

State of Michigan LAW DAY 2008 Essay Contest
"The Rule of Law: Foundation for Communities of Opportunity and Equity"

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Suppose that a city is concerned that political yard signs create visual blight and clutter. Should a city be able to prohibit the placement of all yard signs with very few exceptions?

A city should not be able to ban yard signs. A law that prohibits most yard signs violates a person's right to freedom of speech, which is protected by the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights. The First Amendment states, "*Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.*" Supporting a candidate or expressing a political opinion with yard signs is a form of freedom of speech.

The United States Supreme Court supported this view in City of Ladue v. Gilleo, 512 U.S. 43 (1994). In this case, the City of Ladue passed a law which banned all residential signs with just a few exceptions. These exceptions included "for sale" signs, address signs, and hazard warning signs. Margaret P. Gilleo, a resident of Ladue, had put up a sign in her yard stating, "For Peace in the Gulf. She was told she could not display this sign, as it was illegal in Ladue. She filed suit against the city because she felt this violated her right to free speech. The District Court found the law unconstitutional and the Court of Appeals agreed. The City of Ladue did not agree and the case was heard by the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme Court also agreed that the law was unconstitutional in that this law suppresses too much speech "by eliminating a common means of speaking." 512 U.S., at 56. "A special respect for individual liberty in the home has long been part of our culture and our law." 512 U.S., at 58.

I can understand why Ladue would want to ban all yard signs. In Portage, Michigan, where I live, I can look out of my window at times and see up to twelve signs in a yard. The signs look like trash blowing in the wind. However, I respect a person's right to free speech although I do feel that a city can regulate the signs. Time limits for how long they can be up or how many per yard are such examples. A city cannot forbid the signs though. A person has a right to put up signs in support of what he or she believes.

I believe a city should never have a law banning all residential yard signs with very few exceptions! Even though I do not find the signs attractive, they cannot be prohibited because that would violate the First Amendment. Our freedom of speech is important so we can state our beliefs. That is what makes our country great and free.