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Governor McAuliffe Announces Changes to Virginia's Restoration of Rights Policy

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Today Governor Terry McAuliffe announced his amendments to the Commonwealth of Virginia's process by which rehabilitated felons can have their voting rights restored after they have paid their debt to society.

When it takes effect on April 21st, the new policy will make the restoration of rights process more transparent by providing Virginians with a list of the offenses that require a waiting period before an offender can apply to have his or her rights restored. It will also empower more Virginians to have their rights restored sooner by removing drug crimes from that list, and changing the waiting period for rehabilitated violent offenders from five years to three.

"Virginians who have made a mistake and paid their debt to society should have their voting rights restored through a process that is as transparent and responsive as possible," said Governor McAuliffe. "These changes will build on the process Virginia has in place to increase transparency for applicants and ensure that we are restoring Virginians' civil rights quickly and efficiently after they have applied and observed any necessary waiting period.

"I am pleased to announce that we have restored the voting rights of more than 800 Virginians since I took office, and that this policy will allow my administration to increase our responsiveness to Virginians who have paid their debt to society and wish to have their rights restored."

Presently, Virginians who have been convicted of a felony can petition to have their rights restored after they have served their prison sentences and paid any necessary restitution. Violent offenders are required to wait 5 years before petitioning to have their rights restored, while nonviolent offenders are eligible to have their rights restored immediately.

Upon taking office, Governor McAuliffe instructed the Secretary of the Commonwealth to review the current policy and recommend ways to make it more open and transparent to Virginians. These changes are likely to be followed by more amendments that further align the Commonwealth's policy with the Governor's view that Virginians who have paid their debt to society should not have to jump through unnecessary hoops to have their rights restored.

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