

The Rockdale Homeowner Protection & Rights Initiative
Defending Your Castle: Protecting Property Rights and Personal Security
A Michelle Bernard Special Program
"RESULTS FOR ROCKDALE"

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rockdale Homeowner Protection & Rights Initiative is a comprehensive program designed to address the growing challenges homeowners face with burdensome regulations, code enforcement overreach, property rights infringement, and threats to personal security. This initiative recognizes that homeownership is the cornerstone of the American Dream and a fundamental component of personal and financial security. Michelle Bernard is committed to ensuring that Rockdale County government serves as a partner, not an adversary, to homeowners.

THE PROBLEM: HOMEOWNER CHALLENGES IN ROCKDALE COUNTY

Regulatory Overreach

- **Excessive Code Enforcement:** Minor violations result in excessive fines and legal threats
- **Unclear Standards:** Vague regulations leave homeowners vulnerable to subjective interpretation
- **Notification Failures:** Homeowners are unaware of violations until facing penalties
- **Limited Appeal Options:** Difficult and expensive process to challenge enforcement actions
- **Disproportionate Impact:** Lower-income homeowners lack the resources to navigate complex compliance

Property Rights Infringement

- **Arbitrary Restrictions:** County regulations limiting reasonable use of private property
- **Retroactive Enforcement:** New rules applied to existing structures and uses
- **Eminent Domain Concerns:** Insufficient protections against government takings
- **HOA Conflicts:** Limited county support when HOA actions violate homeowner rights
- **Land Use Decisions:** Inadequate homeowner input on zoning and development affecting their property

Personal Security Threats

- **Home Security Restrictions:** Regulations limiting reasonable security measures (fencing, cameras, lighting)
- **Privacy Violations:** Excessive county inspections without proper cause
- **Predatory Practices:** Vulnerable homeowners targeted by unscrupulous contractors exploiting code violations
- **Financial Instability:** Unexpected fines and compliance costs threaten homeownership
- **Foreclosure Risk:** Code violations and liens leading to loss of homes

Bureaucratic Barriers

- **Complex Permitting:** Lengthy and expensive processes for basic home improvements
- **Inconsistent Application:** Different interpretations of the same rules by different inspectors
- **Limited Assistance:** No dedicated homeowner advocate within county government
- **Cost Burdens:** Fees and compliance expenses disproportionate to actual county costs
- **Adversarial Culture:** County approaches homeowners as violators rather than constituents

THE SOLUTION: MICHELLE BERNARD'S COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION PLAN

PILLAR 1: HOMEOWNER BILL OF RIGHTS

Michelle Bernard will champion and implement a Rockdale County Homeowner Bill of Rights, establishing clear protections:

Right to Clear Standards

- All code regulations are written in plain language accessible to the average homeowner
- Visual guides and examples illustrating compliance requirements
- Annual review and simplification of unnecessarily complex regulations
- Elimination of vague or subjectively enforced provisions

Right to Fair Notice

- Minimum 30-day written notice before any enforcement action
- Photo documentation of alleged violations provided to homeowner
- Clear explanation of violation, correction timeline, and appeal rights
- Multiple notification methods (mail, email, door posting), ensuring receipt

Right to Reasonable Time to Cure

- Minimum 60 days to correct non-safety violations
- Extended timelines for homeowners demonstrating good faith effort
- Payment plans for costly compliance requirements
- Suspension of fines during the active correction period

Right to Affordable Compliance

- Fee waivers or reductions for low-income homeowners
- County-sponsored compliance assistance programs
- No cumulative fines exceeding actual correction costs
- Cap on total penalties preventing disproportionate punishment

Right to Appeal and Advocacy

- Free administrative hearing before any lien or legal action
- Access to the county ombudsman assisting with appeals
- Right to present evidence and witnesses
- Written decision with clear reasoning
- Affordable judicial review option

Right to Protection from Retaliation

- Prohibition on targeted enforcement against homeowners who complain or appeal
- Whistleblower protections for those reporting inspector misconduct
- Regular audits ensuring enforcement is uniform and fair

Right to Privacy and Security

- Limits on warrantless inspections to emergencies only
- Homeowner consent required for non-emergency property access
- Protection of personal information collected during inspections
- Right to reasonable security measures (fencing, cameras, lighting) without permit requirements

PILLAR 2: CODE ENFORCEMENT REFORM

Establish Community-Focused Enforcement Philosophy

Transform code enforcement from punitive to educational:

Education First Approach

- Initial contact focuses on helping homeowners understand and achieve compliance
- Courtesy notices replacing citations for first-time minor violations

- Free compliance consultations before enforcement action
- Partnership mindset rather than adversarial approach

Proportional Response System

- Three-tier violation system: Minor, Moderate, Serious
- Minor violations: Education and assistance only
- Moderate violations: Notice period with support
- Serious violations (safety/health): Swift but fair action
- Fines only after repeated non-compliance despite assistance

Transparency and Accountability

- Body cameras or audio recording of all inspector interactions
- Written documentation of every property visit
- Public database of all enforcement actions (anonymized by address)
- Quarterly reports on enforcement patterns and outcomes
- Independent review board hearing homeowner complaints about inspectors

Inspector Training and Standards

- Customer service training for all code enforcement personnel
- Cultural competency education
- Conflict de-escalation certification
- Annual performance reviews, including homeowner feedback
- Discipline for inspectors with a pattern of complaints

Reasonable Standards Implementation

- Repeal or revise the top 10 most-complained-about regulations
- Grandfather protections for existing non-conforming uses
- Focus enforcement on genuine safety and health hazards, not aesthetic preferences
- Eliminate regulations that serve no legitimate public purpose

PILLAR 3: PROPERTY RIGHTS PROTECTION PROGRAM

Eminent Domain Safeguards

- County may use eminent domain only for clearly defined public use
- Fair market value PLUS relocation assistance and compensation for distress
- Homeowners receive an independent appraisal at county expense
- 180-day notice minimum before taking any action
- Right to remain in home during entire appeals process

Land Use Participation Rights

- Mandatory notification to all homeowners within 1,000 feet of proposed zoning changes
- Town hall meetings in affected neighborhoods before zoning decisions
- Homeowner testimony is weighted equally with developer presentations
- Impact studies required for any development affecting established neighborhoods
- Supermajority vote required to override neighborhood opposition

Protection from HOA Overreach

- County ombudsman mediating disputes between homeowners and HOAs
- Legal assistance fund for homeowners challenging illegal HOA actions
- Required county review of HOA foreclosures before approval
- State legislative advocacy for stronger homeowner protections
- Public education about HOA rights and remedies

Reasonable Use Rights

- Presumption that homeowners may use property as they see fit unless specific harm is demonstrated
- Home-based business encouragement with streamlined approval
- Urban agriculture and sustainability measures protected (gardens, composting, rainwater collection, solar panels)
- Reasonable accommodation for multi-generational households
- Protection of religious and cultural practices on private property

PILLAR 4: HOMEOWNER SECURITY ENHANCEMENT

Physical Security Rights

- **Fencing Rights:** Homeowners may install fencing up to 6 feet without a permit (8 feet in rear yards)
- **Security Camera Protection:** No restrictions on security cameras monitoring the homeowner's property
- **Lighting Rights:** Motion-sensor and security lighting permitted without limitation
- **Safe Room Allowances:** Expedited permits for security enhancements and safe rooms
- **Alarm System Support:** County coordination with alarm companies, reducing false alarm penalties

Financial Security Protections

- **Predatory Contractor Registry:** Database of contractors with violations, complaints, or predatory practices

- **Required Estimates:** Contractors must provide written estimates before code-violation-related work
- **Cooling-Off Period:** 72-hour right to cancel contracts signed under pressure of code violations
- **Price Gouging Prohibition:** County investigation of excessive charges related to compliance work
- **Contractor Licensing Enforcement:** Swift action against unlicensed or fraudulent contractors

Senior and Vulnerable Homeowner Program

- **Priority Assistance:** Dedicated support for seniors, the disabled, and low-income homeowners
- **Compliance Help:** County-coordinated volunteer program assisting with minor repairs
- **Financial Counseling:** Free access to housing counselors, preventing foreclosure
- **Legal Aid Partnership:** Free or low-cost legal assistance for homeowners facing violations or takings
- **Scam Protection:** Education and enforcement against contractor scams targeting vulnerable populations

Foreclosure Prevention Initiative

- **Early Warning System:** County notification when property taxes or liens accumulate
- **Payment Plans:** Flexible payment options for county-related debts
- **Mediation Services:** Free mediation between homeowners and lenders
- **Resource Connection:** Links to foreclosure prevention programs and emergency assistance
- **Lien Resolution:** County works with homeowners to resolve code-related liens before foreclosure

PILLAR 5: STREAMLINED PERMITTING AND ASSISTANCE

Permit Process Overhaul

- **Online Portal:** Apply, pay, track permits 24/7 from home
- **Fast-Track Options:** 48-hour approval for minor projects meeting clear standards
- **Consolidated Review:** Single submission for projects requiring multiple permits
- **Fee Transparency:** Clear breakdown of all costs upfront, no hidden fees
- **One-Stop Shop:** Single county office handling all homeowner needs

Free Homeowner Assistance Services

- **Pre-Application Consultations:** Free 30-minute meetings before formal submission
- **Plan Review Assistance:** Help ensure applications are complete and compliant
- **DIY Homeowner Support:** Guidance for owner-builders doing their own work
- **Compliance Checklists:** Simple guides for common projects (decks, sheds, additions)
- **Permitting Workshops:** Monthly classes teaching homeowners the process

Reasonable Exemptions

- **Minor Work Exemptions:** No permit required for basic repairs and maintenance
- **Value Thresholds:** Projects under \$5,000 are exempt from permit requirements
- **Emergency Repairs:** Expedited same-day permits for health/safety emergencies
- **Senior/Veteran Discounts:** Reduced or waived fees for qualified homeowners
- **Historic Home Assistance:** Specialized support for owners of older properties

Inspection Scheduling and Flexibility

- **Homeowner-Friendly Hours:** Evening and Saturday inspection availability
- **Same-Day Scheduling:** Inspections within 24 hours of request
- **Consolidated Inspections:** Multiple inspections in a single visit when possible
- **Re-Inspection Fee Elimination:** No charge if initial failure due to inspector error or unclear requirements
- **Virtual Inspections:** Remote inspection options for appropriate projects

PILLAR 6: HOMEOWNER ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Office of Homeowner Advocacy

Establish a dedicated county office serving as the homeowners' voice in government:

Core Functions:

- Assist homeowners navigating county departments and processes
- Investigate complaints about unfair treatment or regulatory overreach
- Mediate disputes between homeowners and county agencies
- Recommend policy changes based on homeowner feedback
- Publish annual report on homeowner issues and resolutions

Staffing:

- Full-time Homeowner Advocate (ombudsman)
- Support staff with expertise in codes, zoning, and property rights
- Multilingual team serving a diverse community
- Located in an accessible county office with evening hours
- Available by phone, email, and in person

Services Provided:

- Free consultations on code compliance issues
- Help prepare appeals and applications
- Mediation services resolving disputes
- Referrals to legal aid and other resources
- Education about homeowner rights and responsibilities

Homeowner Advisory Council

Create a representative body ensuring the homeowner's voice in policy:

Composition:

- 15 members representing diverse county areas and demographics
- Mix of longtime homeowners and recent buyers
- Including seniors, families, and working professionals
- Term limits ensuring fresh perspectives
- Appointed through an application process, not a political appointment

Responsibilities:

- Review and comment on proposed code changes
- Identify problematic regulations needing revision
- Recommend homeowner-friendly policies
- Serve as liaison between community and government
- Host quarterly public forums for homeowner input

Authority:

- All proposed code changes reviewed by Council before adoption
- Council recommendations included in public record
- Annual report to County Commission on homeowner issues
- Budget allocation for independent research and analysis

Community Education Program

Proactive education preventing problems:

Homeownership 101 Workshops

- Free monthly classes for new homeowners
- Topics: Codes, permits, property taxes, maintenance, rights
- Available in multiple languages
- Partnerships with real estate agents and lenders, ensuring all new buyers are invited

Online Resource Center

- Comprehensive website with all homeowner information
- Video tutorials for common projects
- Downloadable guides and checklists
- FAQ addressing the most common questions
- Live chat support during business hours

Neighborhood Liaison Program

- County staff assigned to specific neighborhoods
- Regular attendance at community meetings
- Proactive communication about county initiatives
- Direct connection between residents and government
- Trust-building through consistent presence

Annual Homeowner Summit

- Day-long event bringing together homeowners, county officials, and experts
- Workshops on relevant topics
- Meet county staff and elected officials
- Provide feedback on policies and programs
- Networking and community building

PILLAR 7: ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Performance Metrics and Transparency

Measure success and ensure accountability:

Key Performance Indicators:

- Average time from violation notice to resolution
- Percentage of violations cured without fines
- Homeowner satisfaction ratings with code enforcement
- Appeal success rates indicating fairness
- Demographic data ensuring equitable enforcement
- Inspector performance metrics
- Permit processing times
- Customer service ratings

Public Reporting:

- Quarterly dashboard published online
- Annual comprehensive report
- Comparison to peer counties
- Trend analysis identifying improvements needed
- Response to community feedback

Independent Audits:

- Biennial review by external auditor
- Assessment of fairness and consistency
- Recommendations for improvement
- Follow-up on implementation of past recommendations

Continuous Stakeholder Engagement

- Annual homeowner survey on county services
- Regular town halls focused on property rights issues
- Social media monitoring for emerging concerns
- Response team addressing viral complaints or issues
- Commitment to addressing top concerns within 90 days

Legislative Advocacy

Michelle Bernard will advocate for state-level reforms:

- Stronger property rights protections in Georgia law
- Limits on HOA powers
- Eminent domain reform
- Foreclosure prevention measures
- Grant funding for homeowner assistance programs

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (Days 1-90)

1. **Executive Order:** Implement a moratorium on new code liens pending review
2. **Establish Office:** Create Office of Homeowner Advocacy
3. **Inspector Training:** Launch customer service training for all code enforcement
4. **Fee Freeze:** Suspend any planned permit or compliance fee increases
5. **Listening Tour:** Host homeowner forums in each commission district

SHORT TERM (Months 3-12)

1. **Adopt Homeowner Bill of Rights:** County commission approval and implementation
2. **Regulatory Review:** Identify and repeal the top 10 problematic regulations
3. **Launch Portal:** Implement an online permitting and assistance system
4. **Appoint Council:** Select and convene Homeowner Advisory Council
5. **Begin Education:** Launch workshops and resource center
6. **Assistance Programs:** Implement support for seniors and low-income homeowners

MEDIUM TERM (Years 1-2)

1. **Full Reform Implementation:** Complete code enforcement transformation
2. **Measure Results:** Track KPIs and publish the first annual report
3. **Expand Services:** Add staff and programs based on demand
4. **Technology Enhancement:** Improve digital tools and accessibility
5. **Regional Collaboration:** Partner with neighboring counties on best practices
6. **State Advocacy:** Begin legislative campaign for state-level reforms

LONG TERM (Years 2-3)

1. **Sustain Excellence:** Continuous improvement based on data and feedback
2. **National Recognition:** Position Rockdale as a model for homeowner-friendly governance
3. **Expand Protections:** Address emerging issues and homeowner needs
4. **Cultural Transformation:** Embed homeowner partnership philosophy throughout county government
5. **Evaluate Impact:** Comprehensive assessment of program outcomes and community benefits

FUNDING STRATEGY

Cost-Neutral Approach

This program is designed to pay for itself through:

- **Efficiency Gains:** Streamlined processes, reducing administrative costs
- **Reduced Appeals:** Better compliance assistance means fewer contested cases
- **Economic Development:** Homeowner-friendly reputation attracts residents and increases property values
- **Grant Funding:** Pursue state and federal grants for innovative housing programs

Specific Funding Sources

- **Reallocation:** Redirect savings from reduced litigation and appeals
- **Fee Restructuring:** Ensure fees cover actual costs, not generate excess revenue
- **Grant Applications:** Federal HOME and CDBG funds for homeowner assistance
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with nonprofits and volunteers, reducing costs
- **Foundation Support:** Seek philanthropic funding for pilot programs

Budget Transparency

- Annual public accounting of all program costs and benefits
- Regular reporting on return on investment
- Community input on resource allocation priorities

SUCCESS METRICS

Quantitative Goals (Year 3)

- **90%** homeowner satisfaction with code enforcement

- 75% reduction in contested violations
- 50% faster permit processing times
- **Zero** complaints of inspector misconduct
- 100% of eligible seniors/veterans receiving assistance
- **\$2M+** saved by homeowners through assistance programs
- 40% reduction in foreclosures related to code violations

Qualitative Goals

- Rockdale County is recognized as the most homeowner-friendly in Georgia
- Transformation from adversarial to partnership culture
- Increased homeowner engagement in civic life
- Model program adopted by other jurisdictions
- Homeowners feel respected, protected, and supported

TESTIMONIALS AND CASE STUDIES

Scenario 1: The Retired Senior

Before Program: Mrs. Johnson, 73, receives \$500 fine for peeling paint. Can't afford professional painters on a fixed income. Faces daily accumulating fines and a potential lien on the home.

After the Program, County connects Mrs. Johnson with the volunteer repair program. Paint provided at cost through bulk county purchase. Work completed by volunteers. No fines. Mrs. Johnson remains in the home she's owned for 40 years.

Scenario 2: The Working Family

Before Program: The Martinez family wants to finish their basement for a growing family. \$800 in fees plus architect-drawn plans required. Can't afford it. Delayed indefinitely.

After Program: Free pre-application consultation identifies DIY option. The county provides a checklist and guidance. Reduced permit fee (\$150) for owner-builder. Approved in 48 hours. Family completes project safely and affordably.

Scenario 3: The Code Violation Target

Before Program: Mr. Thompson was cited for 12 minor violations after complaining about a county issue. Faces \$5,000+ in fines. Believes he's being retaliated against. No recourse.

After the Program, the Office of Homeowner Advocacy investigates. Finds enforcement pattern targeting Mr. Thompson. Violations dismissed. Inspector disciplined. Policy preventing retaliation is enforced. Mr. Thompson's complaint was addressed.

Scenario 4: The HOA Victim

Before Program: Ms. Lee was facing HOA foreclosure over \$1,200 in disputed fees. The HOA board won't negotiate. Losing a home worth \$200,000.

After Program: the County ombudsman mediates the dispute. The legal assistance fund provides an attorney. Unreasonable fees challenged. Settlement reached. Ms. Lee keeps the home, pays only legitimate expenses.

COMMITMENT TO ROCKDALE COUNTY HOMEOWNERS

Michelle Bernard's Promise

"Homeownership is the foundation of the American Dream and the backbone of stable communities. Too often, the government treats homeowners as adversaries rather than the taxpaying constituents we serve.

That stops now.

As your County Commissioner, I will ensure that Rockdale County government works FOR homeowners, not against them. I will protect your property rights, respect your privacy, support your security, and treat you with the dignity you deserve.

You work hard for your home. You pay your taxes. You deserve a government that helps you maintain and improve your property, not one that punishes you with burdensome regulations and excessive fines.

The Rockdale Homeowner Protection & Rights Initiative represents my commitment to you. These are not empty promises; they are specific, actionable policies I will implement starting day one.

Your home is your castle. And I will defend it."

— **Michelle Bernard**

CALL TO ACTION

For Homeowners Experiencing Problems:

- Share your story: homeowners@michelleforrockdale.com
- Attend town hall to discuss issues
- Join advisory council when established
- Support campaign fighting for your rights

For All Rockdale County Residents:

- Review the full program at MichelleForRockdale.com
- Vote for leadership that protects homeowners
- Volunteer to help spread the message
- Contribute to the campaign, taking on this important issue

PROGRAM RESOURCES

Contact Information: Email: info@michellebernard4rockdale.com
Phone: 770.809.6706
Website: michellebernard4rockdale.com/homeowner-protection/

Download Resources:

- Full Homeowner Bill of Rights (PDF)
- Code Enforcement Reform Plan (PDF)
- Permitting Guide for Homeowners (PDF)
- Know Your Rights Brochure (Multiple Languages)
- Comparison: Current vs. Proposed Policies

Get Involved:

- Attend Homeowner Town Halls
- Share Your Story
- Join Email List for Updates
- Volunteer for Campaign
- Donate to Support This Initiative

PAID FOR BY MICHELLE BERNARD FOR ROCKDALE COUNTY

Your Home. Your Rights. Your Champion.

MICHELLE BERNARD: DEFENDING HOMEOWNERS, PROTECTING PROPERTY RIGHTS, SECURING YOUR FUTURE.

Key Program Components:

7 Strategic Pillars:

1. **Homeowner Bill of Rights** - Clear protections including rights to fair notice, reasonable time to cure, affordable compliance, appeal processes, and privacy
2. **Code Enforcement Reform** - Shifting from a punitive to an educational approach, proportional responses, and inspector accountability
3. **Property Rights Protection** - Eminent domain safeguards, land use participation, HOA overreach protections, and reasonable use rights
4. **Homeowner Security Enhancement** - Physical security rights (fencing, cameras, lighting), financial security protections, and foreclosure prevention
5. **Streamlined Permitting** - Online portals, fast-track options, free assistance, reasonable exemptions, and flexible inspections
6. **Advocacy Infrastructure** - Office of Homeowner Advocacy, Advisory Council, and comprehensive education programs
7. **Accountability Systems** - Performance metrics, transparency reporting, and continuous improvement

Special Features:

- **Education-first approach** instead of fines
- **30-60 day cure periods** before penalties
- **Free homeowner ombudsman** service
- **Protection from retaliatory enforcement**
- **Senior and vulnerable homeowner assistance programs**
- **Anti-predatory contractor protections**
- **Foreclosure prevention initiatives**

The program includes specific implementation timelines, funding strategies that are cost-neutral, measurable success metrics, and real-world case studies showing the difference these policies will make.

This positions Michelle as a champion for homeowner rights, a powerful differentiator that will resonate strongly with the majority of Rockdale County residents who are homeowners facing these exact challenges.