



ACLU

Kentucky

KYGA 2024

**LEGISLATIVE
AGENDA**

FREEDOM'S WATCHDOG

The ACLU of Kentucky works in courts, in the state legislature, at city councils, in communities, and with activists to defend the civil rights and liberties of all Kentuckians as guaranteed by the federal and state constitutions.

During the legislative session, we work with lawmakers to propose new bills, make bills better, and defeat harmful legislation. This legislative agenda is built around the core issues we advocate for in the Kentucky General Assembly.

The ACLU of Kentucky has long believed the people most affected by an issue can provide the best solutions. We connect groups of directly affected Kentuckians, like the ACLU of Kentucky Smart Justice Advocates and the Breaking Barriers Council, with lawmakers so they can understand the real-life consequences of the legislation they craft.

All the ACLU of Kentucky's work is done through a racial justice lens. Our nation was founded on white supremacy, and we must dismantle those systems and policies and seek justice for the harms they cause. Kentuckians of color – particularly Black Kentuckians – disproportionately bear the burden of these harmful systems and policies. Structuring our work around the goals of equity and justice for the most marginalized among us strengthens our Commonwealth by helping all Kentuckians.

Learn more about our work at [ACLU-KY.org](https://www.aclu-ky.org) and follow @ACLUofKY on social.



2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

- 2** MEET THE TEAM
- 4** REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM
- 8** SMART JUSTICE & LEGAL REFORM
- 12** LGBTQ+ EQUALITY
- 14** PROTECTING OUR RIGHTS
- 16** JOIN US

MEET THE TEAM

ADVOCACY TEAM



BRITTANY HARRIS

Advocacy Intern
she/her

Brittany is a full-time student at Spalding University's School of Social Work. She works with people directly impacted by substance use disorder and the criminal justice system and assists the ACLU of Kentucky's advocacy team in all of their work.



HEATHER AYER

Campaign Coordinator
she/her

Heather brings years of state and electoral campaign experience to ACLU-KY to mobilize Kentuckians and connect them with their lawmakers. She grew up in Frankfort and works with people from communities throughout the Commonwealth to build a statewide network of grassroots power.



KUNGU NJUGUNA

Policy Strategist, Smart Justice
he/him

Kungu is a first-generation American and lifelong Kentuckian. He previously served as a prosecutor in Jefferson County. Kungu is justice-involved and uses his experience to advocate for commonsense policies that prioritize treatment over incarceration.



LATONYA MCNEAL

Smart Justice Advocates Co-Leader
she/her

Latonya was introduced to the Smart Justice Advocates in 2018. Since then, she's become more passionate about justice reform, especially about reentry and voting rights issues.

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM



ANGELA COOPER

Communications Director
she/her

Angela oversees the ACLU of Kentucky's communications strategies. She has 25 years of experience in nonprofit communications and brings her passion for social justice and dedication to equity to her work at the affiliate.



KIRA MEADOR

Graphic Designer
she/her

Kira is a creative thinker and community advocate with more than 10 years of experience in design and brand development. She brings her skills to the ACLU of Kentucky to assist the communications team in effectively delivering visual communications to our members and the public.

Look for these members of the ACLU of Kentucky's advocacy and communications teams who are regularly in Frankfort throughout the legislative session.



JACKIE MCGRANAHAN
Senior Policy Strategist,
Reproductive Freedom
she/her

Jackie fights for greater access to healthcare to end the Black maternal mortality crisis and restore essential abortion care. She grew up in Appalachia and works to build a more just and equitable commonwealth.



KATE MILLER
Advocacy Director
she/her

Kate joined the ACLU of Kentucky as a program associate in 2008 and now serves as the advocacy director. She oversees the organization's lobbying strategies in the Kentucky General Assembly and manages the organization's non-partisan electoral work.



RICHELLE HARRIS
Advocacy Administrative
Assistant
she/her

Richelle is passionate about advancing social justice to improve lives and communities. She studied social work, which brought her to the ACLU of Kentucky as an intern before joining the team full time in 2021.



SELENA COOMER
Smart Justice Advocates
Co-Leader
she/her

Selena has worked on the front lines of alcoholism, addiction, and reentry for 15 years, and is passionate about policy work for sustained change.



TAYLOR KILLOUGH
Communications
Manager
she/her

Taylor brings experience as a reporter, writer, and producer to the ACLU of Kentucky to inform and engage Kentuckians about civil liberties. She focuses on storytelling as a tool for social change and impact.

Why do we include our pronouns?

Sharing our pronouns gives us the language we need to affirm everyone present, not make assumptions about gender identity or expression, and promote inclusion and equality of transgender and gender non-conforming Kentuckians. Simple steps like this can save lives.

Young transgender and gender non-conforming people who can use their pronouns with friends and at work, home, and school, experience:

- 71% fewer symptoms of severe depression
- 34% decrease in reported thoughts of suicide
- 65% decrease in suicidal attempts

REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

KENTUCKY IS A FORCED PREGNANCY STATE.

The best person to make decisions about pregnancy is the pregnant person themselves, and the government should never have the authority to force a person to remain pregnant against their will. Following the fall of federal protections in *Roe v. Wade*, abortion remains inaccessible in the Commonwealth. We'll continue the fight to restore it until every Kentuckian has access to the full spectrum of reproductive care. In the meantime, our reproductive freedom policy work is focused on harm reduction in our forced pregnancy state.

WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

If lawmakers continue to force Kentuckians to remain pregnant or give birth against their will, we need policies that protect and support both the person giving birth and their families — both during pregnancy and after birth. Pregnancy is risky and can be dangerous, and abortion bans will only increase Kentucky's already poor maternal health outcomes. These harm reduction strategies include policies to improve maternal and infant health and expand access to paid leave for Kentuckians.

IMPROVING MATERNAL HEALTH

The United States is the only wealthy country whose maternal mortality rate has increased in recent decades, and Kentucky has some of the worst maternal and infant outcomes in the US, putting the Commonwealth at the forefront of the global maternal mortality crisis. This deadly trend is even worse for people of color, regardless of education level or income. Maternal mortality rates for people of color are three times higher than their white peers and four times higher for Black people.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT KENTUCKY LAWMAKERS IMPROVE MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH BY:

Addressing poverty and other socioeconomic factors: including requiring Medicaid coverage for lactation support and supplies, exempting certain post-natal supplies from sales and use tax, and more.

Collecting and analyzing data: identifying trends and areas for targeted interventions around the state is an essential step toward eliminating racial disparities in maternal health outcomes.

Investing in the community: expanding access to culturally competent health care and community health workers, reimbursing doulas through Medicaid, and providing additional support for midwives, lactation professionals, and other health care professionals are necessary to improving maternal health outcomes.

Supporting parents who are incarcerated: building on the success of the Dignity Bills, we want the Cabinet to accept SNAP benefits applications from incarcerated people six months prior to their release, and support legislation that allows people who are incarcerated access to doulas and midwives.

Childcare and family care support: accessing quality, affordable childcare is crucial to supporting Kentucky families and ensuring parents and children thrive in our state.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE

All Kentucky workers need paid family and medical leave because no person should be forced to choose between keeping their job and caring for their family.

About 80 percent of working Kentuckians—or around 1,503,000 people—don't have access to paid family leave through their jobs. Even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 62 percent of working Kentuckians.

The impossible choice between work and family has devastating costs for Kentuckians and their families, public health, and the economy.

Research shows that paid leave has numerous benefits for both employers and workers. Paid leave improves employee retention, reduces workforce turnover and absenteeism, and improves worker productivity and morale. It also improves health outcomes for workers and their families, reduces healthcare costs, and boosts economic growth and development.

PAID LEAVE IS A RACIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE ISSUE:

- > **The enormous wealth gap between white and Black Americans makes it harder for Black Americans to absorb a temporary loss of income when required to take time off work for family or medical leave.**
- > **Black Kentuckians have less access to both paid and unpaid family and medical leave.**
- > **Black women have less access to paid family leave and are more likely to return to work sooner than they should following childbirth, further contributing to the racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality.**

BREAKING BARRIERS COUNCIL

One of the core tenets of ACLU-KY's work is engaging people directly affected by the issue areas in which we work. The Breaking Barriers Council is a group of experts and advocates from around Kentucky working to reduce racial disparities in maternal and infant health and improve outcomes for all Kentuckians. This group includes birth workers, doulas, social workers, other advocacy organizations, and people who have personally experienced the challenges facing pregnant Kentuckians and their families. Look for Breaking Barriers Council members at our lobby days and rallies.

STATEWIDE REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM ORGANIZING

The way forward for reproductive freedom in the Commonwealth is by directly engaging with Kentuckians across the state. In November 2022, nearly 750,000 Kentuckians voted “no” on anti-abortion Constitutional Amendment 2, making it clear that lawmakers had gone too far in attempting to strip their constituents’ freedoms and that Kentuckians want access to abortion care.

Through a statewide organizing campaign, local action teams, and collecting stories of Kentuckians affected by a lack of reproductive freedom, we are mobilizing Kentuckians across the state to reiterate this message to legislators and to ultimately restore access to abortion.

Scan the code below to learn more about our statewide reproductive freedom work.



Scan the code or visit <https://bit.ly/46Z6qWm> to learn more about our statewide reproductive freedom work.





ORGANIZING FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM **THROUGH A RACIAL JUSTICE LENS**



S M A R T
J U S T I C E
& L E G A L
R E F O R M

KENTUCKY

HAS SOME OF THE HIGHEST INCARCERATION RATES OF ANY DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD.

Our state’s carceral system disproportionately harms Kentuckians of color – particularly Black Kentuckians – as well as poor Kentuckians, people with disabilities, and people with substance use disorder. We are committed to eliminating these disparities and addressing our state’s mass incarceration crisis.

DIVERSION PROGRAMS

One step toward reducing incarceration rates is addressing mental health and substance use issues impacting Kentuckians. In 2022, Senate Bill 90 created an 11-county pilot program to allow individuals convicted of low-level, non-violent crimes to seek mental health or substance use disorder treatment instead of incarceration. This three-year pilot can provide a blueprint for other counties looking to implement similar programs.

DRUG POLICY REFORM

Kentucky’s outdated drug policies are a legacy of the failed War on Drugs and must be modernized. Our current policies mean a single mistake can impact an individual’s life forever, preventing them from accessing employment, benefits, voting, and from reentering society. Meaningful change in Kentucky’s drug policies has the potential to reduce jail and prison populations, save on local and state costs, and improve public safety. Kentucky must invest in ensuring all Kentuckians have access to quality education, healthcare, jobs, and opportunities.

A SAFER KENTUCKY

We know that harsher penalties don’t deter crime — in fact, they only increase rates of incarceration, further destabilizing families and

communities. A truly safer Kentucky means investing in communities and people, not more punishment. We can improve public safety by focusing on prevention and by strengthening our investments in proven solutions. These include affordable housing, jobs, education, healthcare, and mental health and substance use prevention and treatment.

“One of the worst excesses of Kentucky’s tough-on-crime movement is a repeat offender statute...the persistent felony offender (PFO) law clearly heads the list of tough-on-crime measures that have filled prisons and jails beyond capacity, pushed the state’s corrections budget off the charts, and changed the balance of power over punishment in ways that threaten the basic fairness of the justice system.”

-Robert G. Lawson, original drafter of Kentucky’s penal code and University of Kentucky College of Law professor

Kentucky needs a justice system that is smart, fair, and works for all of us. Fearmongering and exploitation should never undermine proven, evidence-based policies. We cannot incarcerate our way out of societal problems. In fact, that’s what Kentucky and other states have tried time and time again, with no success.

We advocate for policies that truly rehabilitate people and make Kentucky communities safer, stronger, and healthier.

So-called “tough on crime” policies have a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities. Despite being only 8% of the statewide population, Black people make up 21% of Kentucky’s prison population.

CLEAN SLATE

We are all more than the worst thing we've ever done. Kentuckians who have served their sentences should no longer be exclusively defined by their records and be able to contribute to their community, to work, get an education, and achieve their full potential.

That's why we're partnering with the national organization The Clean Slate Initiative to modernize and streamline Kentucky's expungement process. We can do this by creating an automated process for Kentuckians who are eligible for expungement under existing law offering people a pathway to redemption by opening access to meaningful employment, housing, and education opportunities that allow them to provide for themselves and their families.

To date, 12 states have passed Clean Slate legislation. We look forward to adding Kentucky to that list.

LIBERATION IDENTIFICATION

Too many Kentuckians are leaving incarceration and returning to their communities without an item required to access critical resources like housing, employment, nutrition assistance, health care, mental health services, and substance use treatment — a photo ID.

The current process of securing a photo ID is burdensome and requires documents like birth certificates, social security cards, and other state-verified papers that require time, money, and transportation to obtain — things many who are reentering do not have immediate access to.

Our state incarceration rate persists as one of the highest in the nation and our recidivism rate exceeds 35%. Kentucky is also consistently in the bottom 10 states for workforce participation in the country despite a growing number of fair chance employers willing to hire people who have paid their debt to society.

Around 38% of Kentuckians have a criminal legal record: a conviction, an arrest, or charges that never led to a conviction. Only 10% of those Kentuckians are eligible for expungement but have not pursued one.

Each barrier residents face upon reentry increases the likelihood that they will return to the criminal legal system. When people are unable to efficiently obtain an ID, the promise of a reentry pathway becomes a dead end. They cannot wait months for paperwork before finding income to secure food, medicine, a place to sleep, and other essentials for survival.

Reentry: We must end the collateral consequences that are imposed on people reentering Kentucky communities post-incarceration.

Sentencing Reform: We can reduce the number of people entering jails and prisons and change the extreme laws and policies that drive extraordinarily long prison terms.

SMART JUSTICE ADVOCATES

The Smart Justice Advocates (SJAs) are a group of diverse individuals that work boldly to inspire change through hope and integrity and advance the fight for freedom and equality for all those impacted by the justice system.

The SJAs are people who have experienced incarceration, children of parents who experienced incarceration, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and friends. They work on policy solutions to make the criminal legal system more just and equitable. They meet monthly to build leadership skills, analyze Kentucky's political landscape, and travel to Frankfort to share their stories directly with legislators. This group is built on the belief that all people deserve dignity and respect.



PEOPLE

NOT

PROFITS

PEOPLE

www.earthjustice.org

L G B T Q +
EQUALITY

ALL LGBTQ+

KENTUCKIANS DESERVE SAFETY, DIGNITY, AND THE ABILITY TO LIVE AS THEIR AUTHENTIC SELVES.

We will never stop fighting for the rights of LGBTQ+ children to live freely, receive life-saving, medically necessary care, and participate fully in their schools and communities.

SUPPORTING FRONTLINE LGBTQ+ ORGANIZATIONS

An unprecedented amount of anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation was introduced during the 2023 legislative session, and LGBTQ+ Kentuckians organized to prepare for future attacks. We are proud to support and uplift the Trans Justice Coalition, a group of directly impacted trans Kentuckians working together to develop strategy and advocacy at the 2024 legislative session.

We are also proud to work alongside our longtime friends at the Fairness Campaign, who have worked for more than 30 years on LGBTQ+ rights and equality throughout the Commonwealth.

We look forward to supporting these partners, and other Kentucky-based LGBTQ+ rights organizations and advocates, during this legislative session and beyond.

DOE V. THORNBURY

We'll always protect the constitutional rights of LGBTQ+ Kentuckians, wherever that fight may take us. When legislators pass anti-LGBTQ+ laws, we do everything in our organization's power to stop them from becoming a reality — including taking that fight to the courthouse. Last session, lawmakers passed anti-trans

Senate Bill 150, an egregious example of government overreach that inserts lawmakers between doctors and patients and violates the fundamental rights of parents to direct the upbringing of their children. Senate Bill 150 allows school staff and administration to misgender students, and guts access to medically necessary care for transgender youth by targeting health care providers and threatening them with loss of licensure if they provide that care to minors.

Shortly after this cruel law was passed, we filed *Doe v. Thornbury*, our lawsuit to restore access to that medically necessary care here in the Commonwealth.

Currently, *Doe v. Thornbury* is still making its way through the courts, and we'll continue to pursue until every legal avenue to ensure transgender youth in Kentucky can receive the care they need.

Trans youth and their families are entitled to equal protection under the law and freedom to access to the things they need to live full and authentic lives, as guaranteed by the national and state constitutions, and we stand ready to challenge any more threats to LGBTQ+ Kentuckians that may arise during this legislative session.



PROTECTING
OUR RIGHTS

FREEDOM FOR ALL KENTUCKIANS.

DEFENDING THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Protecting free speech means protecting a free press, the democratic process, diversity of thought, and much more. We have worked for decades to protect this right for everyone, especially communities of color, oppressed religious groups, LGBTQ+ Kentuckians, women, and people with low incomes.

PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Several bills restricting free speech have been filed in recent legislative sessions, most of which were defeated. Similar legislation enacted in other states has been blocked in court. We stand ready to protect Kentuckians' rights to free speech and to protest.

KEEPING GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENT

Ensuring government transparency and protecting the right to organize, publish, and speak out holds government accountable to the people. We stand ready to fight laws that make it difficult to access public information, reduce opportunities for public engagement in the lawmaking process, limit opportunities for lawmakers to speak on legislation, and weaken disclosure and ethics requirements for public officials.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Lawmakers frequently claim they are protecting religious freedom when they are really restricting free speech and indicating state endorsement of specific religious beliefs. Some laws passed in recent years using this technique include the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, mandated displays of 'In God We Trust' in all public schools, and Bible literacy classes.

RESTORATION OF VOTING RIGHTS

Voting is a fundamental right in a democracy and denying someone that right harms individuals, families, and communities. Kentucky is 1 of only 3 states that still permanently bans those with felonies from voting. This leaves our state on the fringe with one of the harshest voting restrictions in the country and many voters' rights reliant on precarious executive actions. We work to ensure Kentuckians are able to exercise their right to vote and to permanently restore voting rights to Kentuckians with past felony convictions.



67% of Kentuckians across age, gender, and political affiliation support automatic restoration for people who have completed their sentence.

JOIN US

SAVE THE DATE FOR THIS YEAR'S MINI LOBBY DAYS AND RALLIES:

January 8, 2024 | Legislative preview

January 17, 2024 | Paid Family Leave Lobby Day

January 24, 2024 | SJA Lobby Day

January 31, 2024 | Abortion Access LobbyDay

February 7, 2024 | Black Maternal Health Lobby Day

February 13, 2024 | Abortion Rally

February 21, 2024 | Fairness Rally

February 28, 2024 | SJA Lobby Day

March 6, 2024 | Paid Leave Lobby Day

March 12, 2024 | CROWN Act Rally

March 20, 2024 | SJA Lobby Day



Scan this QR code for upcoming ACLU-KY legislative session events, or visit <https://www.mobilize.us/acluofkentucky/> to learn more.



GET INVOLVED

Our work and our democracy depend on all Kentuckians. Help protect democracy in the commonwealth by volunteering, becoming a member, or making a donation. Some of the ways you can get involved during the legislative session include:

MINI LOBBY DAYS

These ACLU-KY staff-led, in-person gatherings are an opportunity for community members to come to Frankfort to speak with lawmakers about legislation and issues that are important to them and to gain first-hand experience with the legislative session.

RALLY DAYS

Rally days are opportunities to gather at the Capitol and make your voice heard — literally. We organize these events with partner organizations to demonstrate Kentuckians' passion for issues affecting our lives and communities.

CALL YOUR LEGISLATOR

Every call counts! When you call legislators to tell them how you would like them to vote on a certain bill, they receive a physical piece of green or red paper, representing your view. Many lawmakers say they are influenced by how many green or red slips they receive. These slips are what make phone calls so effective.

Calling the legislative message line is toll-free and only takes a few minutes. Call every day if you have the time. To leave a message for your legislator, call 1-800-372-7181. You don't even have to know your legislators' names but be prepared to share your address so operators can send your message to the right place.

WRITE AN OP-ED

Your story matters, and op-eds are a quick and easy way to share your story to inspire others. If you would like to publish an op-ed, we can provide a template and help with drafting, editing, and placement.

TESTIFY IN A COMMITTEE HEARING

Volunteer testifiers travel to Frankfort to tell their stories to legislators in committees where bills are being heard. Our communications and advocacy teams will work with you to help prepare your testimony and provide support before, during, and after committee appearances.

JOIN US KYGA 2024

**WE THE PEOPLE
DARE TO CREATE A
MORE PERFECT UNION.**

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL
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Created December 2023 for the 2024
Kentucky Legislative Session

ACLU Kentucky