

Why Is Virginia's Governor Encouraging 'Snitching' on Churchgoers?

Governor Ralph Northam wants residents to file a complaint against neighbors, friends and churchgoers who they feel aren't complying with his executive order about Phase 2 restrictions regarding social distancing, masks and establishment capacities.

The Virginia Department of Public Health is urging residents to "snitch" on public gatherings and other activities that violate the governor's coronavirus orders, including church services. The health department's website has been updated with a "Complaint Report Form" with dropdown options to anonymously report citizens who exceed the emergency limits on building capacity or refuse to wear masks to the state. The form allows users to specify the "type of establishment" they're reporting, including indoor gun range or religious service. Additional types of establishments that can be reported are grocery or convenience stores, restaurants, brick-and-mortar retail stores, wineries or breweries, personal grooming service[s], gyms and other.

However, there is not an option to report unmasked crowds of more than 50 people who protest, vandalize communities, destroy personal property or threaten police officers.

The website states: "If you have observed violations of Executive 63 or Executive Order 65 and wish to file a complaint, fill out this report form as completely as possible. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has the authority to enforce Executive Order 63 and section A of Executive Order 65. VDH will review your complaint and forward it to your Local Health Department."

Regarding in-person worship services, under Northam's Phase Two rules, "religious services must be limited to no more than 50% of the lowest occupancy load on the certificate of occupancy of the room or facility in which the religious services are conducted. Individuals attending religious services must be at least six feet apart when seated and must practice proper physical distancing at all times (with the exception of family members)."

Liberty Counsel represents Lighthouse Fellowship Church on Chincoteague Island in the federal lawsuit against Governor Northam after he sent police to serve a summons to Pastor Kevin Wilson for holding a church service for 16 people spaced far apart in a sanctuary that is rated for 293 people. The charge is violating Northam's COVID Order 55 with a penalty up to a year in jail and/or a \$2,500 fine. Yet, commercial establishments in the area were filled with people.

Northam has stated, "Wearing a mask could literally save someone's life." Yet selfies of the governor without a mask on and surrounded by beachgoers appeared on social media in May. Two days later, he signed an executive order requiring residents to cover their faces or face punishment. Northam also called the lockdown protestors "selfish" for violating quarantine and then publicly supported the George Floyd mobs overflowing city streets.

Liberty Counsel Founder and Chairman Mat Staver said, "Governor Ralph Northam has created a gestapo where residents are encouraged to report neighbors for exercising their First Amendment right to attend a worship service without fear of punishment. The governor is trying to drop his heavy hand on churches with unconstitutional restrictions but supporting protests, demonstrations and riots. Encouraging people to snitch on churchgoers is reprehensible."

Liberty Counsel provides broadcast quality TV interviews via Hi-Def Skype and LTN at no cost.