

Ohio effort to make suing police easier can start gathering signatures

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- After two years of rewrites and legal battles, a proposed state constitutional amendment to limit legal protections for Ohio police officers is finally moving forward.

The Ohio Ballot Board on Tuesday unanimously voted to let supporters of the amendment, which would end qualified immunity, start gathering signatures.

"Today is fantastic," said Cynthia Brown, a Youngstown native and co-founder of the [Ohio Coalition to End Qualified Immunity](#). "We've been denied over 10 times. We've been very persistent in this movement. And we are so thankful to start our campaign."

Qualified immunity is a legal doctrine that shields government officials, including police officers, from personal liability in civil lawsuits unless they violated "clearly established" constitutional rights, [according to the Legal Information Institute at Cornell University](#).

Ohio law [also protects governments from civil lawsuits](#) over injuries or deaths unless it's proven the official acted with "malicious purpose, in bad faith, or in a wanton or reckless manner."

The proposed amendment would eliminate this defense, allowing individuals to sue public employees for rights violations.

The Republican-controlled board led by Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose didn't take a position on the merits of the amendment.

The board's legal role was to determine whether the amendment met state requirements and addressed only one subject, or if it needed to be broken into multiple proposed amendments.

“The existence of qualified immunity has led to a lack of accountability for our government and has hindered the ability for citizens to seek justice for the misconduct of government employees,” according to the Ohio Coalition To End Qualified Immunity.

The coalition emphasizes that individual workers wouldn’t be on the hook financially—the government entity would be responsible for any payouts. Supporters also believe the threat of legal action could prompt systemic reforms to prevent future rights violations.

Opponents argue removing qualified immunity could deter individuals from public service and expose officials to frivolous lawsuits.

“This reckless initiative opens the door to frivolous lawsuits and massive payouts that threaten the ability of officers to do their jobs,” Ohio GOP Chair Alex Triantafilou said in a statement. “After years spent defeating radical ‘defund the police’ efforts, Republicans now face a new front in the fight to protect public safety—and this one could endanger cops in every corner of our state.”

The coalition has been trying to get the issue before voters since February 2023, but Attorney General Dave Yost [rejected the summary language](#) nine times.

Yost argued the language voters would see before signing the petition wasn’t “fair and truthful.”

But earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court [declined to block a lower court’s ruling](#) that found Yost had likely infringed upon the First Amendment rights of the amendment’s supporters.

“He severely sabotaged our campaign deliberately because he didn’t want this issue on the ballot,” Brown said.

Yost certified the petition after the court ruling, but he also promised to work with Ohio lawmakers to change the process to “protect the integrity of Ohio’s elections and freedom of speech.”

LaRose told reporters Tuesday he agreed with the attorney general.

“My concern is that some of these groups pick a title that is effectively a marketing slogan but not a true and faithful title,” LaRose said. “Based on this court ruling, you could do a ballot initiative to raise taxes and the title would be a ballot initiative to lower taxes. That’s not really fair to the voters.”

Organizers for the qualified immunity measure need to collect more than 413,000 valid signatures from registered voters by July to place the proposal on November's ballot.

Brown said that's not possible. Their goal is November 2026.

"People want to see our government held accountable," Brown said. "No one should be above the law."