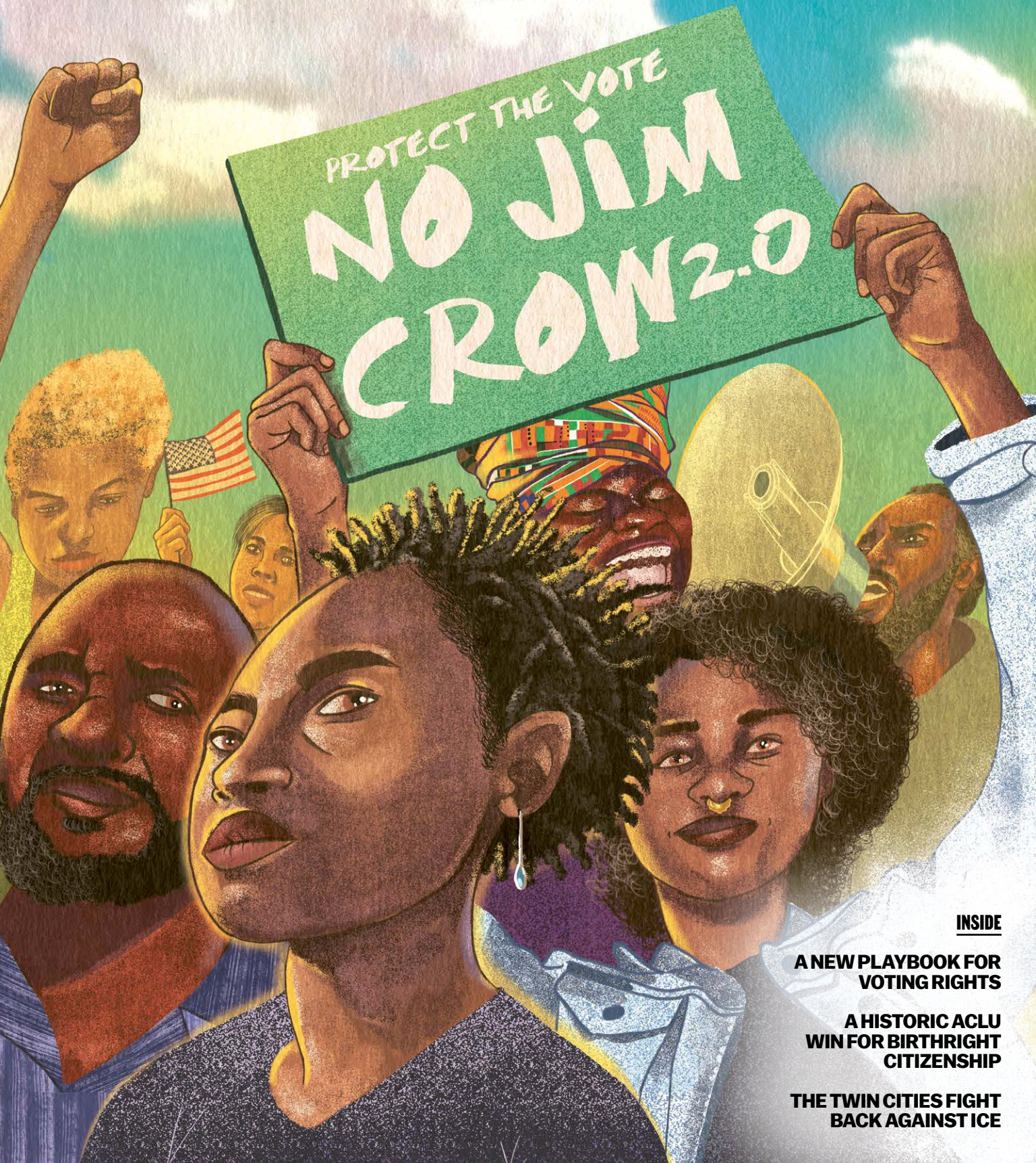


ACLU MAGAZINE

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FALL 2026 | ACLU.ORG



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**A NEW PLAYBOOK FOR
VOTING RIGHTS**

**A HISTORIC ACLU
WIN FOR BIRTHRIGHT
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**THE TWIN CITIES FIGHT
BACK AGAINST ICE**

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: WILL MARTINEZ; BRITTANY GREESON; ARI MICHELSON; SARAH DERAGON

This summer marked a landmark moment in ACLU history. On June 30, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favor of the ACLU, preserving the constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship in *Trump v. Barbara*, one of the most consequential civil rights rulings since the ACLU's founding. The court struck down President Trump's executive order attempting to rewrite the Constitution and overturn birthright citizenship.

In the week of America's 250th anniversary—in which we reaffirmed that all people are created equal—the Supreme Court proclaimed that every newborn in this country will continue to be recognized as a citizen regardless of their parents' immigration status. This landmark victory proves that the Constitution, not the president, determines who is a citizen.

The ACLU's fight for birthright citizenship required rigorous preparation and tenacity: Our lawyers filed a lawsuit to block the executive order just

two hours after it was issued on the first day of President Trump's second term and fought the case through every level of federal court. The ACLU's National Legal Director Cecillia Wang ultimately represented the ACLU and our clients before the nation's highest court in April. She argued that the plain text of the Constitution and the statute required the justices to rule in the ACLU's favor. Chief Justice John Roberts ultimately responded to Cecillia's call by writing in the majority opinion: "Citizenship, then and now, was the right to have rights—to freely participate in our

"The Constitution, not the president, determines who is a citizen."

political community. The Framers of the Fourteenth Amendment extended that promise to 'every free-born person in this land.' We keep that promise today."

With the 2026 midterms approaching, the ACLU has also spent the past year and a half prioritizing pro-democracy efforts to protect the vote and advance election integrity. We've blocked the Department of Justice from getting sensitive voter information and challenged President Trump's executive order restricting mail-in voting (see "Case Study," p. 6). We've also secured court victories in Georgia, Florida, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas to protect access to the ballot. In this issue, you'll read about how the ACLU of Virginia used novel legal strategies to reclaim the vote for thousands of Black Virginians in 2026 (see "A New Playbook for Voting Rights," p. 10).

This fall, we are running the largest election-safeguarding program in our organization's history, with a goal to deploy more than 3,000 volunteers. We've equipped affiliates in key states with resources for responding to potential crises involving federal interference, intimidation at the polls, or attempts to undermine election results.

The Trump administration is attempting to subvert our democracy at every turn. Our response is clear and necessary. I hope you feel encouraged by our victories, inspired by the cases we have filed, uplifted by the clients featured in these pages, and defiant in the face of efforts to degrade American values. Together, our dedication to freedom and justice for all will prevail.



Anthony D. Romero
Executive Director

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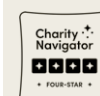
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The Spring 2026 issue of ACLU Magazine features scientists and artists who sued the Trump administration.

"Ministry of Truth"

I was livid reading about the initial removal of Dr. Celeste Royce's article from PSNet because she mentioned that transgender people can have endometriosis. I was also disgusted about the censorship of Dr. Gordon Shiff's article. The shift to censorship and exclusion of LGBTQ people and allies is shocking and immoral. I want to sincerely thank doctors Royce and Shiff, the ACLU, and Ms. Eidelman and her team for opposing this administration's cruelty. My conviction to remain a lifetime member of the ACLU is strengthened by the outcome of this litigation.

*Mara Katz
Farmington Hills, Mich.*

"Fighting for Free Speech"

Thanks so much for the story about Brittany Martin and her courage in facing incarceration for her right to publicly protest. We need more people like her. I'm so proud to call myself a fellow American alongside her.

*William Conrad
San Francisco*

I was reading your latest issue and found most of it quite heartening in these hard times—until I got to your page (with beautiful photo) on the injustice that met Brittany Martin for peacefully protesting police violence and racism during the George Floyd summer. This floored me. I'm in awe of Ms. Martin, that she continues to fight after doing so put her through unimaginable trauma.

*Laurie Dick
Beacon, N.Y.*

Lasting Legacy

I am writing to say thank you for the Spring issue and the work you continue to do to hopefully save our democracy. I am almost 80, and I still protest once a week. The nation needs what you are doing. I am not in a position at the moment to put you in my will, but if that changes, I will. I'll send a donation of thanks. I want you to know that your work is noticed and appreciated. We need you now more than ever!

*Fain M. Webb
Parkville, Md.*

For many years the ACLU has been at the forefront for justice, protecting civil rights and defending the U.S. Constitution. So many struggles have been brought before our judicial system, and the ACLU is consistently taking them on and winning them. In my opinion, supporting the ACLU is urgent and imperative. We are in a very precarious time, when due process and racially motivated, illegal arrests and detentions are harming so many people. Thank you for all that you do.

*Pamela Blunt
Bisbee, Ariz.*

A Welcome Change

Finding the magazine's fresh, crisp, lively layout and style a welcome change from its predecessor. We now have a better tool to help welcome younger people, especially those not inclined to read long, inside baseball-style articles. I am glad to see positive change in our very worthwhile endeavors.

*Peter Toll
Lake Oswego, Ore.*



FRONT LINE

PRIORITIES

Act Free

Thousands of new supporters join the ACLU to defend the promise of America.

This year, the ACLU is joining people all across the country in marking the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, in which our founders declared “all men are created equal.” This milestone is an opportunity to reflect on where the country has succeeded and where it’s fallen far short. The ACLU has never stopped believing in the promises of a more just country.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

The Trump administration, on the other hand, wants us to lose faith in the law, in our country, and in each other. Their America is rooted in fear, where free speech is silenced and marginalized communities live under threat.

The ACLU is fighting for a different kind of America, a place where every person can live freely and with dignity. The ACLU's 300 legal actions to challenge the Trump administration's vision of America have led to successes in the courtroom that are consequential. The power of our voices in the streets is too: It's in the streets, through peaceful action, where rights confirmed in court are fought for and won.

"The best way to protect freedom is to act free," says Deirdre Schifeling, chief political and advocacy officer at the ACLU.

At a time when many feel helpless in the face of attacks on their friends and neighbors, the ACLU has been mobilizing thousands of people who've never engaged in citizen action and helping them claim their power. As cosponsors of the Hands Off! and three No Kings rallies, among the largest single-day protests in American history, the ACLU helped collectively mobilize some 20 million people in peaceful action.

Since January 2025, more than 380,000 people have joined the ACLU's People Power activist program. Over 275,000 have attended ACLU Know Your Rights trainings—including more than 200,000 people on a single day in January 2026. ACLU volunteers and staff have sent 5.1 million texts and 6.1 million emails to mobilize communities across the country.

In July, the next generation of activists joined the ACLU in Washington, D.C., for the 10th anniversary of the National Advocacy Institute, a summer program for high school students. The ACLU welcomed 1,000 students for 10 days of learning directly from ACLU lawyers, lobbyists, community activists, and other experts working to defend the civil rights and civil liberties that are critical to a free and open society. The students also participated in the largest Day of Action in the program's history—a collective demonstration on Capitol Hill to reaffirm the country's constitutional values.

"Today we must choose peaceful democratic engagement over dehumanization," says Schifeling. "The power ultimately lies with the people." —THE ACLU

TAKE ACTION Honor our values this 250th anniversary by visiting the ACLU's People's Archive at aclu.org/peoplesarchive.

CASE STUDY



Defending Mail-in Voting

The Trump administration is trying to undermine elections by weaponizing the postal service.

Earlier this year, President Trump once again took aim at voting by mail. He issued an executive order that attempts to leverage the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) as a voter-suppression tool. If the order was implemented, the USPS would be required to throw out the mail-in ballot of any person whose name doesn't appear on preapproved lists generated by the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration. Voting rights experts immediately challenged the move.

"Simply put, the president doesn't have any power to make or change election rules," says Ethan Herenstein, staff attorney with the

ACLU's Voting Rights Project. "The Constitution gives that power to Congress and the states. The president can't order the Postal Service to block mail: It's an independent agency, and its job is to deliver ballots fairly and reliably."

The ACLU and partners quickly sued to block the order and appeared in federal court in June. A ruling is pending. The plaintiffs are nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations, including the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO), US Vote Foundation, OCA-Asian Pacific American

The ACLU is suing to block implementation of an executive order on mail-in voting.

Advocates, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., whose members depend on absentee voting and would be harmed if the executive order takes effect.

If implemented, the order could disenfranchise millions of Americans. More than 48 million people voted by mail in the 2024 general election—that's nearly one third of all voters.

"That includes people with disabilities, older voters, those without reliable transportation, military families serving overseas, and anyone juggling multiple jobs who might not be able to make it to the voting booth on Election Day," says Herenstein. Any lists generated by federal agencies are also likely to be flawed or out of date—they may not accurately reflect the status of recently naturalized citizens who have gained the right to vote, for example.

This executive order is part of the administration's broader effort to undermine elections. President Trump has pledged to "get rid of mail-in ballots," calling them "corrupt." But Herenstein emphasizes that voters who want to vote by mail should not be discouraged. The order hasn't taken effect, and a similar attack by the administration on voting rights last year failed after the ACLU challenged it. That 2025 executive order would have required millions of Americans to prove their citizenship with a passport or birth certificate to register to vote.

"We're seeing these attacks from President Trump and his allies, who want chaos, and who are laying the groundwork to question election results, and we're not going to let them," says Herenstein. —REBECCA MCCRAY

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS



Protected at the Polls

Voter intimidation is a federal crime. Yet harassment at the polls continues to threaten our right to vote. Here's what you need to know to show up prepared—for yourself and for your neighbor.

- No one can aggressively question you about your citizenship, criminal record, or qualifications to vote.
- It's illegal to display misleading signs about voter fraud or to spread false information about voter requirements.
- It's against the law for someone to falsely claim that they are an election official.
- If you make a mistake on your ballot, you may ask for a new one.
- In many states, you can give a sworn statement to the poll worker that you are qualified to vote and then cast your ballot.
- You can report intimidation to the Election Protection Hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE and to your local election officials on Election Day.

—JAY A. FERNANDEZ

LEARN MORE Brush up on your rights at aclu.org/vote.

ILLUSTRATION BY ALLIE SULLBERG

Fighting for Free and Fair Elections

The ACLU is running the largest election-safeguarding program in its history

On the eve of the 2026 midterm elections, ACLU affiliates, along with 3,000 election volunteers, are tackling state-specific election threats, including intimidation at the polls. State efforts on Election Day will include monitoring the polls, staffing election protection hotlines, and de-escalating potential crises if federal agents are present at polling sites. The goal is to ensure that every vote is cast freely and that every vote is counted.

Yet defending voting rights doesn't start and stop in November. Years of ACLU litigation challenging voter suppression and advancing fair district maps have cleared the path for free and fair elections this fall. In April, the ACLU and partners filed a lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's

unlawful executive order attempting to restrict mail-in voting nationwide (see "Case Study," p. 6). The ACLU and other voting rights groups also sued the U.S. Department of Justice to block the formation of a national voter database.

Here are a few states where the ACLU's litigation is making a difference this November and beyond:

Georgia: The ACLU successfully challenged Georgia's ban on providing food and water to voters in line at polling places and a requirement that voters include their birth date on absentee ballot envelopes.

Iowa: After objecting to Iowa's wrongful, citizenship-based voter challenges, the ACLU is in settlement discussions

to prevent future use of this kind of flawed data.

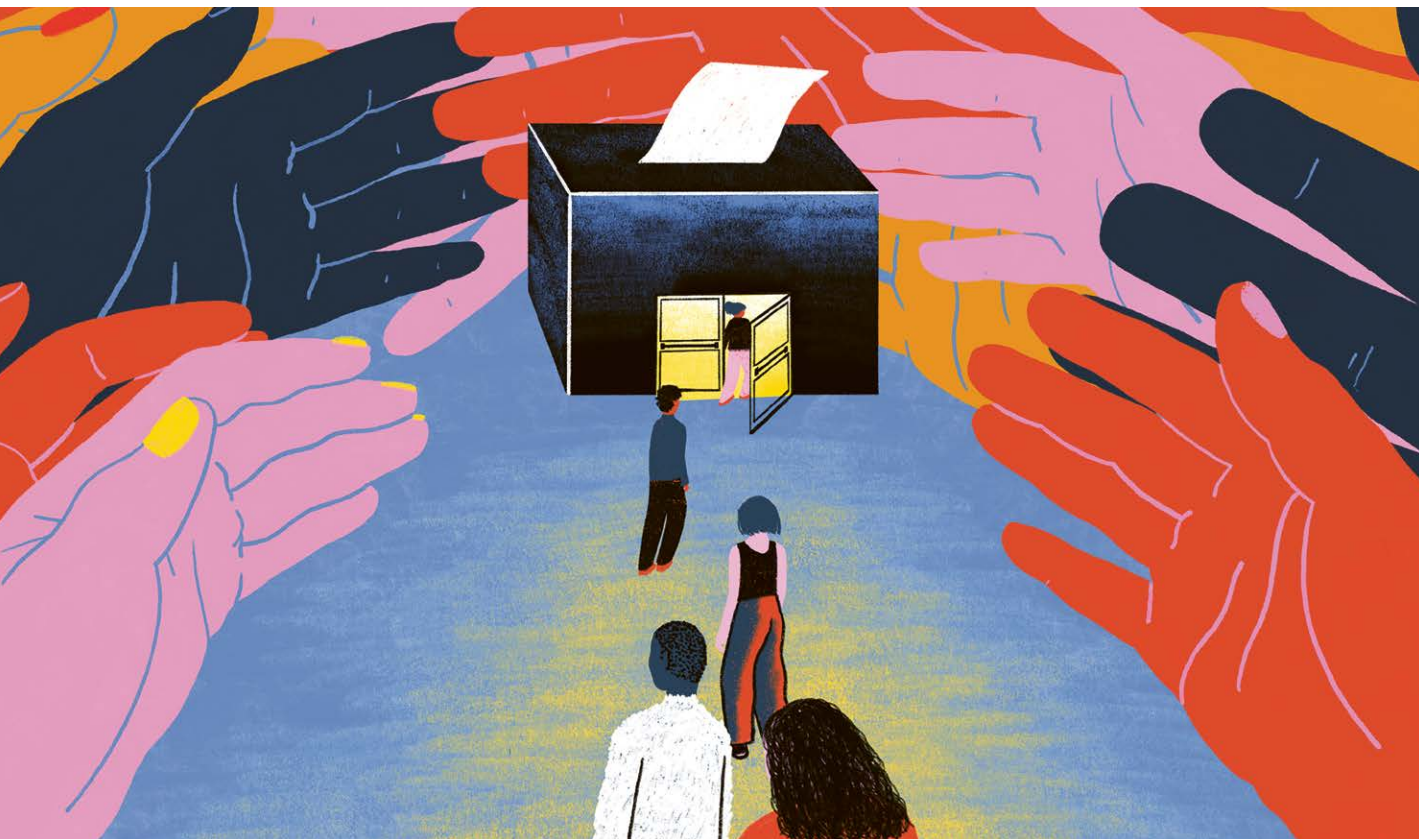
Montana: The ACLU blocked a Montana law that restricted Native American voter participation by reducing critical hours of registration on Election Day.

North Carolina: The ACLU of North Carolina challenged the state's mid-decade redistricting plan, which dismantles a Black district and shifts thousands of Black voters out of their communities of representation. The ACLU is also challenging the state's documentary proof of citizenship requirements.

Pennsylvania: Last year, the ACLU and partners secured an important victory when the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review a case in which Pennsylvania courts had ruled that voters whose absentee ballots are rejected because of a paperwork mistake must still be allowed to vote via provisional ballot.

—JAY A. FERNANDEZ

LEARN MORE
Visit aclu.org/voting-rights.



QUINN RUSSELL BROWN

A Call to Action

ACLU President Deborah N. Archer shares the path forward to true voting equality.

This spring, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered a profound setback to our multiracial democracy. In a 6–3 ruling, the Court struck down Louisiana's congressional map—which had been redrawn to include a second majority-Black district—and severely narrowed Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). By gutting the VRA, the Court has dismantled the primary legal tool that voters of color rely on to challenge discriminatory maps and election systems.

For decades, Section 2 guaranteed that Black, Latine, Native, and other communities of color could elect leaders who reflect their lives and their interests. This ruling discards that guarantee, overturning decades of precedent and endangering the political power of communities in states where the fight for the ballot has never truly ended.

When a community's political voice is stifled, so is its ability to secure better schools, health care access, environmental protections, and economic opportunity. As courts narrow the meaning of equality and policymakers retreat from race-conscious remedies, the responsibility is still ours—organizers, advocates, community leaders, and voters—to prioritize the fight for fair representation, expand participation, and protect every vote.

Last year, on the 60th Anniversary of the historic Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, I had the distinct honor of joining the ACLU and thousands of marchers to reflect on the activists who fought and died for voting rights. We must call on their bravery now more than ever to respond forcefully even when the setbacks are steep.

The ACLU has never stopped fighting when the courts moved against justice. Our state affiliates are focused on legislative fights in Louisiana, Tennessee, and South Carolina, where potential redistricting battles will play out. We will continue to challenge racially discriminatory redrawn maps in federal courts, state courts, and redistricting commissions.

We are also working to advance state-level Voting Rights Acts that restore and exceed the federal protections that the Supreme Court just stripped away and to pass state constitutional amendments to lock



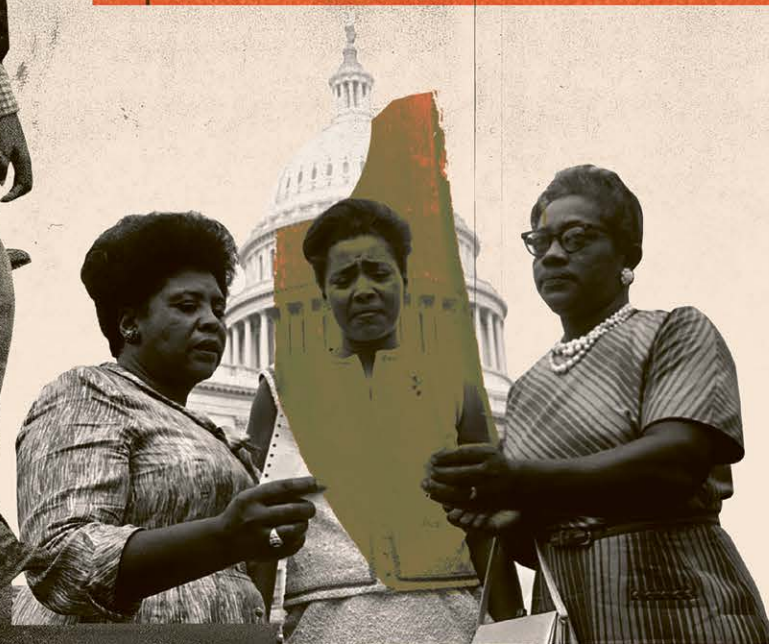
in voting rights protections beyond the reach of any legislatures or courts.

With the help of our grassroots partners and millions of members and volunteers, we are expanding political power to confront these threats on the ground and deepening our investment in voter registration, civic education, and turnout operations in states most impacted by the Court's decision.

Every major civil rights victory has grown out of difficult moments like this one. The ACLU has been on the frontlines of voting rights battles for nearly a century, and we are not stopping now. No matter the obstacles, we will keep fighting until every voter—especially voters who have been disenfranchised for generations—can participate freely, fairly, and safely. This ruling is not the end of the fight; it is a call to action, and together we are answering it.

Deborah N. Archer is the Margaret B. Hoppin Professor of Law at New York University School of Law, where she founded the Community Equity Initiative.

A NEW PLAYBOOK for VOTING RIGHTS



Even as the Supreme Court eviscerated the Voting Rights Act this year, the ACLU of Virginia restored the right to vote for tens of thousands of people with a first-of-its-kind lawsuit in federal court.

By Elise Craig



W

hen Tati Abu King's stepdaughter turned 18, he took her to the polling station to vote for the very first time. "It made me feel good," he says, "because she exercised her right. And it made me feel like I was voting."

King, a 55-year-old man from Fairfax County, Virginia, has never cast a ballot.

He lost the right to vote before he even had it. In 1988, at age 17, he was tried as an adult on robbery charges and served five years in prison. Under Virginia's state constitution, people convicted of felonies were immediately disenfranchised, and their rights were not returned upon their release from incarceration. It didn't matter whether they had completed their sentence or paid restitution; only the governor could reinstate their right to vote, serve on a jury, be a public notary, or run for public office.

Since 1902, this provision of the constitution has had an enormous—and intentional—effect on the state's electorate. The ACLU of Virginia estimates that more than 260,000 Virginians have automatically and permanently lost the right to vote because of a felony conviction. The state has the fourth-highest disenfranchised population in the U.S. (only Florida, Texas, and Tennessee rank higher). And the numbers are particularly damaging for Black Virginians. About one in 10 otherwise eligible Black Virginians can't vote because of a felony conviction.

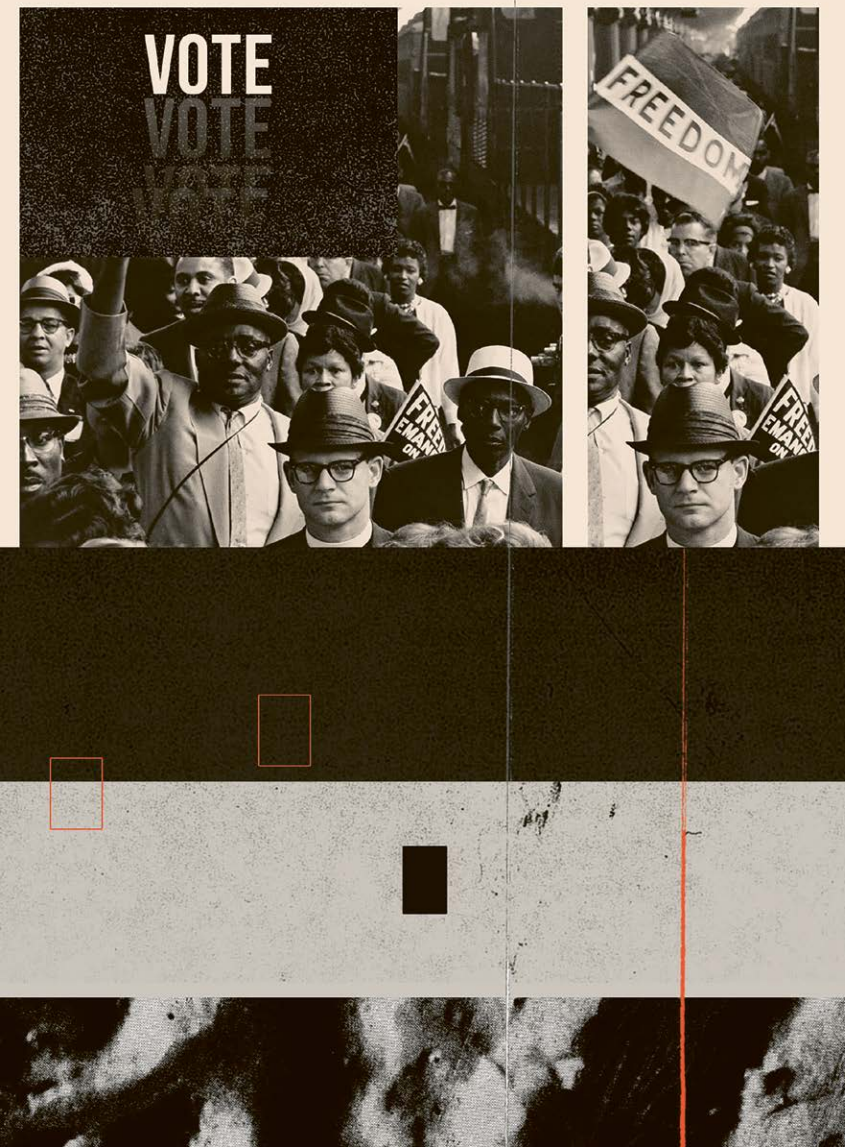
But that's all about to change, thanks to a class-action lawsuit, *King v. Youngkin*, filed by the ACLU of Virginia and partners on behalf of King and other disenfranchised Virginians. In January, a district court judge found that that provision of the state constitution violated federal law. The ruling demonstrates that federal courts continue to check efforts by legislators to chip away at civil rights and restrict access to the ballot.

Now, tens of thousands of Virginians will regain the right to vote. Later this year, King himself will be able to vote for the very first time in his 55 years.

TODAY'S JIM CROW

The fight to restore the rights of the estimated 4.4 million Americans affected by felony disenfranchisement is just part of the ACLU's efforts to protect and restore access to the ballot. For decades, that work has included everything from pushing for the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) to fighting racial gerrymandering, battling cuts to early and mail-in voting, and challenging voter ID laws. The ACLU has also fought to remove barriers to the ballot box for disabled Americans. In many states, it's easier to vote than ever.

And yet, waves of efforts to suppress voting rights are curtailing progress, particularly in the South. In 2011, a record number of voting restrictions were introduced in state legislatures across the country. In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled against one of the key provisions of the VRA—that jurisdictions



FLIP SCHULKE ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

with a history of voting discrimination get preapproval for voting changes. And this year, amid a flurry of partisan gerrymandering efforts across the country, the Supreme Court gutted Section 2 of the VRA, making it much easier for states to dilute minority voting power by redrawing district maps (see sidebar).

Now that the strongest tool for defending voting rights has been severely diminished, continuing the fight will require creativity and out-of-the-box thinking, says ACLU of Virginia Senior Supervising Attorney Vishal Agraharkar.

"We've been relying on the Voting Rights Act as our bedrock law and civil rights principles that have been subject to a long campaign by people who want

to tear down voting rights," he says. "We are finding new approaches to ensure we're able to strengthen the democratic principles that the ACLU stands for. There are still paths forward and reasons for optimism and progress—they just might not be in the usual places."

King v. Youngkin is an example of that kind of creativity.

The ACLU of Virginia's lawsuit hinges on the Virginia Readmission Act of 1870, a Reconstruction-era law signed by President Ulysses S. Grant. The law set the terms for Virginia's readmission to representation in the United States Congress after the Civil War. In addition to requiring the state to ratify both the 14th and 15th Amendments, protecting citizenship, equal protection,

"We are finding new approaches to ensure we're able to strengthen the democratic principles that the ACLU stands for."

—VISHAL AGRAHARKAR, ACLU OF VIRGINIA
SENIOR SUPERVISING ATTORNEY

and voting rights, it also aimed to prevent any attempts to suppress Black Virginians' right to vote. It specifically prohibited lawmakers from depriving any citizen or class of citizens of the right to vote except as a punishment for "common law felonies"—a specific list of 11 crimes, including manslaughter and arson.

But in 1876, lawmakers began amending the state constitution to widen the list to include petit larceny. And in 1902, the state held a constitutional convention to formally adopt common voter-suppression methods like poll taxes and literacy tests, and to strip the voting rights of anyone who had been convicted of any felony at all.

Because of these restrictions, the population of eligible Black voters in Virginia plummeted from around 147,000 in 1901 to about 10,000 by 1905. In 1964, the 24th Amendment outlawed poll taxes, and the following year, the VRA prohibited literacy test requirements, but Jim Crow-era felony disenfranchisement remained in the Virginia constitution for more than 120 years. In modern times, people lost their rights for crimes like forging a check or minor drug offenses and hundreds of others not named in the Readmission Act.

"Virginia's government has blatantly broken the law for more than a century by disenfranchising everyone with a felony conviction—a violation that has disproportionately affected Black and Brown Virginians," Agraharkar said after the January ruling in *King v. Youngkin*. "Today, the Commonwealth is finally free of that Confederate legacy."

The court granted an injunction prohibiting the state from disenfranchising anyone unless they had a conviction for one of the crimes named in the Virginia Readmission Act. Under the ruling, people who have been convicted of other felonies will never lose the right to vote in the first place. However, people who have been convicted of one of the named crimes still cannot vote, even after release.

But that could change this fall. In November, voters in Virginia will have an opportunity to weigh in on an amendment to the state constitution that will automatically give people who have committed felonies the right to vote upon completion of their sentences.* The proposed amendment goes wider than the ruling in the lawsuit, calling for automatic restoration of voting rights when incarcerated people are released—regardless of which crime they have committed.

Nearly a quarter of a million Virginians would see their rights restored.

FIGHTING FOR 'TRUE EMANCIPATION'

The ACLU of Virginia has been fighting felony disenfranchisement for decades, pursuing every available avenue—legislation, gubernatorial action, constitutional amendment—but progress has always been hard-won. “We are pushing Virginia to show the world what a Southern state that wants to protect civil rights and civil liberties can look like,” says the ACLU of Virginia’s Executive Director Mary Bauer. “We’re nowhere near there, but we are moving.”

In 2021, the state’s General Assembly voted to put an amendment that automatically restored rights upon release before voters. But to actually get an amendment on the ballot, Virginia

requires a second vote after an intervening election, and it died in subcommittee in 2022.

Though recent Virginia governors streamlined voting processes, cut waiting periods, and restored the rights of tens of thousands of voters, gubernatorial progress is easily undone by the next governor. In 2023, Governor Glen Youngkin reinstated a discretionary application process for people with felony convictions and declined to discontinue the approval criteria. The number of people getting their rights back plummeted.

All the back-and-forth between administrations is incredibly confusing for people trying to vote. In fact, King says he was legally eligible to vote in 2017 upon completion of probation, but he never received notification and by the time he found out, another charge had already disqualified him.

“We are pushing Virginia to show the world what a Southern state that wants to protect civil rights and civil liberties can look like.”

—MARY BAUER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF THE ACLU OF VIRGINIA

“Each administration has the authority to change the process how they see fit,” says Sheba Williams, executive director of Nolef Turns Inc., an organization focused on reducing recidivism, who herself was disenfranchised. “That has resulted in some people being reinstated after a difficult process, some using a fairly simple process, some being denied, and some not knowing if it’s safe to even apply for restoration.”

In 2023, after the failed second vote and the reinstatement of a discretionary process, the ACLU of Virginia was back at it, working with lawmakers, when the nonprofit Protect Democracy came to the organization with an idea. It had discovered a law review article about the Readmission Act of 1870. “It had been a long time since any kind of case had been brought on the Readmission Act,” says Agraharkar, “but it certainly seemed plausible.”

In 2023, the ACLU and Protect Democracy filed the lawsuit on behalf of King and others. Though the state tried to have it dismissed, it went ahead. In 2025, the ACLU and its partners filed motions for a summary judgment and a class-action lawsuit on behalf of tens of thousands of disenfranchised voters. In January, the judge granted King and all disenfranchised voters who did not commit crimes of common law “true emancipation at the Commonwealth’s ballot boxes.”

“When I went outside and was talking to the legal team, I broke down,” King says. “I mean, I just broke down and started crying. I’m 55 now, and since I’ve been of legal age, I’ve never voted.”

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

“The biggest thing is making sure that all people who are eligible under this ruling are aware, and that they aren’t going to be deterred from exercising their right to register and vote in November,” Agraharkar says.

Given the sheer number of people who have been disenfranchised in Virginia, it could have considerable impact. In particular districts, there could be a substantial influx of new voters.

But Williams would caution people against thinking of the shift in political terms. It’s about democracy, not partisanship. “It impacts everybody,” she says.

At a time when optimism over voting rights has plummeted, it’s important to remember that what has happened in Virginia is what Bauer calls “an astonishing victory.” She adds: “It’s one of the things I love about the ACLU. We don’t give up.”

For King, it’s particularly meaningful that when he casts his first-ever ballot, he’ll be able to help enshrine the right to vote for everyone. He won’t just be taking his stepdaughter to vote or encouraging friends to get to the ballot box. This time, he’ll be leading by example.

“I get to be a part of this,” King says. “I’m going to feel like my vote was the vote that made a change.” ■

THE FIGHT FOR BLACK VOTERS

After the U.S. Supreme Court gutted Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act in April, a wave of Southern states took action to dilute the Black vote ahead of the midterm elections. The ACLU and activists immediately pushed back.

“This fight is going to be much steeper and longer

than we expected,” says Sophia Lin Lakin, director of the ACLU’s Voting Rights Project. “But we are going to lead it.”

Tennessee: After the Court’s ruling, state legislators immediately carved up Memphis—a majority-Black city—into thirds, scattering Black voters across districts. In May, thousands of people gathered at the statehouse to fight back. The ACLU filed a lawsuit on behalf of three individual Memphis voters as well as the Black Clergy Collaborative of Memphis,

the Memphis A. Philip Randolph Institute, and the Equity Alliance.

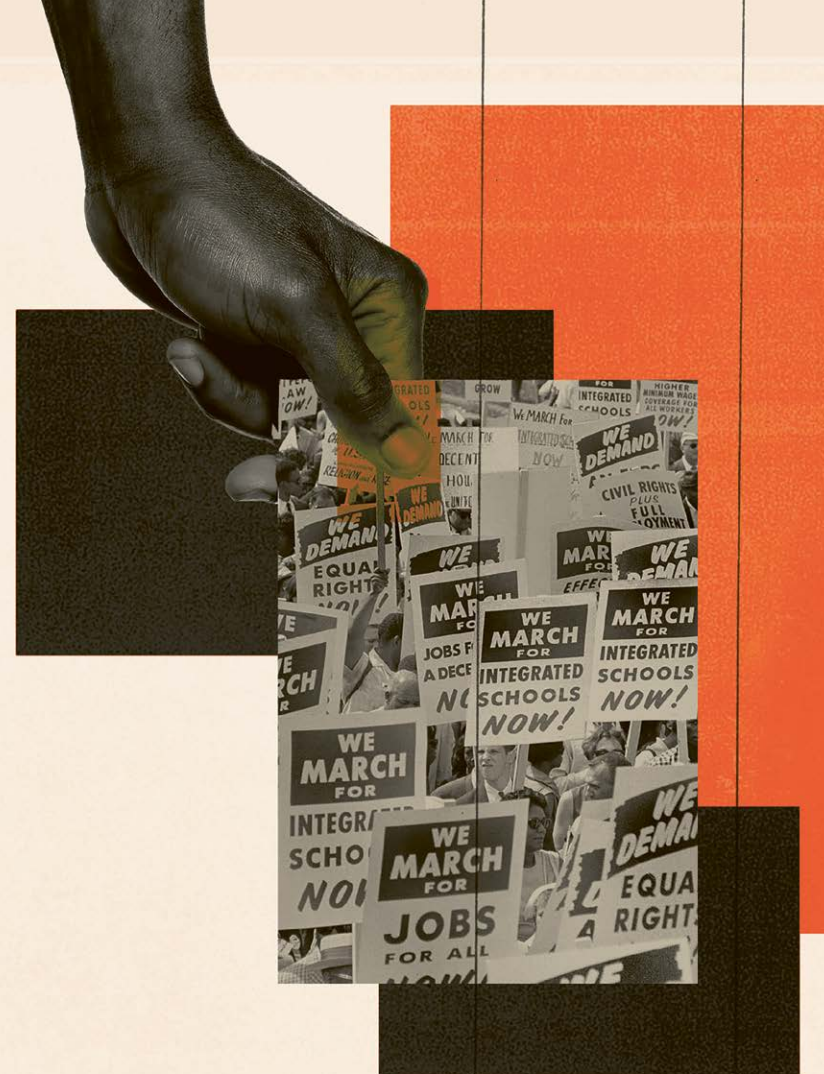
Louisiana: Governor Jeff Landry put the state’s May primaries on hold so lawmakers could redraw district lines. The ACLU sued to block the governor’s order, and Louisiana voters flooded the statehouse in Baton Rouge, testifying against elected officials’ attempts to roll back the clock on voting rights.

Alabama: This spring, the U.S. Supreme Court eliminated a court-ordered

congressional map in Alabama, even though voting had already begun in the state’s primary election. The Court subsequently reinstated an earlier map that intentionally discriminated against Black voters. In May, the ACLU and its voting rights partners mobilized All Roads Lead to the South, a day of action in Montgomery, to protest the dilution of Black votes and protect fair representation.

i To learn about future opportunities to take action for Black voters, sign up at aclu.org/peoplepower.

UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; NEW AFRICA/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



In January, three days after Renee Nicole Good was killed by an ICE agent, thousands marched down Lake Street in Minneapolis.

ICE OUT

Earlier this year, residents of the Twin Cities joined the ACLU of Minnesota to block the Trump administration's authoritarian takeover.

By Rebecca McCray



STAR TRIBUNE/GETTY IMAGES

O

NA COLD morning in early December, **Mahamed Eydarus** woke to find his car covered in snow. It was not an unusual sight for winter in Minneapolis, so he set to work, shoveling out his car and clearing a spot for his mother to park in. Suddenly, six

masked and armed men, flanked by two others with cameras, materialized, seemingly out of nowhere.

“I was focused on shoveling, and I just looked up and saw myself completely surrounded,” recalls Eydarus. “It was extremely intimidating.”

The men refused to identify themselves and began peppering Eydarus and his mother with questions. That’s when he realized they were part of Operation Metro Surge, the massive deployment of immigration agents to the Twin Cities that marked the Trump administration’s most aggressive, targeted crackdown on immigrants.

Mahamed Eydarus, a U.S. citizen, was surrounded by armed agents while shoveling snow last year.



Susan Tincher is a plaintiff in an ACLU lawsuit filed on behalf of protesters who were harassed by ICE.

Eydarus, who is a U.S. citizen, knew that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents were flooding the Twin Cities, and he knew his rights. He declined to give them identification or answer their questions. He began advising his mother to do the same, speaking to her in Somali.

“I knew we were in a very dangerous situation,” says Eydarus.

The agents continued to interrogate Eydarus and his mother, and he continued to ask questions back, both sides refusing to answer. His mother started to cry.

As the encounter unfolded, a group of roughly a dozen neighbors formed on the nearby sidewalk and began filming the interaction.

“I could see their phones, and I could see them recording, and I could see them protesting, and them saying, ‘This is not right,’” recalls Eydarus. “It was very reassuring.” Eventually the agents told Eydarus they had determined he was a U.S. citizen and he was free to go.

Eydarus was a plaintiff in *Hussen v. Noem*, an ACLU lawsuit challenging the discriminatory targeting of Latine and Somali communities in the Twin Cities by officers from ICE, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and other federal agencies. The lawsuit was one part of a multipronged effort by the ACLU to push back against aggressive and unconstitutional tactics used by federal agents and their aftereffects.

Since the start of the second Trump administration, the ACLU has filed more than 100 lawsuits against ICE in states across the country, alongside public records requests and administrative complaints. After Minneapolis resident Renee Nicole Good was shot and killed by an ICE agent, the ACLU and ACLU of Minnesota worked together to plan a National Day of Action and hosted a congressional briefing. Along with more than a thousand protests across the country, the ACLU mobilized supporters with

partner organizations to collectively deliver over 100,000 calls and letters to members of Congress in a single day.

“Peaceful, people-led movements have always created real change,” says Deirdre Schifeling, chief political advocacy officer at the ACLU.

At the height of Operation Metro Surge, there were more than 3,000 federal agents in the Twin Cities. Before the operation, fewer than 200 federal agents were assigned to cover a five-state area that included Minnesota. The federal

government’s incursion was met with swift, organized, and unrelenting resistance from community members.

“The people of Minnesota did an incredible thing,” says Alicia Granse, a staff attorney at the ACLU of Minnesota. “They took time out of their everyday lives. They took time from work, they took time from church, they took time from mosque, they took time from family, and they went out and they documented governmental abuses.... They went out and they helped each other.”



“There’s currently an administration that is willing to just step over people’s rights, and they don’t see the Constitution as sacred.”

—MAHAMED EYDARUS, PLAINTIFF IN AN ACLU LAWSUIT

THE ACLU lawsuit filed on behalf of Eydarus followed another filed by the ACLU of Minnesota in December that represents community members like those Eydarus recalled assembling on the sidewalk during his interrogation. That case, *Tincher v. Noem*, was filed on behalf of six community members who were met with harassment, intimidation, force, and detention while exercising their right to speak freely and assemble during Operation Metro Surge. “*Tincher* is about the rights of everyday Americans to tell the government that they think what it’s doing is wrong,” says Granse, who is leading the lawsuit. “The idea that we don’t have the right to know what our government is doing, and to document what they’re doing and tell other people what they’re doing, is preposterous. It’s not the country that I want to live in, and it’s not the country most people want to live in.”

Susan Tincher, the lead plaintiff, responded to a rapid-response notification in a community group about an ICE encounter in early December. She jumped in her car and drove 12 blocks in the predawn darkness from her home to the location where organizers said

an immigration raid was taking place. Tincher stood on the sidewalk and asked one of the agents present if they were ICE. They moved toward her, and then told her to get back, all in less than 15 seconds.

“I stood my ground there on the sidewalk,” says Tincher. “Then other agents approached, and they knocked me face-first into the snow.... I kind of felt like I was being kidnapped, and that’s why I yelled a lot.”

Tincher was then handcuffed, pulled into a vehicle, and taken to the Whipple Building just outside the city, which is home to a courthouse and detention center. There, some of her clothing and her wedding ring were cut off before she was shackled and detained in a cell for five hours. She was then released without charges.

“I did vow that night when I came out of my arrest that I wouldn’t be cowed by

that,” says Tincher. Undeterred by the violent encounter, she continued to track ICE’s movements with her neighbors, responding to rapid-response calls as she had the morning of her arrest.

Tincher has lived in Minneapolis for 30 years. During the federal operation, a neighbor of hers was detained on his way to work, further strengthening her resolve to fight back. After months in prison, he decided to self-deport without his family.

“No matter how cruel the treatment was that I experienced, it doesn’t come close to what many of our immigrant neighbors are facing,” says Tincher.

Tincher’s response to the attempt to intimidate and silence her was a common thread among neighbors in the Twin Cities. Community members described being followed to their homes by ICE agents, photographed, and pepper-sprayed during the course

“The people of Minnesota did an incredible thing.... They went out and they helped each other.”

—ALICIA GRANSE, STAFF ATTORNEY AT THE ACLU OF MINNESOTA



Maggie Wood was pepper-sprayed by ICE agents after observing the arrest of a neighbor.



Jonny Garcia, a U.S. citizen, was detained by federal agents outside a Target store earlier this year.

pulled him back up. While they were dragging him toward their car, he slipped and hit his head. After they roughly threw him in the backseat, Garcia says he had one thought: his mother.

“I’m just like, she’s not gonna know. She doesn’t know where I’m at,” said Garcia. “No one knows where I’m at.”

The agents drove around with Garcia and his coworker cuffed in the backseat, at times speeding and blasting Mexican music while laughing. During the drive, one agent scanned their faces with a camera. Eventually, they released them, dumping them in a Walmart parking lot.

Garcia was a named plaintiff in the *Hussen* case. In June, the ACLU of Minnesota filed to dismiss the case in order to pursue individual claims on behalf of the plaintiffs. Once complete, the plaintiffs will return to federal court to resume their fight for accountability.

IN JANUARY, **Katie Henly**, who lives in South Minneapolis, decided she wanted to get involved with community efforts to protect immigrant neighbors and document abuses by federal agents. The 40-year-old mother of two has a full-time job in local government and not much free time to spare, but she joined a local monitoring group and soon found herself patrolling the streets with a neighbor on a day when many ICE sightings were reported.

“My purpose that day was just to document what was happening,” says Henly. “If we happened to see any ICE officers approach a home or a person, we would document what was happening, maybe get their name, and just make sure that people don’t disappear on our streets in our neighborhood.”

She and a neighbor she’d never met before began trailing behind a vehicle full of federal agents. It wasn’t clear where the agents were going, and the car made seemingly random turns throughout the neighborhood. Suddenly, its route became clear to Henly.

of Operation Metro Surge. None of these tactics, nor relentless subzero temperatures, was enough to stop community members from showing up as federal agents became omnipresent in their neighborhoods.

Roughly a week after Alex Pretti was shot and killed by federal agents, who fired at him after they had wrestled him to the ground, Minneapolis resident **Maggie Wood** recalled recording the arrest of a community member. She called out to him to get his name as he was tackled and handcuffed by ICE agents. Though she was separated from the agents by a fence, another agent pepper-sprayed her at close range, temporarily blinding her. After other observers helped her, she went home, showered, and considered her next move.

“I kind of took stock, and then I was like, let’s go back out observing,” says

Wood. “I don’t want to be deterred.... I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Wood is one of several community members who’ve since contributed to the *Tincher* lawsuit, describing their experiences with federal agents.

Like Wood, **Jonny Garcia** was eager to observe and document the actions of ICE agents when he heard they were in the parking lot outside the Target store where he works. He went outside and found four agents, including former Border Patrol Commander Gregory Bovino, blocking the path of one of his coworkers, who was recording them with his phone. They asked Garcia, who is Latine and a U.S. citizen, where he was born.

“Fuck you, I don’t need to tell you anything,” replied Garcia, before turning to walk back into the store. Next, an agent tackled him. Multiple agents pinned him to the ground and handcuffed him, then



“I thought, ‘Oh, I know where they’re going. They’re going to my house,’” says Henly. “They turned right onto my street, slowed down, and someone in one of the vehicles pulled out [what] appeared to be a professional camera and just started taking pictures of my house.”

Henly assumes the agents ran her license plate after noticing her following them. She had heard on the news of this happening to other people—ICE agents following them to their homes—but experiencing it was different. She felt a mix of indignation and shock. As a government employee herself, she was appalled by the waste of resources.

After the agents took pictures, they kept driving. Henly continued to follow their car, until the agents abruptly got out of their car at a stop sign and came to Henly’s window. One instructed her to “stop following us.” Henly and her

passenger looked ahead and said nothing. Another agent began photographing her license plates.

The data being gathered by federal agents, which includes photographs and identifying information ranging from names to fingerprints to DNA, is also a target of the *Tincher* litigation. The ACLU is asking that all of the information gathered be expunged from government databases.

TOGETHER, these lawsuits capture the breadth of constitutional violations that pervaded Minnesotans’ lives during the federal occupation. But Catherine Ahlin-Halverson, a staff attorney at the ACLU of Minnesota leading the *Hussen* case, is quick to note that just because the operation formally ended, the federal

Community advocate
Katie Henly observed
federal agents
photographing
her home.

presence in the Twin Cities persists, and the fight isn’t over.

“There’s no question that the depth and breadth of the operation that we saw in January and February has relented,” says Ahlin-Halverson. “But we know there are still hundreds more federal immigration agents on the ground in Minnesota than there were before Operation Metro Surge started. There’s no evidence that they’ve stopped acting unlawfully in their stops and arrests of people.”

The policies that allowed government agents to racially profile and unlawfully arrest people have not been rescinded, so the ACLU’s work continues.

“The agents are still engaging in a lot of the same behaviors and a lot of the same retaliatory conduct,” says Granse. “The ACLU of Minnesota continues to hear from community members about being followed by federal agents, pulled over, and threatened with arrest. They’re still hearing reports of agents pointing guns at community members and yelling at them.”

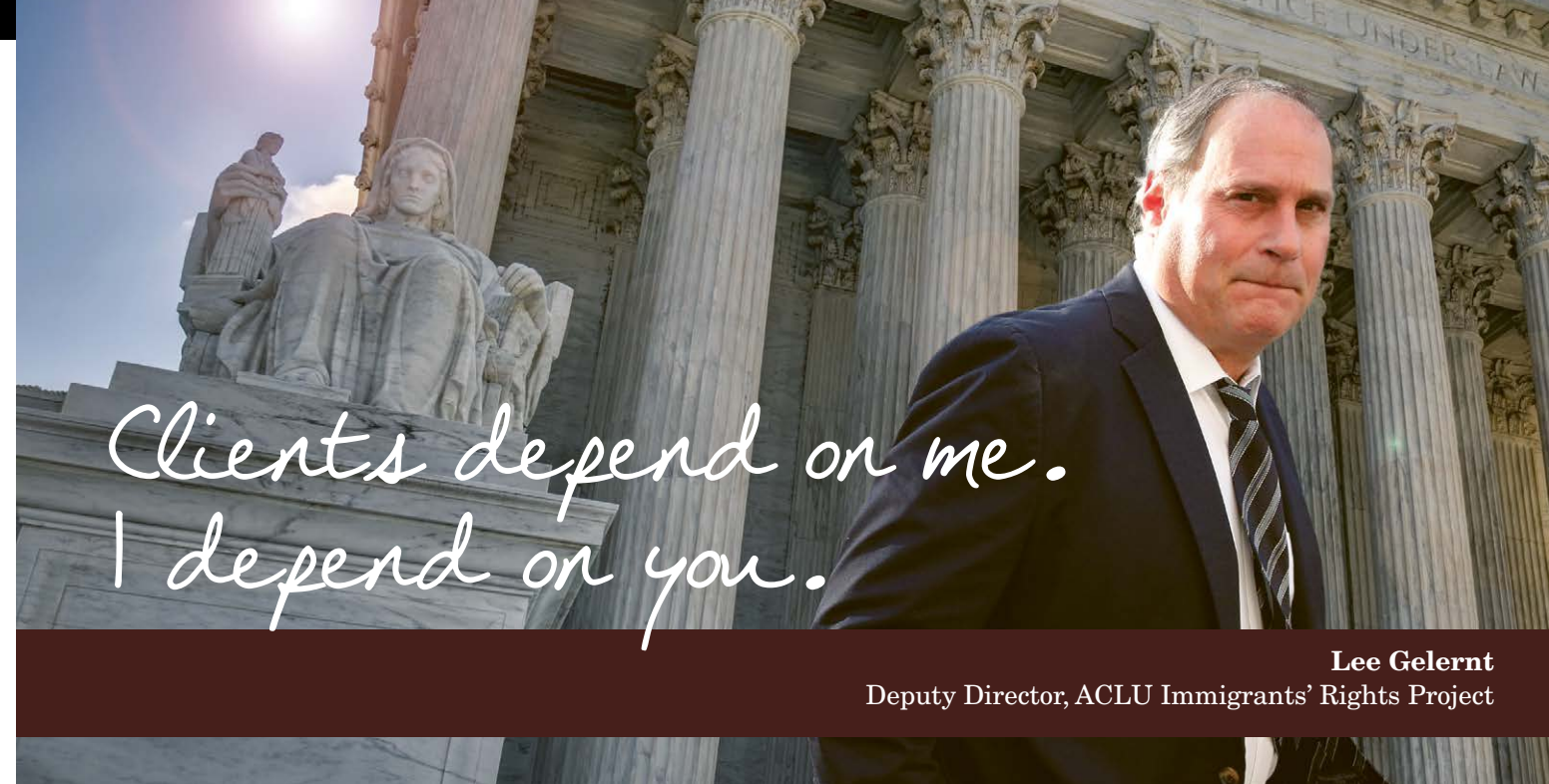
Eydarus emphasized it’s important not to let the nation’s attention fade from what is an ongoing problem, even if the acute crisis is no longer making headlines.

“[The operation] is proof that there’s currently an administration that is willing to just step over people’s rights, and they don’t see the Constitution as sacred, they believe some people are not deserving of those rights,” says Eydarus.

For Henly, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence this summer marks another reason to keep paying attention and keep showing up for her community.

“What happened in Minneapolis was the antithesis of what America was founded on,” says Henly. “We just can’t forget that, and people need to be held accountable.” ■

 **TAKE ACTION:** Contact your legislators and ask them to block any additional funding for ICE and CBP without reforms. Visit [aclu.org/action](https://www.aclu.org/action).



Lee Gelernt
Deputy Director, ACLU Immigrants’ Rights Project

As Deputy Director of the ACLU’s Immigrants’ Rights Project, I have argued some of the country’s highest-profile cases. I know that people like you care deeply and make my work possible. I’m personally grateful for all the ways you are supporting our work.

That’s why I hope you’ll consider increasing your impact by including the ACLU as a beneficiary of your will, trust, or other estate plan.

You can make protecting the rights of all people, including your immigrant family, friends, and neighbors, a part of your legacy.

If you’re like most people, leaving a gift in your will may be the biggest opportunity you have to make a difference. It is a powerful message of the values both you and I support. Thank you on behalf of me, my clients, and all of us at the ACLU.

Learn more about how to include a gift in your will or other estate plan.

Visit [aclu.org/mylegacy](https://www.aclu.org/mylegacy) | Return the enclosed reply envelope | Contact us directly at legacy@aclu.org



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ACLU

TOPPLING INJUSTICE

The ACLU of Louisiana is mobilizing attorneys and activists to block the expansion of an immigration detention system.

By Jay A. Fernandez

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN PELTIER



ON JUNE 26, 2025, SONYA

[a pseudonym, to protect her identity] showed up for a routine hearing on her asylum case in Manhattan and was abruptly seized by masked agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Sonya had fled Ukraine for political reasons and entered the United States in 2005; she'd been a beloved fixture of her Brooklyn neighborhood ever since. ICE sent her to an immigration detention center in Monroe, Louisiana, more than a thousand miles from her home, her husband, and her community.

Sonya is just one of tens of thousands of immigrants unlawfully swept up in ICE's vicious campaign. Last summer, the Trump administration unleashed an aggressive immigration enforcement policy that, for the first time, gave ICE the authority to arrest and lock up millions of people. Many end up in Louisiana, which has the second-highest average daily immigration detainee population in the country. Sonya was incarcerated at Richwood Correctional Center, one of 10 active immigration detention facilities in the state that incarcerated more than

100,000 people between 2025 and 2026. Here, those detained suffer miserable conditions and sometimes simply disappear.

Exacerbating this humanitarian crisis is a shortage of local immigration attorneys. Nearly two thirds of those involved in Louisiana immigration court cases in the last five years have had no legal counsel. Many immigrants who are detained never even see a judge before being deported. Some find detention so unbearable that they choose to self-deport before a lawyer can come to their aid. The surge in immigrant arrests since President Trump regained power has only aggravated these circumstances.

Enter the ACLU of Louisiana's Justice Lab: Immigration, a program that mobilizes volunteer private and public lawyers to submit habeas corpus filings on behalf of immigrants wrongfully detained. These petitions allow citizens and noncitizens alike to challenge their detention as unconstitutional and seek a court order forcing their release. The initiative is the result of years of methodical work led by Nora Ahmed, the ACLU of Louisiana's legal director. Nationally, habeas filings in federal courts have exploded since the start of the second Trump administration: In March 2026 alone, more than 9,000 petitions were filed, up from roughly 100 during the same month the year before. Each filing creates a court record documenting abuses inside the facilities that can be used to build public awareness and force policy changes in the system.

"When an administration or a local government is at war with the people, what can we do to resist?" Ahmed says. "Frequently, it's brave people standing up and attorneys representing them who say, 'We are not going to stand for this. Every person matters.' One by one, they start to add up, and eventually you can topple injustice."

This year, the Trump administration's assault against immigrants has become more chaotic and dangerous, with decreasing oversight. Nationally, more than 60,000 people are now in ICE detention on any given day, and the administration has plans for an expanded warehouse system that would increase capacity to 96,000. Nearly 71 percent of people detained have no criminal conviction. They're housed in dismal conditions: brutally hot or ice-cold temperatures, inadequate access to water, and backed-up toilets and sewage.

In 2025, the ACLU successfully sued the Trump administration over lack of access to legal counsel and violations of due process for people detained at Florida's notorious Everglades immigration center, a hastily constructed compound on an abandoned airstrip. The facility, cruelly dubbed "Alligator Alcatraz," is built out of temporary tents, trailers, and chain-link fences with barbed wire. It is surrounded by alligators, pythons, mosquitos, and swampland, and it's at risk of dangerous flooding.

Along with other human rights organizations, the ACLU has also repeatedly interviewed detained individuals and documented substandard medical care within ICE facilities. The ACLU has sent letters to ICE detailing accounts of



"When an administration or a local government is at war with the people, what can we do to resist?"

violent assaults, sexual abuse, and other forms of intimidation at Fort Bliss military base in El Paso, Texas, the largest immigration detention site in the country. As of March, deaths inside these detention centers now occur at a rate of roughly one every four days.

Last summer, the state of Louisiana reopened the notorious Camp J at Louisiana State Penitentiary, aka Angola, which the ACLU of Louisiana had helped shut down in 2018 because of inhumane conditions. Those conditions haven't changed, as current detained immigrants report long periods of isolation in dirty cells, withholding of medical care, and severe restrictions on speaking with attorneys and family. At the end of 2025, ICE revealed plans for a warehouse in Hammond, Louisiana, that would hold up to 9,000 more detainees.

Across the country, grassroots organizers and local advocates have joined the ACLU to block and delay ICE's plans for expansion. In New Hampshire, for example, the ACLU and partners mobilized thousands to confront ICE's plan to repurpose a warehouse in Merrimack for immigration detention. Residents called their representatives and showed up to town meetings in force. As a result of the coordinated protest effort, the Department of Homeland Security did not move forward



with the Merrimack facility. State leaders in Maryland, New Jersey, and Michigan have all filed lawsuits to halt the development of warehouses in their states. In the Maryland case, a judge blocked a new detention center, noting that the sewage system could not serve hundreds of people.

The ACLU of Louisiana's Justice Lab began as a collaboration with more than 70 law firms and legal clinics to hold police accountable for racially discriminatory policing and unconstitutional misconduct across the state. Since its launch in 2020, the project has secured more than a dozen legal victories and nearly \$1.5 million in reparations for survivors of police violence. Justice Lab: Immigration similarly uses the legal system to create a documented record of injustice while seeking immediate relief for clients in detention.

Ahmed and Sarah Gillman, then cofounder of the nonprofit Rapid Defense Network and now director of strategic U.S. litigation at the Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center, collaborated on model legal paperwork for immigrants in detention. In 2022, they visited the River Correctional Center

in Ferriday and discovered that as many as 300 immigrants were in detention there. (That number has nearly doubled since, stretching capacity at the facility.)

They prioritized visiting clients consistently, staying on site all day, and building relationships with facility staff. Two years of conducting legal rights presentations at every detention center in the state culminated in their August 2024 report, "Inside the Black Hole: Systemic Human Rights Abuses Against Immigrants Detained & Disappeared in Louisiana." It outlined appalling conditions: abusive and discriminatory treatment, lack of access to basic hygiene and food, and denial of care for medical emergencies.

Despite this, even supportive partners were skeptical that their legal strategy could be effective in such a conservative federal court district. But opinions shifted after Ahmed, Gillman, and their teams represented two married Louisiana State University graduate students who were unlawfully detained by ICE at their home in Baton Rouge in June 2025, despite having entered the U.S. from Iran on valid visas. The court sided with the husband's petition on all counts a few weeks after his arrest, and he and his wife, who was detained at a different detention center, were released. Suddenly the

ACLU of Louisiana and co-counsel were carving out a potential pathway to justice.

"That is what I view as the catalyst for really bringing hope," says Ahmed, "that in the midst of this administration's lawlessness, we could still get courts to follow the law. From there, we started working to create a model for how this could be done, taking on cases we thought could form the foundation for others."

Sonya became one of the Justice Lab's earliest successes: She finally returned home in October 2025. A few weeks after freeing Sonya, the ACLU of Louisiana won the release of Carlos Ventura Martinez, a Salvadoran husband and father with no criminal record who had lived in Maryland for 12 years before being detained at Jackson Parish Correctional Center under the same mandatory policy. Like Sonya, he was granted bond by an immigration judge only for the Board of Immigration Appeals to vacate it. The subsequent ruling that his detention was unconstitutional had the potential to impact thousands of similar cases in the region. The Lab then expanded its advocacy to secure the release of detained pregnant women and children with special juvenile protected status.

"The Justice Lab's approach to impact litigation is so important," says Gillman. "If you look at the litigation they've brought and are using to mentor other attorneys, it's very responsive to the individual needs of the client." The attorneys also adapt and adjust their strategy in real time with each court ruling.

The Justice Lab's volunteer legal corps continues to grow to meet increased demand. As of late April 2026, it had partnered with the Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center, Tulane Law School, the National Immigration Project, and the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, and it continues to recruit attorneys through community events. The ACLU of Louisiana's goal is to build a roster of at least 50 litigators who can practice law in federal courts to represent people from across the country detained within the state. A volunteer coordinator now handles the influx of people looking for legal help, and Ahmed holds weekly office hours where volunteers and legal partners can ask and answer questions and share strategies.

Federal attorneys and seasoned immigration lawyers with clients who aren't detained in Louisiana now come to Justice Lab for advice, and ACLU affiliates in New Jersey and New Mexico are considering similar programs.

"It's really a self-empowerment model," says Ahmed. "It's empowering everyone across the country to come and assist in this fight in Louisiana, because you've got a 50-percent chance of ending up in this jurisdiction."

The Lab's efforts continue to produce positive results. The courts have issued orders to compel greater government responsiveness and increased transparency about deportation

"In the midst of this administration's lawlessness, we could still get courts to follow the law."

plans. And in a huge win, the court issued an order for federal public defenders to represent habeas petitioners who cannot afford legal counsel, which means more detained immigrants will now have legal counsel.

At the same time, narrative shifting has been a crucial part of Justice Lab's strategy. The act of repeatedly bringing cases against the government has educated judges about the scope of the problem, ICE's punitive motivations, and the disastrous effect on people's lives. Cases that once failed are now being adjudicated differently.

"In order to win, you first have to be willing to lose," Ahmed says. "We take on the fight anyway, and we document it. That's something that the attorneys of this generation—at least those of us who do civil rights work—have to contend with. It's incredibly important work. It can build a record of hope."

Though the freedom of immigrants like Sonya remains at risk in the face of government retaliation, the ACLU of Louisiana's Justice Lab has established a bank of positive case law that can benefit a wide range of detained immigrants. And the Lab's model habeas paperwork for detained individuals without an attorney is now available in every immigration detention center in the state.

"It's heartbreaking that we can't help every single person," says Gillman. "But what we hope to do is to take cases that have impact and that can then be scaled. It's important to remember that history is long, and real change is incremental. Every bit counts."

"We the people can do this," adds Ahmed. "Sometimes we need to win small to win big." ■



COMMUNITY

CREATIVES FOR FREEDOM

High Note

Uniting communities to defend democracy has never been more urgent—and what unites people better than music? The ACLU teamed up with Ben & Jerry’s, Gabriela Hearst, and YOLA Mezcal to host a benefit concert in Brooklyn on November 22, 2025, through the ACLU’s Creatives for Freedom—an initiative that brings together brands, artists, and audiences from across creative industries to amplify the ACLU’s work. Nine-time Grammy winner Sheryl Crow headlined a lineup featuring Mark Ronson, St. Vincent, Maggie Rogers, Taylor Meier, Mon Rovia, Joy Oladokun, Andrew Wyatt, and more. “I just want you guys to know that we artists don’t take it lightly that our First Amendment is under attack,” Crow said at the concert. “These artists right here, I have great hope and faith in.” —TOM VELLNER

The ACLU’s sold-out Creatives for Freedom concert was held at Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, New York.

BRE JOHNSON/BFA.COM

Born in the U.S.A.

Bruce Springsteen championed the ACLU's fight for birthright citizenship.

To increase awareness of the landmark birthright citizenship case at the Supreme Court, the ACLU launched a national ad campaign in March showing vignettes of American life—a birthday at the kitchen table, a high school marching band, a wedding celebration—set to Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." In a rare move, Springsteen authorized the ACLU's use of the song to highlight what was at stake in the case. "It's our pleasure to be working with the ACLU, and they finally put 'Born in the U.S.A.' to some good and righteous use," Springsteen told *Democracy Now!* In June, the Supreme Court

ruled that President Trump's efforts to strip citizenship from American children born to undocumented parents were unconstitutional.

Springsteen and the E Street Band also showcased the ACLU's work at concerts on their Land of Hope and Dreams American Tour. "[The song] captures what birthright citizenship has made possible for generations: the simple, powerful guarantee that if you are born here, you belong here," said ACLU Executive Director Anthony D. Romero. "If you're born in the U.S.A., you're an American. Period."

—TOM VELLNER

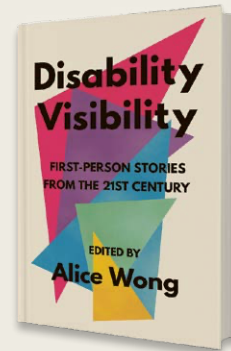
"It's our pleasure to be working with the ACLU, and they finally put 'Born in the U.S.A.' to some good and righteous use."

—Bruce Springsteen



Bruce Springsteen performs with the E Street Band on May 27 at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C. The ACLU was the concert's featured organization.

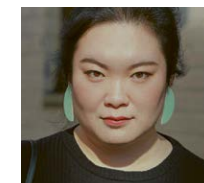
LEARN MORE Dive deeper into the ACLU's fight for immigrants' rights at aclu.org/immigration.



Disability Visibility

Through her founding of the Disability Visibility Project, the late activist and writer Alice Wong amplified the lived experiences of people with disabilities. Edited by Wong and published by Vintage Books in 2020 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the anthology *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories From the 21st Century* is an essential part of her advocacy. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one in four people in the United States live with a disability, but their stories continue to be underrepresented. This collection of personal essays uplifts the voices of activists, lawyers, artists, and more to celebrate and document disability culture. In the wake of Wong's passing last year, her advocacy continues to shape national conversations around disability rights.

—T.V.



Forward, Together

Illustration and text by Lisk Feng

This illustration reflects the quiet resilience of ordinary people facing constant pressure and uncertainty. Like branches bending in strong wind, survival is not found in rigidity, but in the ability to adapt, endure, and continue growing through difficult times.

PAUL MORIGI/GETTY IMAGES

HO TAO

Making Voting Accessible for Michiganders With Disabilities

Disability activist Dessa Cosma is shedding light on her state's inaccessible polling places.

Dessa Cosma started the nonprofit Detroit Disability Power (DDP)—which ensures that the 130,000 Detroiters with disabilities (80,000 of whom have mobility disabilities) have full access to the city, from transit to housing—just before Michigan's primary elections in 2018. She had recently moved, and as someone who uses a wheelchair, she had no

idea if she would be able to get inside her new polling place. The building did have a ramp, but after Cosma got her ballot, she saw that there were only standing-height voting booths.

"I turned back to the election official, and I said, 'Hey, where should I vote?'" Cosma recalls.

Despite federal laws that require equal access and accommodations at polling

places, Cosma's was not prepared for voters like her.

She had a DDP advisory board meeting that same night, and she told her story to the group, all people with disabilities. "They were like, 'Oh yeah, let me tell you what happened to me,'" said Cosma, who is also a board member of the ACLU of Michigan, which works to amplify DDP's efforts. "Every one of us practically had a story of how voting hadn't been accessible to us in some way because we were blind or because we were a wheelchair user."

DDP had found its new mission.

The nonprofit began auditing accessibility at polling places, and the program grew from ad hoc reports from voters with disabilities into a comprehensive survey system designed in partnership with the Carter Center. DDP's most recent audit, released in April, found that 90 percent of 415 Election Day polling places across seven counties in southeast Michigan do not meet basic accessibility requirements, threatening equal voting rights for people with disabilities.

The work now is to raise awareness and ensure that this bar is met both locally and elsewhere. "Because if we can't access democracy," Cosma says, "then how are we going to change policies and culture?"

—WILLY BLACKMORE

Dessa Cosma is the founder and executive director of Detroit Disability Power.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BRITTANY GREESON

Tom Alonzo traveled to Washington, D.C., last year with fellow veterans, organized by the ACLU and partners, to demand Congress stop President Trump's domestic military deployments.



A Portrait of Protest

The ACLU's Portraits of Protest series details the stories of people who courageously fought back against the Trump administration's efforts to suppress our civil rights and liberties. Together, the series reveals the strategy and strength necessary to defeat the administration's unlawful attacks on our most fundamental freedoms. This is Tom Alonzo's story.

Tom Alonzo is a United States Air Force veteran and LGBTQ advocate in Kansas. After President Trump was sworn in for his second term, Alonzo watched the politicization of our troops, their deployment into American cities, and the treatment of transgender military service members with increasing concern. So, he joined the ACLU and his fellow veterans last October to bring a message to Congress: "Our federal troops do not belong in the streets. They do not belong policing civilians."

As the Trump administration continued its efforts to sow fear and consolidate power by deploying federal agents and National Guard troops to cities across the country, the ACLU and state affiliates responded

with a coordinated strategy combining litigation with organizing, advocacy, and public pressure.

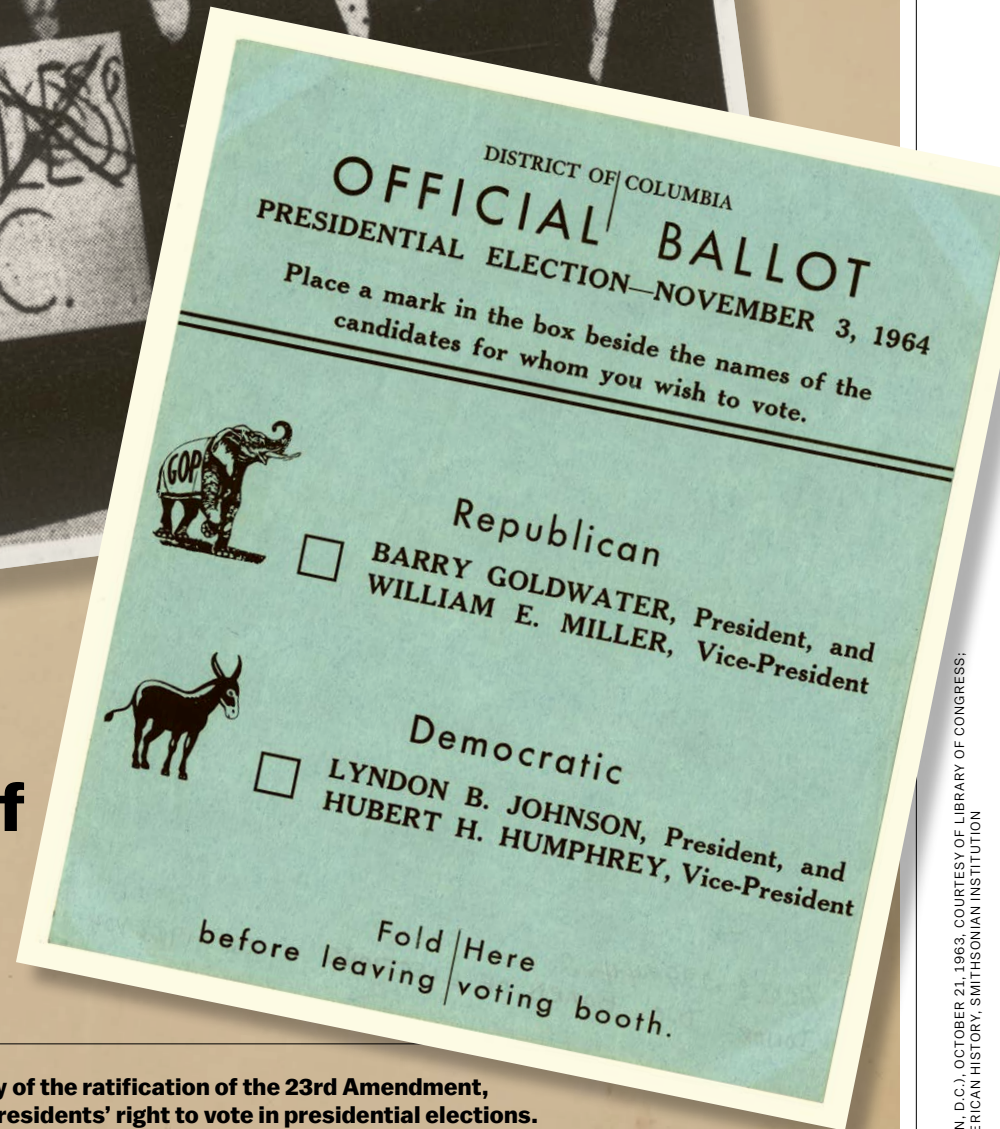
More than 400,000 ACLU supporters nationwide took action to challenge the administration's deployments, and over 80,000 people joined the ACLU's Know Your Rights trainings to learn about their legal protections and prepare for protests. With the ACLU, Alonzo and his fellow veterans from across the country traveled to Capitol Hill to meet with more than 40 congressional offices, sharing their stories to urge Congress to stop President Trump's militarization of American cities.

"It was an incredible experience, because it seemed like people were listening to us, and as veterans, we had skin in the game," Alonzo says. "It seems like every time I turn around, the ACLU is popping up and doing something for political freedom."

Alonzo knows that this fight can be discouraging at times. "I'm just a person that loves his state in spite of the people who run it and don't love all of us," he says. Yet, he believes that every person in our country has a role to play in the fight to defend our civil rights and liberties. "We're capable of greatness and we're capable of compassion."

i LEARN MORE At the ACLU, we're celebrating people like Tom who give us hope and inspire us to do more. And we want to hear from you. Whose activism has inspired you? Share your story at aclu.org/portraits.

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Ratification of the 23rd Amendment March 29, 1961

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the ratification of the 23rd Amendment, which recognized Washington, D.C., residents' right to vote in presidential elections. The ACLU of D.C., which is also celebrating its 65th anniversary, is still advocating for D.C. residents to have full congressional representation. After the Civil War, in response to Black voters beginning to exercise their political power in D.C., Congress replaced the city's local government with federally appointed commissioners, stripping the majority-Black region of its full voting rights.

While the 23rd Amendment was a critical step forward, the ACLU continues to fight to end the disenfranchisement of the capital's nearly 700,000 residents. "When we defend D.C., we are defending democracy," says ACLU of D.C. Executive Director Monica Hopkins. —TOM VELLNER



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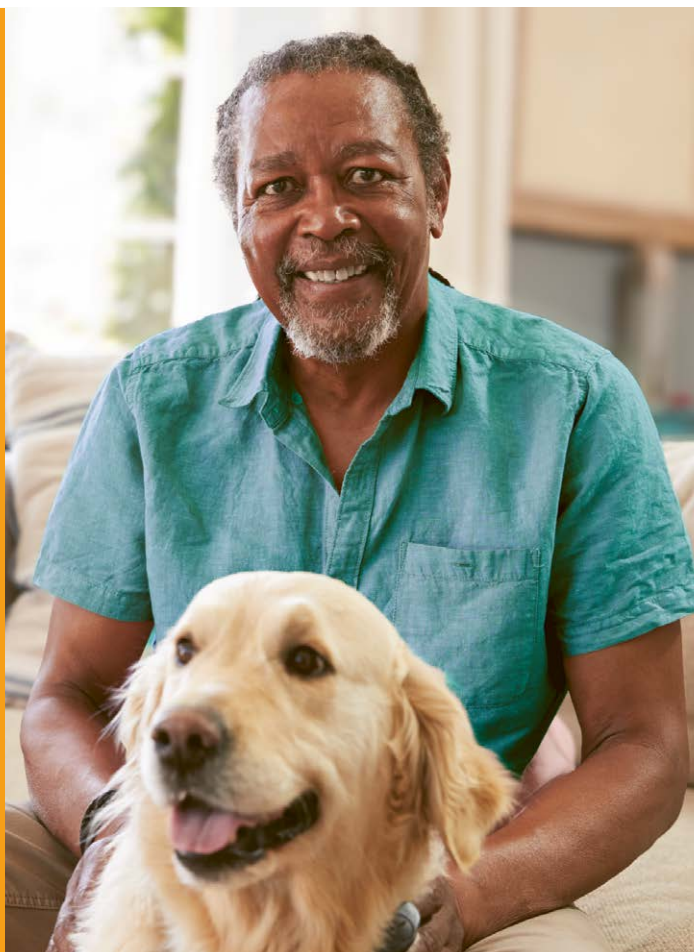
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