

Claim: Unwed abuse victims left unprotected under Issue 1

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Ohio's new constitutional amendment aimed at denying special legal rights to gay and unmarried couples also may strip legal protections from thousands of unwed victims of domestic violence.

Legal and victim-advocacy circles are buzzing over motions from the Cuyahoga County public defender's office to dismiss

domestic-violence charges against unmarried defendants.

The argument: that the charge violates the amendment to Ohio's Constitution known as Issue 1 by giving spouselike status and protection to victims who live with, but aren't married to, their accused attackers.

"The thing is, you can only get a domestic-violence charge now if you are a wife beater, not a girlfriend beater," said Jeff Lazarus, a law clerk for public de-

fender Robert Tobik and chief architect of the motions to dismiss.

Issue 1 became law on Dec. 1, and none of the cases in Cleveland Municipal and Cuyahoga County Common Pleas courts has produced a judge's ruling yet. But the filings have stunned domestic-violence victims advocates, who expect that the office's novel tactic will start an avalanche of copycat pleadings across the state.

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