

Ohio Green Party sues to regain state recognition, allow presidential candidates on fall ballot

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The Ohio Green Party has filed a federal lawsuit seeking to force state officials to grant it minor-party status and allow two presidential candidates to appear on the November ballot as independents.

By [Jeremy Pelzer, cleveland.com](#)

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Ohio Green Party leaders have filed a federal lawsuit seeking to force state officials to re-recognize it as a political party and allow Green presidential candidates to run as independents this November.

The lawsuit, filed late last month in U.S. District Court in Columbus, argues that the coronavirus pandemic is preventing Green Party leaders from gathering the needed signatures to re-gain minor-party status and allow presidential candidates Howie Hawkins and Dario Hunter to appear on this year's general-election ballot.

“Attempting to collect nominating petition signatures or minor party formation petition signatures during the ‘COVID-19’ pandemic endangers the health and the lives of petition circulators, petition signers, and the public at large,” the suit states. “Circulators cannot gather petition signatures because there are social-distancing requirements, fewer people congregating in public places, and fewer people will open their doors to strangers.”

Even when the current public-health emergency subsides, the lawsuit continues, the coronavirus is “likely to suppress petition signature gathering for an indefinite period of time.” As a result, enforcement of such ballot-access rules violates constitutional guarantees of free speech and equal protection, the lawsuit asserts.

The Greens lost Ohio ballot access in 2018, when their candidate for governor, Constance Gadell-Newton, received only 1.1 percent of the vote – far below the 3-percent threshold needed for the party to maintain its minor-party status.

Under [Ohio law](#), the Green Party could regain state recognition if it gathers about 45,000 valid signatures from registered voters in the state (1 percent of votes cast in the last gubernatorial election).

The lawsuit also suggests alternative actions the court could take besides ordering the state to grant party recognition and place the candidates on the ballot, including lowering the signature requirements, extending the deadline for submitting the signatures, and ordering

the state to develop “efficient and realistic procedures” for gathering and submitting petition signatures electronically.

Last month, a federal judge in Cincinnati ordered state officials to allow signatures to be collected electronically for a proposed ballot issue to raise Ohio’s minimum wage to \$13 per hour. However, an appeals court has temporarily blocked that ruling.

Hawkins, a longtime activist from New York, is the presumptive Green Party nominee for president this year. Hunter is a former Youngstown School Board member and a gay, Muslim-born rabbi.