

Ohio GOP lawmakers propose stripping judges of power to interpret abortion rights, Issue 1

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Several Republican lawmakers plan to fight the recently approved abortion rights amendment by trying to overthrow the judicial branch's authority to interpret it.

Ohio voters approved protections for abortion and other reproductive rights, 57-43%, Tuesday. Abortion rights advocates will soon head to court to repeal restrictions and bans on the procedure.

But four GOP lawmakers had another idea.

"To prevent mischief by pro-abortion courts with Issue 1, Ohio legislators will consider removing jurisdiction from the judiciary over this ambiguous ballot initiative," according to a Thursday night news release with quotes from four GOP House representatives. "The Ohio legislature alone will consider what, if any, modifications to make to existing laws based on public hearings and input from legal experts on both sides."

The news release from Reps. Jennifer Gross, R-West Chester; Bill Dean, R-Xenia; Melanie Miller, R-Miller; and Beth Lear, R-Galena and was titled: "DECEPTIVE OHIO ISSUE 1 MISLED THE PUBLIC BUT DOESN'T REPEAL OUR LAWS." Ohio Value Voters, an anti-abortion organization, shared the same quotes in a Friday news release.

"We will withdraw jurisdiction from the courts so that they cannot misapply Issue 1 for the benefit of the abortion industry," Gross said in the Ohio Value Voters' release.

Speaker Jason Stephens, R-Kitts Hill, declined to comment on the release or the idea through a spokesman. But Paul Pfeifer, executive director of the Ohio Judicial Conference, pushed back against the proposal.

The Supreme Court of Ohio is the final arbiter of constitutional issues. Period," said Pfeifer, a former justice and Republican lawmaker. "There's no getting around that, so legislation that attempts to circumvent the constitution eventually isn't going to go anywhere."

Gabriel Mann, a spokesman for the Issue 1 campaign, said the idea was more bad behavior from Republican lawmakers. "Issue 1 passed thanks to the votes

of a lot of Republicans who do not like the idea of government overstep. They don't want government interference in people's private lives," Mann said.

House Minority Leader Allison Russo, D-Upper Arlington, responded to the proposal, saying: "Instead of creating a constitutional crisis with desperate, anti-American attacks on the rule of law and the power of citizens, out-of-touch politicians should work to uphold the bipartisan will of the people by respecting health care decisions between women and their doctors."

On Wednesday, more than two dozen House Republicans promised to push back against Issue 1. On Tuesday, Stephens said in a statement: "The legislature has multiple paths that we will explore to continue to protect innocent life. This is not the end of the conversation."

House Democrats recently announced they would introduce a bill to repeal abortion restrictions and add protections against discrimination because of abortions. These proposals face an uphill battle in the GOP-controlled Legislature.