. For example, encourage them to meet with their own city council members. Having individuals from different districts visit their representatives will show that there is widespread support for abortion access in the community. If they are interested in visiting their members, please share this toolkit resource with them.

Don't have the capacity to create your own Rapid Response Team or not sure where to start? Contact us at repro@acluohio.org so we can get you plugged in with organizers to assist.

3 Meet with your elected officials and other influential members/ organizations/businesses within your community

City councils are made up of a diverse group of individuals who often do not share the same viewpoints or values. Knowing what motivates each of the elected officials in your area can make a huge difference in whether or not we are able to successfully stop an ordinance. Review the [Contacting Your Council Member How To Guide](#) for more information. Once you've reviewed the document, you will be ready to meet with your elected official.

Additionally, city lawyers as well as influential folks with economic or political leverage within the city are worth speaking to as well. For instance, it is worth having business owners come out to support and testify against an ordinance in your city in the context of protecting the city's economy, small businesses, and residents, because they could be directly impacted. A great example of this impact is found in Lebanon, where [businesses and the city's economy have been struggling since their local ordinance ban was enacted](#). *Note: It is very important to be aware of which of these folks you target and how they are/will be impacted if they stand behind defeating the ordinance.*

Follow the tips below for a successful meeting:

Get to know your local landscape. Compile information about your elected officials and influential folks in one place. Try to find out what their policy positions are on reproductive rights and other progressive causes. Based on that research, try to determine if they are likely to support or oppose your position. Please feel free to use the [Elected Official Information Worksheet](#) as a template for your information gathering.

Identify local decision-making processes. In some communities, the mayor may drive the local agenda while in other communities it might make more sense to target your city council member. As you gather information about local officials, also identify key local officials for outreach.

Set your meeting. Identify your city council representative or a key local decision-maker or influencer and set a meeting with their office. The best way to do this is by emailing them at their official addresses or calling their office phone number during business hours, which can usually be found on the city website.

Prepare for the meeting. Prior to the meeting, reach out to us at repro@acluohio.org, make sure you are up to date on the local abortion bans that have been passed throughout the state, and review the [Abortion Forward Language](#) messaging guidance.

Make your case. The purpose of every visit is to educate key people on the issues and ask them to support your position. To educate these folks, talk to them about the issues from your perspective. Let them know why it matters to you personally and how an ordinance ban could impact them and other residents in their city. Use that personal information combined with the messaging guidance and other information provided here to be persuasive. Learn more information with the [Guideline To Having a Successful Office Visit](#) and download the [Local Abortion Bans in Ohio are Unconstitutional](#) memo to leave with the council member. Be sure to speak with them personally before handing them printed material. Too often, you'll hear "I'll review your handout." as a way for them to end the conversation.

Make your ask. After you have made your case, make your ask. We suggest one or all of the below asks as options, depending on the council member's reaction:

- Ask them to oppose any anti-abortion proposal that comes before the body.
- With city officials, request that they notify you if any anti-abortion proposal is being circulated at the council.
- Discuss the viability and general local impact of a pro-choice ordinance and see if they are willing to offer a pro-choice ordinance or resolution at a city council meeting. If they say yes to this, let them know that we will be in contact with further information on possible ordinances and next steps.

Report Out. Let us know how it went! Feel free to send us the information you've gathered at repro@acluohio.org.

4 Get social

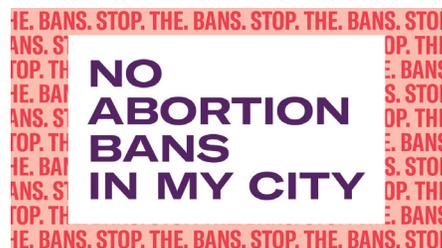
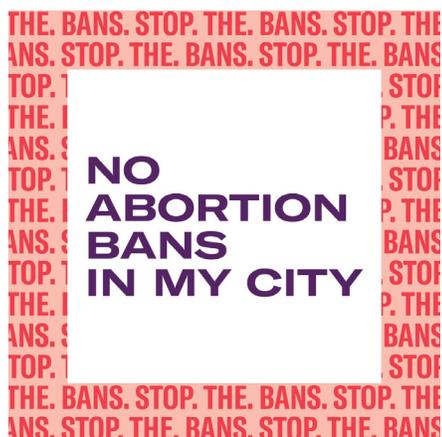
Social media is a powerful tool to use to build momentum around abortion access and to educate your community. In fact, 68% of people in this country get their news from social media. You can use social media to rally and thank your supporters and to respond to your opposition. Below are some general tips to maximize your social media effort.

Facebook is great for reaching supporters quickly. You can choose to either post on your own personal Facebook wall to create interest, or you can create or join a local abortion advocacy group and invite your current friends to join. You also need to commit to posting on, at least, a once a week basis in your group. You can always pre-schedule your posts to help keep your page current.

Twitter is great for inserting yourself into the conversation and reaching a substantial amount of people, especially members of the media. When using Twitter make sure you use relevant hashtags in your post. You can use other people's handles to call out or speak directly to other Twitter users. This can be a great way to informally engage with your lawmakers and their staff. Be sure to plug in the relevant details.

Instagram is a great way to educate folks about what is going on and reaching a variety of people passionate about this issue. Make sure to use relevant hashtags in your post. You can easily direct people to message you on how to get involved.

Feel free to use the graphics provided below for your social media posts.
(click image to download)



Educating the public and generating support and attention for the issue is a crucial part of any local advocacy campaign. You can use the threat of an abortion ban, the possibility of a proactive agenda item, or other events happening locally and elsewhere to try to generate earned media. A couple of good strategies to use when trying to generate media attention are Op-Eds and letters to the editor. Also, make sure you review the [Abortion Forward Language](#) messaging guidance prepared by the ACLU of Texas and their partners.

Op-Eds are pieces you submit to a media outlet that reflect your opinion about an issue. They are a good opportunity to educate the public and advance your advocacy within your local community. Most newspapers have rules about how to submit op-eds and the format they must follow in order to be considered for publication. If the newspaper does not have posted guidelines, feel free to call up the op-ed editor and ask for them. When writing an op-ed, make sure to tailor your piece to your audience and stay focused on your issue. Use facts and research to support your opinion, but you want to also stick to clear and plain language. This is not the place for overuse of jargon. Make sure to have others read your piece before you submit and remember to edit carefully. After submission, make sure you follow up with the editor.

Letters to the editor are used to respond to something that was printed in the newspaper. A letter to the editor is a good strategy if you are looking to uplift something that was printed or if you would like to offer a new or contrary perspective. If you are considering submitting a letter to the editor, make sure it is timely. You'll need to respond as soon as you can to a published piece. You will also need to follow the rules for submission for that newspaper. A few quick tips include:

- **Read previous letters.** Previous letters show you what types of letters the newspaper likes to publish.
- **Keep it simple and to the point.** Shorter, well written letters that are direct are more likely to get published.
- **Know your audience.** Familiarize yourself with what the paper likes to print and try to write toward that audience.
- **Edit.** Edit your work several times and ask a friend to read it before submitting.

If you are interested in submitting an op-ed or letter to the editor and would like additional guidance, please reach out to the ACLU of Ohio at repro@acluohio.org. For a list of media outlets where you can send an op-ed or letter to the editor, please visit [NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio's resource](#).

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Prepare for the city council meeting with the anti-abortion agenda item

If an abortion related item does pop up on your agenda, now is the time to go into action. The first step, as mentioned above, is to notify us at repro@acluohio.org. After that you'll want to make sure you are fully prepared for the meeting. You will need to:

Notify your Rapid Response Team. Let your recruits know the date and time of the meeting and ask them to attend. You should also encourage them to prepare testimony against the agenda item.

Prepare to testify. Testimony is an oral statement offering your perspective on the agenda item in question. It is important that you commit to testifying, since in person testimony in city council hearings is viewed as an important reflection of the opinion of the community. Testimony is often limited to three minutes or less. The length of allowed testimony will generally be posted on the agenda. There are also often instructions posted on your city council website.

Draft your testimony. Make sure your testimony includes your name, what council district you live in, how long you've lived in the community, if you represent anyone other than yourself, and your position on the agenda item (for or against). The body of your testimony should include why you hold the position you do. This could include a personal story, data from research, and/or examples gathered from other community members. End by reiterating the action you want the council to take on the agenda item. Review our sample testimonies below to use as a guide, but we encourage you to draft your testimony in your own words. If you need help drafting testimony, reach out to repro@acluohio.org.

Examples of video testimony can be found here: [Public objections to a potential anti-abortion ordinance in Mason, Ohio.](#)