

Today, the ACLU of Georgia filed suit on behalf of Georgia's Green Party and Libertarian Party asserting their rights to collect signatures for petitions to appear on the Georgia General Election Ballot.

The suit arises out of an incident July 4, 2002, when volunteers for both parties were driven out of Ridge Ferry Park in Rome, Georgia for seeking to peaceably collect signatures from the 20,000 people present for a fireworks display. Police confronted the party volunteers and ordered them to leave the park or face arrest under Rome Code 15-153, which states:

"[i]t shall be unlawful for any person to engage in any activity within a recreation facility that could cause injury to other persons or interfere with the use and enjoyment of the recreation facility by other persons."

While most volunteers ceased their activities when faced with likely arrest, Plaintiff Mitch Lawson asserted his constitutional rights and was arrested for "solicitation of a political petition in a public park."

"While the Fourth of July fireworks boomed in the sky, our clients were having their constitutional rights blasted on the ground," said Gerry Weber, Legal Director of the Georgia ACLU. "The law clearly protects a citizen's right to peaceably gather signatures in a public park."

Plaintiffs talking about how this is a problem across the state.

Volunteer attorney, Hollie Manheimer, adds .....

Debbie giving it a big picture focus.

The lawsuit seeks an order preventing the City from enforcing the ordinance and compensatory damages.