



Ohio Community Rights Network

It Is Time the People Govern

Every Ohioan retains an unalienable right to participate in community local self-government in the place where they live. But every citizen of Ohio is denied the full enjoyment of that right, and many are denied it completely!

State laws that deny the authority of community governments to protect their health, safety, welfare, and quality of life violate fundamental rights. State laws that exempt agribusiness and fracking corporations from being governed locally place the privileges of wealth and property over the democratic rights of citizens to determine the future of their own communities. Local officials regularly confess to their constituents that they wish they could do more, but their “hands are tied” by state preemptive law. These officials are told that if they honor their oaths to protect the health, safety and welfare of the community, they will be breaking state law.

The first communities in Ohio – Yellow Springs, Broadview Heights, Mansfield, Oberlin and Athens – have adopted Community Rights Amendments/Ordinances which ban fracking and injection wells. These local laws passed by the people of these communities, not only prohibit specific activities that will cause harm to the community, but they also challenge state preemption and corporate powers by codifying our rights to local self-governance, to clean air and water, and the rights of nature – and removing corporate privileges and state authorities when they violate those rights.

Unequal Rights to Self-Government

Citizens living in home rule cities enjoy a modicum of local self-governing rights that include initiative, referendum, and recall as well as the ability to amend their local government charters and the right to enact local laws through their elected community representatives. Citizens in statutory cities, villages and townships can beg their local officials to make law on their behalf. But too often these local representatives act as mere administrators of State law in our communities. That is when the initiative process becomes a valuable tool. And yet, even then, County and State functionaries often try to stop the people from voting on citizen initiated legislation. Residents of unincorporated townships have it even worse. They are denied all forms of local self-government. The fact is people in cities, villages and townships are afforded unequal protection of the law regarding the right to community local self-government.

The Illusion of Democracy

The authority to locally administer State-dictated regulations does not constitute community local self-government. When residents of our communities are told to appeal to their state representatives if they want laws passed, they are sent on a fool’s mission. No municipality, city, village or township has representation in the state legislature. Voting districts are gerrymandered for incumbency protection in violation of community integrity by whatever political party is in power come census time. The “representatives” choose their voters, rather than the voters choosing their representatives.

Who shall we ask to represent us?

We are the ones we’ve been waiting for! On November 16, 2013, citizens from 11 counties in Ohio gathered in Columbus to form the Ohio Community Rights Network (OHCRN), a project supported by the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF). At the convention, attendees signed the Columbus Declaration resolving to form a network of people committed to securing for all Ohioans the right to local, community self government through the formation of county chapters. Become part of the grassroots [movement for community rights](#) by joining the OHCRN. For more information, contact: