

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Anti-ticket tax group failed to collect enough valid signatures for ballot issue

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The effort to place a charter amendment on the November ballot that would eliminate Columbus' two 5% ticket taxes and prevent future ticket taxes has run into two big problems.

The Franklin County Board of Elections says that effort did not collect enough valid signatures to place the issue before city voters on Nov. 5. While the anti-tax group, Advocates for Responsible Taxation (A.R.T.), collected 22,095 signatures, the board validated just 10,746, or less than 50 percent. The group needed 11,030 valid signatures.

Also, the board found that one of the five petitioners was not registered to vote in the city of Columbus until this past Friday. The group filed with the city the petition that they were going to circulate on Jan. 17.

Jeff Mackey, the manager of petitions and filings for the elections board, sent the letter on Monday to Andrea Blevins, the clerk of Columbus City Council. From here the Columbus City Attorney's office will make a final determination, then provide a memo to the council with its opinion on whether the petition is legally sufficient, according to Meredith Tucker, a spokeswoman for City Attorney Zach Klein.

Ben Frech, a spokesman for Advocates for Responsible Taxation, said in a statement that while the group is disappointed that the board did not verify the petitions, it remains encouraged.

"We worked with one of the leading signature acquisition firms in the country and we will continue our work with them to remedy this situation immediately," Frech's statement said. The anti-tax group hired a suburban Detroit company,

SMI Enterprises, to collect the signatures.

“The over 18,000 people who signed our petitions did so to repeal this regressive tax. And while some of their addresses may not have been up to date at the Board of Elections, that does not discount their opposition to this tax,” Frech’s statement said.

According to the Ohio Secretary of State’s office, local questions and issues for the Nov. 5 general election must be certified to or filed with boards of election by 4 p.m. on Aug. 7.

Lisa Griffin, a spokeswoman for Protect Art 4 Columbus, the pro-tax group, said it appears the anti-tax group’s petition effort has flaws.

“We’re surprised that a group can spend over \$150,000 in collecting signatures and still come up short,” Griffin said.

She also said that her group’s reading of the charter states that the committee of five petitioners must be voters of the city and registered at the address where they live.

The petition the anti-tax group filed with the city in January gave an East Spring Street address Downtown for the one petitioner in question, Emily Devol.

Tom Katzenmeyer, president and CEO of the Greater Columbus Arts Council, said in a statement that he was not surprised that tax opponents did not have enough signatures.

“We know Columbus residents want and support a strong arts community, and they recognize that this user fee is a fair and reasonable way to sustain nonprofit arts organizations and to ensure that children and families in all neighborhoods have access to arts and cultural experiences,” he said.

The Columbus City Council adopted the tax package on Dec. 10. The two taxes went into effect on July 1.

One applies to tickets and performances and sporting events at venues with more than 400 seats — such as Huntington Park where the Clippers play but not including Nationwide Arena, college or high school events — and tickets that cost more than \$10. That tax is expected to raise about \$6 million a year for the Greater Columbus Arts Council to fund arts groups.

The second tax is added to tickets for events at Nationwide Arena, including Columbus Blue Jackets games and concerts. That tax is expected to raise an estimated \$3 million a year, with \$2.4 million of that going toward arena improvements and the remaining \$600,000 going to arts facilities improvements.

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