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Voting Rights Groups Seek to Ensure Fair Chance to Apply for Voting Rights Restoration in Kentucky

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Fair Elections Center and Kentucky Equal Justice Center today filed a complaint in the Franklin Circuit Court of Kentucky seeking to ensure that all returned citizens who apply for voting rights restoration have a fair chance of having those applications considered. The lawsuit, filed on behalf of 67-year-old Kentucky resident Rick Petro and a class of rights restoration applicants, challenges Governor Andy Beshear's non-public policy of invalidating and effectively denying without notice all rights restoration applications completed before he took office on December 10, 2019. Mr. Petro himself applied to have his voting rights restored in 2018, and requests relief for a class that includes all people not restored by executive order who had completed an application but not received a denial or approval at the time Gov. Beshear took office.

"Right now, the only chance for many returned citizens to get their voting rights back in Kentucky is by applying to the governor," said Michelle Kanter Cohen, policy director and senior counsel at Fair Elections Center. "We are filing this case to make sure that citizens who have served their time and made the effort to apply for rights restoration get a fair shot."

"Governor Beshear made the decision to require every Kentuckian who completed applications to have their voting rights restored before he took office to reapply," said Ben Carter, senior counsel at the Kentucky Equal Justice Center. "We think that's wrong. Worse, he didn't bother to tell those Kentuckians they had to reapply. Kentucky's Constitution guarantees to every Kentuckian the right to be treated fairly by their government and this is completely unfair."

In Kentucky, people with past felony convictions can generally apply for the governor to restore their voting rights. But under the policy challenged in this new case, rights restoration applications submitted before December 10, 2019 have no chance of being granted or even considered, and the people who submitted those applications have no way of knowing this. The lawsuit seeks to ensure that people who submitted rights restoration applications during previous administrations still have a fair chance of having their applications considered and decided upon, no matter the decision.

People who want to apply for voting rights restoration should go to civilrightsrestoration.ky.gov. Some individuals might already have their voting rights restored due to Executive Order 2019-003, and that information can also be found at civilrightsrestoration.ky.gov. People who applied for voting rights restoration before December 2019 can [contact the Kentucky Equal Justice Center](#).

Read the complaint [here](#).

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Fair Elections Center is a national nonpartisan and non-profit voting rights and election reform organization based in Washington, DC whose mission is to use litigation, public education, and advocacy to remove barriers to registration and voting, and to improve election administration.

Kentucky Equal Justice Center is a nonprofit law firm and advocacy organization that works to promote equal justice for all residents of the Commonwealth by advocating for low income people and other vulnerable communities.