

FEDERAL APPEALS COURT UPHOLDS PROTECTION OF KENTUCKY COLONELS TRADEMARK

Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals affirms US District Court for the Western District of Kentucky holding David J. Wright and affiliated entities in contempt of court's prior order prohibiting infringement.

In 2020, The Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels (HOKC) sued David J. Wright and several affiliated corporate defendants (Kentucky Colonels International, Ecology Crossroads) alleging trademark infringement. HOKC was granted a temporary restraining order and the matter was aggressively litigated for more than a year. On February 23, 2021, US District Court Judge Rebecca Jennings entered a permanent injunction prohibiting Wright from using HOKC's protected KENTUCKY COLONELS Mark on any mark that is confusingly similar, in connection with sale of goods, solicitations for membership organizations, charitable donations and other commercial activity. The injunction did not restrict Wright from using the Kentucky Colonel title as an "honorary title for editorial, education, informative...or other non-commercial purpose."

In January 2023, HOKC filed suit again in the United States District Court for the Western District of Kentucky after discovering that Wright was brazenly and deceptively continuing to use the KENTUCKY COLONELS Mark for his own personal enrichment.

Examples that created confusion amongst Kentucky Colonels and the general public were "Kentucky Colonel," "Kentucky Colonel Community," "Kentucky Colonel Club," and "Kentucky Colonel™ 1775," linking to websites including "Kentucky Colonelcy: The Honorable & Official Title" and "Office of the Colonelcy." Among other things, Wright's groups were soliciting registry dues and licensing fees from commissioned Kentucky Colonels to be considered an "official" Kentucky Colonel and marketing "official" badges and "official" ID cards. The 2023 Complaint filed by HOKC can be viewed [here](#). In August 2023, Judge Jennings found that Wright's actions violated the injunction and Wright was held in contempt of court. In addition, Judge Jennings awarded HOKC damages and attorneys' fees.

Wright appealed the ruling to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati in September 2023. On October 14, 2025, the Court denied all of Wright's motions and affirmed the district court's contempt orders.

HOKC is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation which has made more than 4,500—totaling more than \$44 million to nonprofit organizations across Kentucky in the last 20 years. Since 1951, HOKC has made more 9,200 grants, totaling over \$77.8 million and currently has more than 30,000 contributing members across the U.S. and in 79 countries. Kentucky Colonels are appointed by the Governor of the Commonwealth and are Colonels for life. A Kentucky Colonel can selectively decide to join the long-standing HOKC and contribute to help make the lives of citizens in the Commonwealth better.

"This court action is again important, so the same parties follow the injunction to which they agreed and which was entered by the Court in February 2021. We must defend the philanthropic reputation, goodwill, and intellectual property built over decades by individual Colonels and The Honorable Order," said Executive Director Sherry Crose. "The 'KENTUCKY COLONELS' Mark is our federally registered trademark for our charitable fundraising services and grant gifting, social club services for members, and promoting the interests of members. It represents individuals who honor their commission and charitable efforts."

About The Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels, Inc. HOKC is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to supporting charitable activities throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky. For decades, HOKC has pursued its mission through annual grants to charities across the state. This grant-making function is funded by generous donations of its contributing members. Though the corporate name is The Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels, most know it by its long-term trademark, Kentucky Colonels®.

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