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**NEW LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST GOV. YOUNGKIN'S ARBITRARY
VOTING RIGHTS RESTORATION FOR
VIRGINIANS WITH FELONY CONVICTIONS**

RICHMOND, Va. — Today, [Fair Elections Center](https://www.fairelectionscenter.org) along with Terry Frank Law and Attorney Charles Schmidt, filed a lawsuit against Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin and Secretary of the Commonwealth Kay Coles James, challenging Youngkin's [resurrection](#) of an unconstitutionally arbitrary system for restoring voting rights to people with felony convictions.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of [Nolef Turns, Inc.](#), a non-profit dedicated to helping individuals with felony convictions live self-sufficient lives and reintegrate into the workforce and society after completing the requirements of their sentence, and Gregory Williams, a lifelong Virginia resident who is disenfranchised due to a past felony conviction.

Virginia's last three governors have utilized specific, objective, and neutral criteria, such as sentence completion, for restoring voting rights to Virginians with previous felony convictions. Gov. Youngkin has now ended this policy, exercising his unlimited discretion under the Virginia Constitution to grant or deny each individual's application for regaining their right to vote. Without laws, rules, or specific criteria guiding these decisions, Gov. Youngkin's absolute power to decide which Virginians regain these rights opens the door to discrimination in the rights restoration process and violates the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

"Our organization believes in accountability and redemption. The right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy and should be accessible to every eligible resident. It has been proven that participating in the civic process reduces recidivism, and individuals take pride in their communities when they can fully contribute to Virginia. True democracy does not deprive individuals of participation based on the whim of one individual. It's time to correct the wrongs of our 1902 Constitution and leave the power to one succinct process that cannot be modified by a single person's emotions in the moment. Our residents deserve clarity and inclusion in the civic process, despite what kind of mistakes they have made in their past," **said Sheba Williams, Executive Director of [Nolef Turns](#).**

“According to the defendants, Virginia’s new voting rights restoration system is guided by the Governor’s thoughts on ‘grace’ and ‘public safety.’ This is exactly the kind of arbitrary licensing of First Amendment-protected conduct based on vague, subjective standards that the Supreme Court has prohibited for eighty-five years,” **said Jon Sherman, Litigation Director at [Fair Elections Center](#)**. “Governor Youngkin should bring Virginia into compliance with the U.S. Constitution today by restoring his predecessors’ system.”

“Having worked with many clients over the years to help them restore their rights, I am frustrated and disheartened to see Virginia backslide on such an important issue. The Governor's arbitrary and capricious process is unconstitutional and goes against our country's core First Amendment principles. I commend the plaintiffs for stepping forward to challenge this injustice,” said **Charles Schmidt, Attorney at Law**.

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, D.C. which uses litigation, public education and advocacy to remove barriers to registration and voting, particularly those disenfranchising underrepresented and marginalized communities, and to improve election administration.

[Nolef Turns Inc.](#) is a 501(c)(3) public charity that was established to build a network of resources for individuals with court and justice involvement to thrive post-conviction. Its goals are to fight against our unjust judicial system and to help end mass incarceration, with a focus on the fight to allow justice-involved individuals to live a fair and self-sufficient life after they have completed all of their requirements of crime and punishment.