ACLU Kentucky

2026 IMPACT REPORT



70 YEARS OF ADVOCACY

FIGHTING BACK

FIGHTING FORWARD

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

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MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

70 Years, and Forward.

This fiscal year, the ACLU of Kentucky marked 70 years of defending civil liberties across the Commonwealth. That milestone gave us an opportunity to look back. More importantly, it reminded us why the work continues.

This year, we challenged censorship in schools serving military families, defended journalists facing criminal charges, fought for government transparency and voter privacy, and represented Kentuckians whose freedom of speech was threatened. In Frankfort, years of advocacy helped move the Family Preservation and Accountability Act through the General Assembly and on to the Governor's desk where it was signed into law.

We also continued showing up alongside communities confronting threats to immigrant rights, reproductive freedom, LGBTQ+ equality, privacy, and equal protection.

The issues have changed over seven decades. The responsibility has not.

Since 1955, this organization has relied on people willing to challenge government overreach, defend unpopular speech, demand accountability, and insist that constitutional rights belong to everybody. This year showed that this work remains every bit necessary today. ACLU-KY's 70th anniversary theme, "Fighting Back, Fighting Forward," reflected that connection between the struggles of the present and the work required to build something better.

The pages ahead tell just some of that story, in the courts, at the Capitol, and in communities across Kentucky. We are grateful to our clients, partners, volunteers, supporters, staff, and everyone who has carried this work forward for 70 years.

And we are ready for what comes next.

In solidarity,



Amber Duke
Executive Director



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President,
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Anella Wetter

IMPACT LITIGATION

Rights Defended in Court

Throughout this year, the ACLU of Kentucky used litigation to challenge censorship, defend a free press, demand government transparency, protect privacy, and represent Kentuckians whose constitutional rights were threatened.



Jessica Henninger, a military parent who challenged book censorship in DoDEA schools

Putting Books Back on the Shelves

In April 2025, ACLU-KY joined the ACLU of Virginia and national ACLU in challenging censorship in Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools.

Our lawsuit was a response to the Department of Defense's decision to remove books and change curricula involving race, gender, immigration, and other subjects. In October, a federal judge ordered the government to stop censoring materials in the plaintiffs' schools and restore access to books and curricula while the case continued. DoDEA had identified nearly 600 titles for removal or review. DoDEA is currently appealing that ruling.

The case puts a basic First Amendment principle into practice: students do not lose access to ideas simply because those ideas become politically controversial.



ACLU-KY Legal Director Corey Shapiro speaks with PBS NewsHour about the DoDEA censorship case.

Journalism Is Not a Crime

ACLU-KY also defended journalists facing criminal charges connected to their reporting.

In September, the organization successfully defended a journalism student facing charges. In November, attorneys secured dismissal of the remaining charges against another journalist arrested while covering an immigration protest at the Roebling Bridge in Kenton County.

ACLU-KY again defended a basic First Amendment principle: a free press must be free to document events of public importance.

Privacy and Accountability

This year also brought legal action over what government officials must disclose, and what amount of privacy we still have.

ACLU-KY sued Louisville Metro over withheld records concerning the Inmate Observer Program inside Louisville Metro Corrections, eventually securing a court order requiring their release.

In March, ACLU-KY and its partners moved to protect sensitive Kentucky voter information sought by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Government should be transparent about its own actions and accountable when seeking access to our private information.





Lucas Griffith with ACLU-KY attorneys Bill Sharp and Bethany Baxter, and cooperating counsel Tom Pugh, following his trial.

IMPACT ADVOCACY

Years of Work. One Major Step Forward.

The Family Preservation and Accountability Act was built around a straightforward idea: when appropriate, accountability (especially for a drug or property crime) should not unnecessarily destabilize an entire family.

Throughout the year, ACLU-KY worked with lawmakers, coalition partners, advocates, and directly impacted Kentuckians to build support for the legislation. Families shared firsthand experiences of parental incarceration. Advocates returned to Frankfort. Lawmakers from both parties worked across differences.

By the end of Spring, the legislation had completed its journey through the General Assembly and on to the Governor's desk where it was signed into law.

The accomplishment was years in the making. It required policy development, coalition building, public education, direct advocacy, and people willing to tell lawmakers what parental incarceration had meant in their own lives.

That is what legislative change often looks like: slow work, sustained long enough to produce progress.



KY Governor Andy Beshear signs Family Preservation and Accountability Act.



70 Years: Fighting Back, Fighting Forward

In 1955, the organization, now known as the ACLU of Kentucky, began as the Kentucky Civil Liberties Union.

Seventy years later, the methods remain familiar: go to court when rights are violated, challenge government overreach, educate people about their freedoms, organize alongside communities, and keep pushing institutions to live up to constitutional promises.

Throughout 2025 and into 2026, ACLU-KY marked its 70th anniversary under the theme "Fighting Back, Fighting Forward." Anniversary events began in Lexington and crossed the Commonwealth. Each stop included opportunities to reflect on the organization's history while focusing on the civil-liberties challenges still ahead.

The anniversary year coincided with work that made the theme tangible: challenging censorship in Department of Defense schools, distributing Know Your Rights information to immigrant communities, defending free speech, and advancing a new strategic plan focused on democracy, systems of oppression, and community leadership.

Seventy years is worth celebrating – thank you for celebrating with us and showing up, making our 70th year one of our most impactful. Your generous support spanning seven decades has made this work possible. But longevity by itself is not the accomplishment.

What matters now is what we do with it moving forward.



ACLU-KY Senior Staff Attorney Bill Sharp and Executive Director Amber Duke connect with community members at an event in Morehead, KY.

COMMUNITY IMPACT:
SHOWING UP ACROSS KENTUCKY

For 70 years, ACLU-KY's work has depended on more than what happens inside courtrooms and the State Capitol.

It depends on relationships with people and communities across the Commonwealth.

Throughout the year, staff, volunteers, partners, and directly impacted Kentuckians gathered to share information, learn about their rights, build connections, and advocate for change.

Showing up for the Right to Dissent

The ACLU of Kentucky joined Kentuckians at No Kings demonstrations standing alongside our people exercising their First Amendment rights to speak, assemble, and challenge government power.

The demonstrations were part of a nationwide series of nonviolent protests focused on presidential power, government accountability, and the right to dissent. Millions participated across the country in 2025.



For ACLU-KY, showing up in these spaces reflected a principle that has guided our work for 70 years: democracy depends on people being free to raise their voices, especially when they disagree with those in power.

A Path Forward through Amnesty Court

The ACLU of Kentucky continued supporting Amnesty Court, a special docket that gives eligible people with outstanding bench warrants a chance to return to court, resolve their cases, and move forward without fear of arrest.

For many participants, a missed court date can keep them tied to the justice system for years. Amnesty Court offers a way to finally resolve those cases, move on with their lives, and avoid unnecessary time in an already overcrowded jail.

Building on this work in Louisville, ACLU-KY plans to help expand Amnesty Court to Lexington in the next year.



Amber Duke leads press conference announcing Amnesty Court.

Building Community in Central and Eastern Kentucky

The ACLU of Kentucky continued its advocacy tour across the Commonwealth, creating space to sit with directly impacted Kentuckians, listen to their experiences, and learn more about the challenges shaping communities across the state.

In Ashland, we hosted a community meet-and-greet focused on bringing neighbors together, building relationships, and connecting people with those working on the frontlines of civil liberties in Eastern Kentucky.

We carried that same spirit to Lexington for our Spring Summit. This event brought Central Kentuckians together at the historic Lyric Theatre & Cultural Center for conversation, connection, and reflection on the future of civil liberties in Kentucky. Staff, board members, community partners, and local voices helped ground the discussions in the experiences of the people most affected by the issues we work on.

These gatherings were part of a broader strategy and commitment to meet people where they are, listen before acting, engage more volunteers, and ensure our advocacy is intentional, sustainable, and informed by the communities it is meant to serve.

BY THE NUMBERS

15
STAFF MEMBERS

443
VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENTS

1,533
SUBMISSIONS FOR ONLINE ACTION FORMS

61
LEGISLATOR MEETINGS

768
INDIVIDUAL FOUNDATION DONORS

8,339
ACLU OF KENTUCKY UNION MEMBERS

245
BILLS TRACKED

1,183
TOTAL NUMBER OF UNIQUE FOUNDATION DONATIONS

SCAN CODE TO DONATE OR VISIT ACLU-KY.ORG/DONATE

A NOTE FROM DEVELOPMENT

As we reflect on our 70th year, we are extremely proud and deeply grateful for our supporters across the state, whose continued generosity proves just how vital the ACLU of Kentucky is to our community. The wins described in this report are only possible because of your deep commitment to our work. We surpassed our initial fundraising goals for the year because YOU, our extraordinary donors, continue to show up to protect fundamental civil rights and liberties across the Commonwealth.

Your financial support was and remains essential to the ACLU of Kentucky's readiness to challenge systemic oppression,

safeguard democracy, and empower our neighbors. We know you will continue to fight alongside us, making sure our work is sustainable, and our team remains prepared to face the challenges ahead. Your steadfast support enables us to confidently face what's next, giving us collective hope for a better, more equitable future ahead.

We are grateful for how you powered this momentum, and we know that with your continued partnership, we will stand strong for the next 70 years.

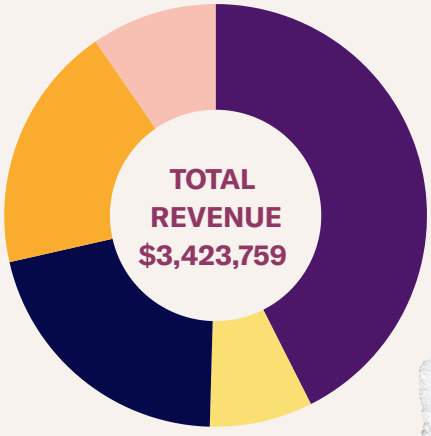
In Solidarity,

Jill Seelmeyer

Jill Seelmeyer
Development Director

FINANCIALS

- Revenue from National ACLU: **$1,338,179**
- Event Revenue: **$248,021**
- Grant Contributions: **$660,661**
- Individual Contributions: **$595,515**
- Other Revenue: **$302,292**

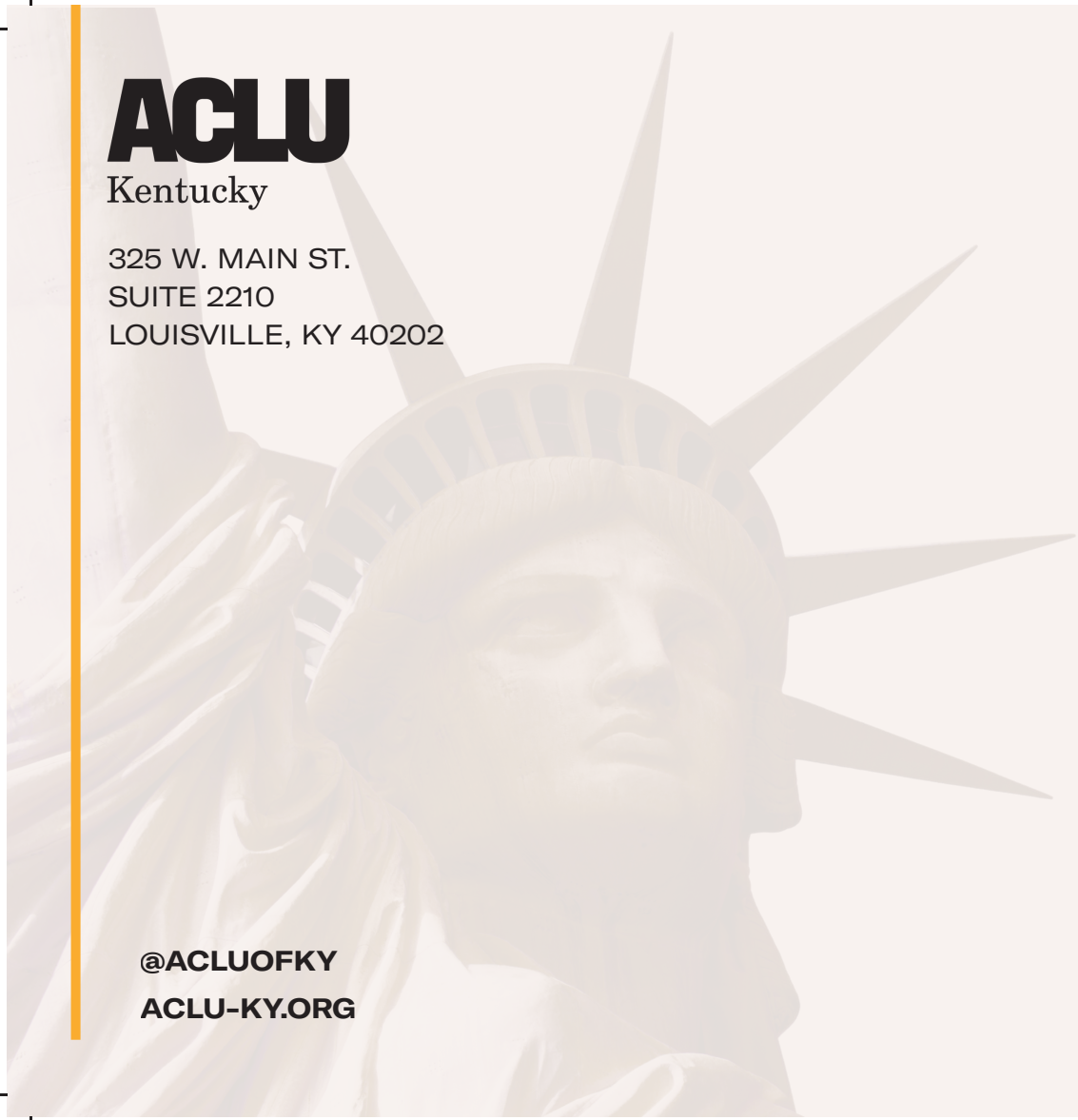


- Programs: **$1,651,396**
- Fundraising: **$655,977**
- General Operations & Administrative: **$525,612**



NET INCOME: $590,774

*Consolidated audited statement for ACLU-KY and ACLU-KY Foundation, Fiscal Year 26 (April 1, 2025 - March 31, 2026)



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