

THE TORCH



70 YEARS

Years in Kentucky

SPRING 2025

70 YEARS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES: ROOTED IN RESISTANCE

From our Executive Director

For 70 years, the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky has worked to protect and expand civil liberties for the people of the commonwealth. The organization was founded on the premise that everyone living in Kentucky is deserving of the same rights, freedom, and liberties guaranteed to all people by the Constitutions of the United States and the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

The Kentucky Civil Liberties Union grew from acts of resistance. When Anne and Carl Braden helped Andrew and Charlotte Wade, a Black Kentucky family, buy a house in a white neighborhood, they planted a seed. The Wades suffered vandalism and violence at the hands of their own neighbors and community members, and our organization grew out of the need to fight injustice and discrimination.

As time went on, we branched out to become more than a legal resource for Kentuckians. We began to advocate for more equitable policies, and to empower directly impacted people to use their collective power to create change. While we continue to litigate cases on behalf of clients who are disenfranchised, we have expanded our capacity and worked toward setting a course for the future.

Kentucky needs a strong ACLU, and we look to the strength of those who came before us to prepare for every hurdle that comes our way. Today, our challenges seem more complicated, but the roots of our work are the same. As we reflect on the history of this organization, we recognize the strength of our beginning and the enduring necessity of our existence.

In honor of this special anniversary year, we are hosting seven events in seven different areas of Kentucky to celebrate. We will use this time to be in community with our partners and supporters, inform people of our work, and connect with the people we're fighting to protect. We hope to see you this year.



In solidarity,

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

Amber Duke
Executive Director



Students from the University of Louisville protest attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in 2025. Photo: Murphy Meador



We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish
insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to our
and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article I

Section 1. All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

DISSENT

entitled to no more; May eight, Delaware one, Maryland six, Virginia three, New York six, and Georgia three.

When vacancies happen in the Representation of any State, the Executive Authority thereof shall issue Writs of Election to fill such Vacancies.

The House of Representatives shall choose their Speaker and other Officers; and shall have the sole Power of Impeachment.

Section 3. The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, chosen by the Legislature thereof, for six Years; and each Senator shall have one Vote.

Immediately after they shall be assembled in Consequence of the first Election, they shall be divided as equally as may be into three Clases. Of the Senators of the first Class shall be vacated at the Expiration of the second Year, of the second Class at the Expiration of the fourth Year, and of the third Class at the Expiration of the sixth Year, so that one-third may be chosen every second Year; but if Vacancies happen, they shall be filled in such Manner as the Legislature may direct.

is not grounds

President, or Judge, or Officer, or Minister, or any Person holding any Office under the United States, shall be liable to Impeachment. Impeachment shall not extend further than to removal from Office, and Disqualification to hold and enjoy any Office of Trust or Profit under the United States; but the Party convicted shall nevertheless be liable and subject to Indictment, Trial, Judgment and Punishment according to Law.

Section 4. The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of choosing Senators. They shall assemble at least once in every Year, and such Meetings shall be on the first Monday in December, unless they be otherwise by Law.

for deportation

Section 6. The Senators and Representatives shall receive Compensation for their Services, as well as Expenses in going to and returning from their respective Houses, and in going to and returning from any other Place.

No Senator or Representative shall, during the Time for which he was elected, be appointed to any civil Office under the Authority of the United States, which shall have been created, or the Emoluments whereof shall have been increased during such time; and no Person holding any Office under the United States, shall be a Member of either House during his Continuance in Office.

Section 7. All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives; but the Senate may propose or concur with Amendments to any Bill passed by the House of Representatives.

LEGAL UPDATE: FIGHTING BACK, FIGHTING FORWARD

Challenging the New Administration

Donald Trump signed a record number of executive orders in his first few months back in office. Many of these orders have no basis in legal reality, but the impact is echoing across the country. The ACLU was built for times like these, and we stay ready for anything that comes our way.

In the first 100 days of the Trump administration, National ACLU filed 110 legal actions. More than 1 million ACLU community members have taken action since Election Day, more than 14,000 have been trained as volunteers, and more than 150 Know Your Rights trainings have been held across the country.

Defending the First Amendment

EK v DoDEA

We are collaborating with our partners at ACLU National and our neighboring affiliate in Virginia to challenge book bans and changes to curriculum at schools on military bases run by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) made in response to those executive orders from the Trump Administration. The ACLU is representing a group of DoDEA students and their families, ranging in grades from pre-kindergarten to high school, whose educational opportunities have been limited by these executive orders, including two families at Fort Campbell in Kentucky. The lawsuit asserts that President Trump's Executive Orders infringe on the plaintiffs' First Amendment rights and seeks the reinstatement of removed books and curricula.

Between January 20th and January 29th, 2025, President Trump signed three Executive Orders which ban topics such as "gender ideology" and "discriminatory equity ideology" from federally funded K-12 education. Since then, DoDEA, which provides pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary education to approximately 67,000 dependents of military personnel around the world, has removed books, parts of curriculums, and cultural awareness celebrations from school grounds.

DoDEA has placed hundreds of school library books in "quarantine," reviewing them for permanent removal. These books include award-winning titles such as "To Kill a Mockingbird," "Fahrenheit 451," "The Kite Runner," "A Queer History of the United States," as well as hundreds of other books about gender, class, and race. Additionally, DoDEA educators have been instructed to alter their curriculums to remove mentions of gender, race, immigration, and various facets of developmental health.

All students have the right to receive an education with open, honest dialogue about America's history.

Restoring Abortion Access in the Commonwealth

Our case challenging Kentucky's abortion bans, *Poe v Coleman*, continues. Our legal team is hard at work in the discovery process, and though the legal system moves slowly, we remain undeterred. The coming months should bring a court appearance and an opportunity to convince the court of what we know to be true – decisions about reproductive care are complicated, private, and should remain between patients and their medical caregivers, without government interference.

Fighting for Transgender Youth

We are still waiting for the Supreme Court of the United States to rule in *US v Skrametti*, the case that will determine whether bans on medically necessary care for trans youth violate the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution. The case will also likely determine the next steps in our case, *Doe v. Thornbury*, challenging Kentucky's law banning trans youth health care.

So much is at stake for the transgender community, who have been unfairly targeted with increasing cruelty for years. While some may dismiss these attacks as "culture wars," the lasting damage is real and lasting. We will continue to fight for the constitutional rights of every Kentuckian – when one person is denied freedom, we are all denied freedom.

Protecting Immigrant Communities

Targeting immigrant populations has been a key focus of this administration. Across the country, federal agents have raided workplaces, homes, and schools, and are detaining people without due process.

Locally, we have worked to promote Know Your Rights information for workplaces, schools, places of worship, and individuals. Information published on our website and social media channels can help guide individuals and communities on how to respond if they interact with law enforcement. Most importantly, we are working to be sure everyone knows that a signed judicial warrant is the only thing that can compel a person to interact with ICE.

We have also joined other nonprofits and organizations to form the Louisville Coalition for Immigrant Support, a coalition formed to support our immigrant neighbors proactively to prevent crises and reactively to address immediate needs to keep individuals safe and families together.

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

This year marks our 70th year defending civil rights and liberties in the commonwealth. To celebrate, we are heading out to seven areas in Kentucky to meet with our members and supporters, make new connections, and let people know they aren't alone in the fight. We met in Lexington on May 18 at the historic Lyric Theater, but if you missed us there, you can join us in one of these locations:

- Paducah
- Morehead
- Northern Kentucky
- Bowling Green
- Louisville

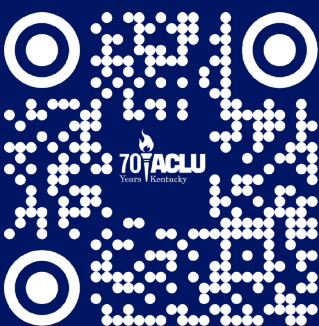
We could not continue our work without you and your support. Our team is small, but we are devoted to a future where every Kentuckian enjoys equality, freedom, and liberty.

We are called to do this work for a variety of reasons. Some of us are directly impacted by the systems we are working to reimagine. Some of us know that abuse of power never stops with just one group of people. Some of us just don't like bullies. ALL of us dare to create a more perfect union.

Board of Education • Newburg Area Council, Inc. • Jefferson Board of Education • United States v. Dudley • Board of Hopkins County • Waddell • Clark v. Shelbyville School District • United States v. Charles • Associated Students of Danville • Board of Regents Eastern Kentucky • Gray v. Board of Registration • Jefferson v. Kentucky Education • Gannett • Whitehouse • Election • Eubanks v. P. • Jefferson • Wolf v. S. • Plouffe v. First Security National Bank and Trust Company of Kentucky • Board of Trade • Wilson • Marshall v. Brainer • Socialist Workers Party v. Extra Shirt Company • Gibson v. FCI of Lexington • Ashland • Commonwealth of Kentucky v. Wasson • Burkhardt v. Eastern Kentucky University • United States v. Scott County Sheriff • ACLU v. Wilkinson • Klein v. Kenton County Board of Education • Williams v. Ellington • Doe v. • Commonwealth v. Welch • Canale v. Hardin County Board • Ayer v. Armstrong • Birch v. Jefferson County •

70th **ACLU** **Years** **Kentucky** **FIGHTING BACK** **FIGHTING FORWARD**

SAVE THE DATE
Friday, November 1, 2025
5:00pm - 7:00pm
Speed Art Museum Grand Hall
2035 S. 3rd St., Louisville, KY 40208



SCAN HERE
TO SEE
HOW TO
SUPPORT
OUR WORK

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

KYGA 2025

During the 2025 Kentucky General Assembly, we put forth a piece of legislation aimed at helping caregivers who face incarceration, and we continued our defensive efforts to minimize the impact of legislation that threatens civil rights and civil liberties.

Proactive Criminal Legal Reform

The Family Preservation and Accountability Act

For too long, lawmakers in Kentucky have relied almost exclusively on incarceration as a response to the unmet needs of Kentuckians suffering with substance use disorder, mental illness and poverty. The Advocacy Team worked to craft legislation to point us in a different direction.

The Family Preservation and Accountability Act is a solutions-focused policy that addresses the root causes of crime. This bill encourages sentencing alternatives for Kentuckians who are parenting and are convicted of low-level offenses where support services would be a more effective intervention.

With strong bipartisan support and tremendous activity from our volunteers, this legislation passed out of committee and the full House unanimously! We will take this momentum into the interim and return in 2026 to get the bill across the finish line.

Clean Slate Efforts Continue

For Kentuckians who have completed the requirements of criminal sentencing, the expungement process can be difficult and costly, creating barriers for those who want to fully participate in their communities. The Clean Slate Kentucky policy proposal takes this complex process and modernizes it, meaning individuals who have maintained a clean record after completing their sentence will have their records sealed, without the need for burdensome paperwork or unaffordable fees.

This change would benefit over 500,000 Kentuckians who deserve the opportunity to rebuild their lives. By removing these barriers, Clean Slate Kentucky would allow more people to contribute fully to their families and communities. This legislation has strong bipartisan support and has already passed in 12 states and Washington D.C. It's time for Kentucky to do the same.



Senator Julie Raque Adams and Representative Nick Wilson introduce the Family Preservation and Accountability Act at a press conference during the 2025 Legislative Session. Photo: Angela Cooper

Defending Basic Rights for All

As we anticipated, attacks on marginalized communities became more focused and frequent than ever before. These attempts to deny already oppressed groups their dignity, access to education, healthcare, and more will not be allowed to take hold without a fight.

The legislature passed laws denying medical care to transgender Kentuckians on Medicaid and transgender people who are incarcerated in Kentucky. They also overturned the Governor's Executive Order banning conversion torture on children in the commonwealth. And anti-intellectual, anti-diversity lawmakers passed a bill stripping Kentucky's postsecondary institutions of their diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, leaving the commonwealth unwelcoming to students from marginalized communities and widening gaps in equitable access to education that took decades to fill with diversity initiatives and affirmative action.

Laws like these will cost taxpayers far more than they will save, in litigation and the cost of treating people who are denied the care they need. The time to leave draconian laws in the dust has long passed, but if the Kentucky General Assembly continues to pass antiquated and cruel legislation, we will continue to resist.

The Continued Fight for Reproductive Freedom

Last year, the legislature failed to address Kentucky's costly and dangerous abortion ban. This year, they saw fit to recognize the fact that this ban on healthcare is killing people and dramatically impacting the state of reproductive healthcare, not just for patients, but for providers.

In the final days of session, lawmakers added language to a bill about freestanding birth centers that included harmful rhetoric and biased, inaccurate terminology that has been soundly rejected by medical professionals. The additional language creates a limited list of emergency situations when abortion may be permitted to save the life of the mother. Pregnancy is complicated, and no single list could encompass the myriad emergency situations that could occur during pregnancy.

The bill does not fix the problems Kentucky's abortion bans created, and it may cause more confusion and uncertainty for pregnant Kentuckians.

2025 GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY THE NUMBERS

IN PERSON

294

BILLS REVIEWED

45

LEGISLATOR
MEETINGS

282

VOLUNTEERS
ENGAGED

SOCIAL MEDIA

49.8k

FOLLOWERS

54.8k

INTERACTIONS

668.8k

IMPRESSIONS

CONVERSION THERAPY

REPARATIVE THERAPY

EXPLORATORY THERAPY

**IT DOESN'T MATTER
WHAT THEY CALL IT.**

**IT'S TORTURE, AND
IT'S WRONG.**

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The ACLU of Kentucky Board, staff, consultants, and stakeholders have developed a strategic plan that will guide the organization from 2025 through 2028. This plan outlines three primary strategic directions and seeks to create and protect a thriving, multiracial society across Kentucky:

- build a sustainable organization that is representative of the communities we come from;
- strengthen democracy and increase civic participation among systemically excluded communities; and
- build power for impacted communities and strengthen the commonwealth’s movement infrastructure.

Vision

Our vision is a Kentucky where we the people exist freely, with dignity, and fully realize our Constitutional rights and civil liberties.

Mission

The ACLU of KY defends and advances civil rights and liberties in the statehouse and the courthouse. We do this work in solidarity with directly impacted people and community partners to create a more perfect union.

North Star

The ACLU of Kentucky safeguards democracy, challenges systems of oppression, and advances civil rights and liberties for all with a focus on supporting and developing the activism and leadership of impacted communities.

To learn more about the strategic plan, visit aclu-ky.org/pathway.



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PATHWAY TO PROGRESS

2025-28 Strategic Plan

2025

@ACLUOFKY



THE WATERFRONT

For 70 years, the ACLU of Kentucky has been an enduring institution that covers the waterfront of civil rights and civil liberties issues. While we remain focused on our priority issues, we do not abandon our partners working in other important areas. Since we are a small team with limited capacity, we rely on coalition work and strategic collaboration to meet the needs of the moment.

This year, solidarity looks like building coalitions with LGBTQ partners like the Trans Justice Coalition and Kentucky Health Justice Network, immigration advocates like the Louisville Coalition for Immigrant Support, and racial justice partners. Like the Stakeholders for Change at LMDC. We lend what support we can to these efforts by writing letters to lawmakers, distributing

and promoting Know Your Rights information, speaking at rallies and conferences, participating in amnesty court, and more. Since the new presidential administration, we sent letters to lawmakers in opposition to anti-diversity and anti-trans legislation; distributed over 3,000 know your rights cards in multiple languages to immigrant communities across Kentucky; and coordinated and promoted the third amnesty court held in Jefferson County clearing hundreds of nonviolent bench warrants, and plans for another amnesty docket this fall.

In the current political climate, there is no shortage of work to be done. Kentucky needs a strong ACLU, and we stay ready to address whatever comes next, together.



Jackson and Angela Cooper hold a quilt of Pride flags at the 2025 Trans Day of Joy in the Capitol Rotunda. Photo: Murphy Meador

70 YEARS OF DEFENDING CIVIL LIBERTIES
FIGHTING BACK
FIGHTING FORWARD



JOIN US



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INSIDE: 70 YEARS OF DEFENDING CIVIL LIBERTIES, STRATEGIC PLAN, AND MORE

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