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ACLU

Kentucky

DEFENDING FREEDOM. BUILDING POWER.

EXECUTIVE UPDATE

*Rights rarely disappear all at once. More often, they erode slowly.
A book removed here. A voice silenced there.*

That is why the work of the ACLU of Kentucky matters so deeply right now.

Over the last several months, our legal team defended two Northern Kentucky journalists arrested while covering protests, challenged retaliation against a Kentucky mother banned from her children's school over social media posts, and secured a major injunction restoring books, curriculum, and cultural programming in Department of Defense schools serving military families. These cases were more than legal arguments. They were about protecting the basic freedom to speak, learn, and participate fully in public life.

In Frankfort, we helped pass the Family Preservation and Accountability Act, a rare bipartisan victory rooted in a simple idea: accountability and family stability do not have to be opposites. Directly impacted Kentuckians helped move this issue from politics to something more human and more honest.

And across Kentucky, we spent this past year doing something increasingly rare in modern public life: showing up in person. During our 70th anniversary year, we traveled the Commonwealth meeting with supporters, coalition partners, advocates, and directly impacted Kentuckians face-to-face, having honest conversations about the work ahead and the stakes in front of us. People showed up. They volunteered, organized, shared their stories, and invested in this work because they understand what is happening in this moment and what is at risk if communities stay silent.



That understanding matters because the challenges in front of us are not abstract. In February, Juan Miguel Munoz Penalver died inside Louisville Metro Department of Corrections. He was just 21 years old. He was the 23rd person to die inside LMDC since December of 2021, raising urgent questions about accountability, transparency, and dignity within our justice system. At the same time, voting rights continue to face growing pressure nationally, just as Kentucky prepares for a major election year, with every House seat and half of the Senate on the ballot. The decisions made in these elections will shape our schools, our justice system, our freedoms, and the future of communities across the Commonwealth.

But this year has also reminded us of something important: engagement still matters. Courage still matters. People still have the power to create change when they organize and refuse to give up ground.

That is the work ahead of us. And together, we are meeting it.



In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amber L. Duke".

Amber Duke
Executive Director

LEGAL UPDATE

ELECTIONS UNDER ATTACK: *(U.S. v. Adams)*

For decades, the Voting Rights Act served as the nation's strongest protection against racial discrimination in elections, helping ensure Black and Brown communities could participate fully in American democracy. But in recent years, key parts of that law have been weakened through court decisions and coordinated political attacks, opening the door to new barriers to voting and growing efforts to challenge voter access across the country.

The consequences are real. When communities fear intimidation, surveillance, or targeted scrutiny, participation drops. Trust erodes. Democracy weakens.

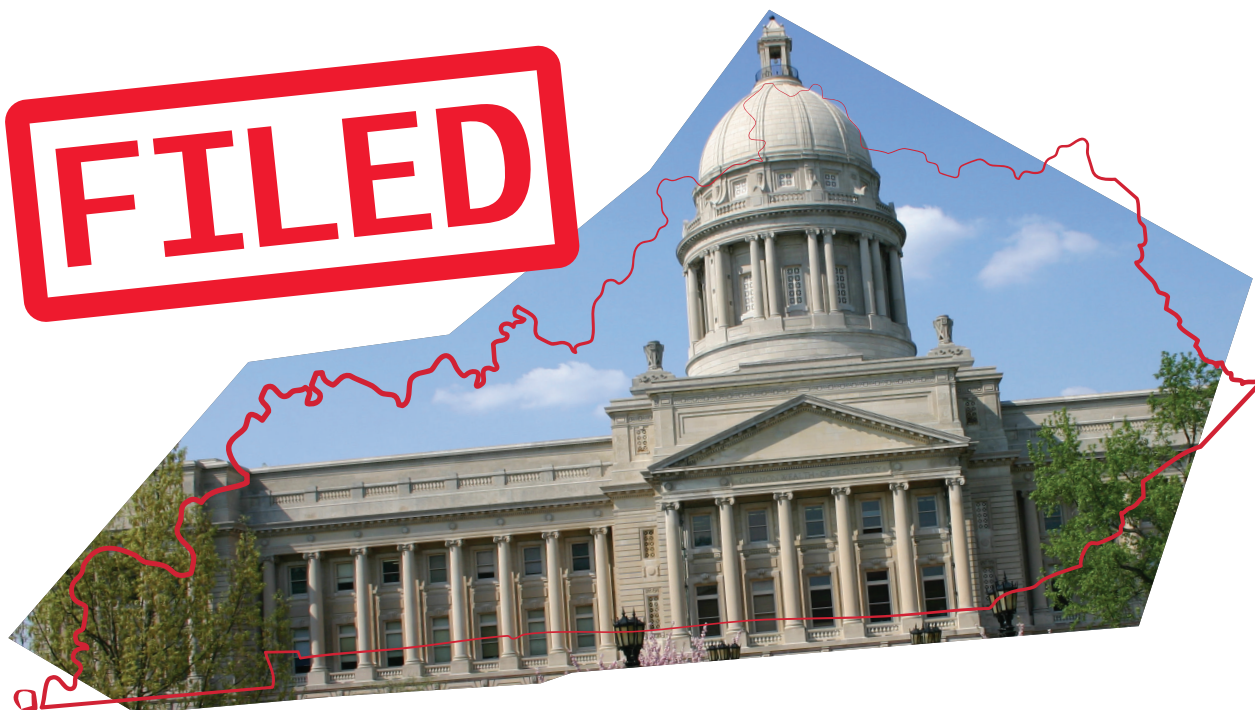
That is why the ACLU of Kentucky intervened when the U.S. Department of Justice sought access to sensitive voter data belonging to Kentuckians, including dates of birth, driver's license information, and partial Social Security numbers. Alongside voting rights partners and individual voters, we are working to protect

Kentuckians from an unprecedented effort to collect protected voter information and build a national voter database without meaningful oversight.

For many Kentuckians, particularly naturalized citizens and historically targeted communities, the implications were serious. People should not have to wonder whether registering to vote could expose their personal information to misuse or intimidation. Protecting the freedom to vote also means protecting the people behind the ballots.

As Kentucky prepares for a major election year, the stakes could not be clearer. Every House seat and half of the Senate will be on the ballot. The future of our schools, our justice system, and our civil liberties will be shaped by who participates and whose voices are heard.

That is why we will continue fighting in courtrooms, communities, and the legislature to protect voting rights for every eligible Kentuckian. And it is why your support matters now more than ever. Democracy only works when people are free to participate without fear.



IMPACT LITIGATION:
Restoring the Right to Learn
(EK v. DoDEA)

When the federal government moved to strip books, lessons, and cultural programming from Department of Defense schools serving military families, families fought back - and won.

In *EK v. DoDEA*, a federal court issued a sweeping injunction restoring access to previously banned books, reinstating inclusive curriculum, and allowing schools to once again recognize cultural observances like Black History Month. For thousands of students,

the impact was immediate: classrooms returned to places of learning, not censorship.

This was more than a legal victory. It was a human one. Families like Jessica Henninger's - who stepped forward in Ft. Campbell Kentucky to challenge the policy made it possible. Her willingness to stand up, publicly and persistently, reflects what it takes to defend constitutional rights in real time.

Although the government is appealing, the message is simple. When the government overreaches, we push back. And when civil rights are on the line, we do not give an inch.



IMPACT LITIGATION:
Standing Up for Free Speech
(Jones v. Jenkins)

When a Letcher County mother was banned from her children's school over her social media posts, the consequences were immediate and deeply personal. Elizabeth Jones could no longer attend her children's games, walk into the school, or even safely pick them up. Instead, she was forced to drop them off across the street, creating real concerns for their safety and well-being.

The ACLU of Kentucky stepped in to challenge the school district's actions, arguing that public officials cannot punish a parent for protected speech, or exclude them from their children's education without clear rules and due process.

At its core, this case asks a simple question: can a school shut a parent out because it doesn't like what they say? The answer must be no.

Because if it can happen to Elizabeth Jones, it can happen to anyone.

ADVOCACY UPDATE

The 2026 legislative session reminded us of something important: progress is still possible, even in places where many people have stopped expecting it.

THE FAMILY PRESERVATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The ACLU of Kentucky helped lead the successful campaign to pass the Family Preservation and Accountability Act (FPAA), a landmark piece of legislation that rethinks how the Commonwealth approaches accountability, public safety, and family stability. Built through an unlikely coalition of advocates, impacted families, community partners, and bipartisan lawmakers, the legislation empowers judges to consider community-based alternatives for primary caregivers convicted of certain offenses.

At its heart, the bill recognizes something Kentucky families have known for years: punishment does not happen in isolation. When a parent disappears into the criminal legal system, children, grandparents, and entire communities absorb the consequences.

For directly impacted Kentuckians, the issue was never theoretical. And, in sharing their stories, they helped move this campaign beyond politics and into something more human.

Stories like Gavin's helped move this campaign beyond politics and into something more human. This victory was not about being soft on accountability. It was about being honest enough to ask whether our systems are actually making families and communities stronger.

The passage of the FPAA was a rare and meaningful legislative victory in the South, and it did not happen by accident. It happened because people organized, spoke out, shared painful truths, and refused to accept that Kentucky could not do better.

The impact of this legislation will reach far beyond courtrooms. Kentucky has one of the highest rates in the nation of children with an incarcerated parent, and too many families have experienced the lasting trauma that separation creates. The FPAA recognizes a simple truth: children should not have to serve their parents' sentences.

By investing in proven alternatives that reduce reoffending, strengthen families, and cost taxpayers less than incarceration, Kentucky is choosing a smarter path forward, one rooted not just in punishment, but in long-term public safety, recovery, and stability.

And perhaps most importantly, this victory showed what is possible when directly impacted Kentuckians, advocates, and lawmakers come together around solutions that put people first. Miracles do occasionally happen in legislative chambers. Usually right after everyone says they can't.

Now, our work continues. From advancing public safety reforms in Louisville to strengthening civic engagement and identifying the next generation of policy priorities, we remain focused on building a Commonwealth where dignity, fairness, and opportunity are not reserved for a select few.



ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT: BRITTANY & GAVIN HERRINGTON



For Brittany and Gavin Herrington, the fight to pass the Family Preservation and Accountability Act (FPAA) was never political theater. It was personal.

When Gavin was just two years old, Brittany was incarcerated while struggling with addiction after repeatedly asking for treatment and support. Instead of receiving help, she was sent to jail and later prison, leaving Gavin to grow up missing his mother during some of the most important years of his childhood.

Gavin remembers saying goodnight to his mother's picture and running to the mailbox hoping for letters or drawings from her. Brittany remembers the guilt and heartbreak of missing those years, pain she still carries today.

But their story did not end there. Brittany eventually received treatment, rebuilt her life, and became a peer support specialist

helping others navigate recovery. Gavin grew into an honor roll student, athlete, and powerful advocate in his own right. Together, they transformed personal trauma into public purpose.

Throughout the fight for the FPAA, Brittany and Gavin shared their story across Kentucky and in Frankfort, reminding lawmakers that incarceration does not just affect the person sentenced. It reshapes entire families.

Their courage helped move this legislation from policy discussion to human reality. Because behind every statistic is a child missing a parent, a family trying to hold itself together, and a community hoping for a better path forward.

Thanks to advocates like Brittany and Gavin, Kentucky is beginning to choose that path. Human beings are remarkably resilient creatures. We break each other, heal each other, and occasionally even learn from it.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: RICHELLE HARRIS



Every organization has people whose work gets public attention. And then there are the people quietly making sure everything actually works. At the ACLU of Kentucky, Richelle Harris is one of those people.

Richelle joined the ACLU of Kentucky in 2021 after first serving as an intern during the legislative session. A graduate of the University of Louisville and the Kent School of Social Work, she was drawn to advocacy through her passion for policy and social justice.

As Advocacy Administrative Assistant, Richelle helps keep the organization running smoothly behind the scenes. From financial processes and compliance to keeping projects on track, her work creates the structure that allows the team to move forward effectively.

“Working at the ACLU of Kentucky was my dream job because I truly believe in our mission,” Richelle says. “My job isn’t the most glamorous on paper, but I’ve learned so much and feel incredibly grateful to work alongside my colleagues, community partners, and volunteers every day.”

Around the office, Richelle is known as the person who keeps the train on the tracks. Steady, thoughtful, and deeply committed, she represents the backbone of the work we do every day.

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Last year, as we celebrated our affiliate's 70th anniversary, the ACLU of Kentucky set an ambitious fundraising goal: \$550,000. Together, our supporters helped raise more than \$938,000.

That is not just a successful fundraising year. That is a statement. One that says loud and clear, Kentuckians like you trust that the ACLU of Kentucky remains a fierce protector of our civil rights and liberties.

At a moment when civil liberties are increasingly under attack across the country, Kentuckians chose to invest in building long-term people power here at home. Your support allows us to organize directly impacted communities, train citizen advocates, educate voters, strengthen coalition partnerships, respond swiftly in courtrooms, and equip people across the Commonwealth with the tools to defend their rights and shape their futures.

Those investments matter. They help place more power in the hands of Black and Brown communities, strengthen movement infrastructure across Kentucky, and create pathways for directly impacted Kentuckians to lead. They also help us continue building an organization that reflects the communities we serve.

This spring, we also gathered with supporters across Central Kentucky for a series of inspiring events, including The Alabama Solution, our Spring

Summit at the historic Lyric Theatre & Cultural Arts Center, and a special screening of *To Kill a Mockingbird* at Kentucky Theatre.

These events brought Kentuckians together around a shared belief that lasting change happens when communities are informed, organized, and connected to one another, raising \$12,000 to support the work of the ACLU of Kentucky.

That sense of connection and momentum matters, because the work ahead will require all of us. Attacks on free speech, reproductive freedom, immigrant rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and democratic participation are accelerating, not slowing down.

That means this work cannot pause. We must press forward with intention and drive.

Every donation, whether it is \$10 or \$10,000, helps ensure we can continue fighting in the courts, in the legislature, and in communities across Kentucky. More importantly, your support helps build the kind of durable, statewide power that outlasts any one election cycle or legislative session.

Thank you for showing up when it matters most. Not simply as donors, but as partners in the ongoing work of protecting freedom in Kentucky.

**To make
a donation,
scan here.**



SAVE
the
DATE

Join us on
November 5th
as we celebrate the return
of The Carl L. Wedekind Bill
of Rights Dinner!

We will gather in support of the work of the ACLU of Kentucky and hear from Keynote Speaker Deborah Archer, National ACLU President and leading expert in civil rights, civil liberties, and racial justice, and an award-winning teacher and legal scholar.

— THE —
CARL L. WEDEKIND
BILL
of
RIGHTS
— DINNER —



You can find more information,
including sponsorship and ticketing info,
by visiting www.aclu-ky.org/bill-of-rights/



VOLUNTEER WITH US:

Our work depends on volunteers like you talking with lawmakers, helping us with text and phone banks, and getting your friends to fill out petitions.

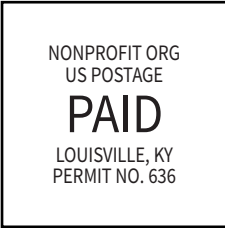




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