Welcome New Members!

Since the November 2016 elections, the ACLU of Kentucky’s membership has tripled to more than 7,500 supporters statewide! It will take all of us to overcome the extraordinary challenges we face; we’re so glad to have you at our side.

If you are new to The Torch, this is a publication you will receive each spring and fall. Keep up with the ACLU of Kentucky’s activities in real-time, and learn more about our work by visiting our website www.aclu-ky.org. While you are there, sign up to receive our Action Alert emails (see the right side of the home page). If you are on social media, like our Facebook page and follow us on Twitter @ ACLUofKY. If you have questions, concerns or want to share feedback, email us at info@aclu-ky.org.

Also note, the national ACLU is working hard to process all new memberships. If you haven’t received your membership card yet, it’ll be on its way to you soon!

The 2017 General Assembly

By Kate Miller, ACLU-KY Advocacy Director

The 2017 regular session of the Kentucky General Assembly has come to a close. A new era was ushered in at the Capitol with Republicans controlling the House of Representatives for the first time in nearly a century; a feat all the more historic alongside GOP control of the state Senate and Governorship.

Abortion

The General Assembly moved at unprecedented speed the first five days of the session to pass two bills restricting abortion, a ban on the procedure at 20 weeks gestation and a mandatory, narrated ultrasound before the procedure. The 20 week abortion ban offers no exceptions for Kentuckians who have received a tragic diagnosis related to the health of the fetus, nor those who are survivors of rape or incest.

Heather Hyden of Lexington, who was 14 weeks pregnant, testified before both House and Senate committees that her fetus had anomalies that were incompatible with life. Devastatingly, she testified this new law could force her into ending her pregnancy ahead of the 20 week deadline before her doctors exhausted all avenues of medical testing. She asked both committees, as well as the bill sponsor to oppose the measure, but specifically requested that, should the bill pass, exceptions be made for circumstances like hers. Ultimately, the measure was rushed through and these important concerns were not addressed.

The ultrasound bill forces doctors to perform and narrate an ultrasound on patients who have made the decision to end a pregnancy. If a heartbeat is present, doctors must auscultate the audio for their patient. The law allows patients to “avert” their eyes or cover their ears, but it does not allow a doctor the option to modify or skip portions of the narration if they believe it will cause the patient harm. The ACLU-KY is currently challenging the constitutionality of this measure in Federal Court.
PREGNANT WORKERS
The ACLU-KY worked in coalition to support the pregnant workers bill, which was successfully filed by Republican lawmakers (Sen. Alice Forgy Kerr and Rep. Jason Nemes) in both the House and Senate. The bill did not receive hearings in their respective chambers, but we expect an interim discussion this summer to better position us for progress in the 2018 session. The measure offers relief to pregnant Kentuckians who require modest accommodations to stay on the job and maintain a healthy pregnancy.

IMMIGRATION
Several anti-immigrant bills were filed during the 2017 session, but none advanced. People with direct experience with the immigration system had one-on-one meetings with lawmakers facilitated by ACLU-KY throughout the session.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
Bills “attacking” religious practices in public schools, already protected under the First Amendment, passed through the General Assembly. These bills are redundant, unnecessary, overly broad, and will very likely be implemented incorrectly. As we do with all bills of concern, we will monitor their implementation, and remind anyone that feels their rights have been violated to contact us.

JUSTICE
The ACLU-KY spent significant time and resources working with allies to oppose the so-called “Blue Lives Matter” bill. The measure adds police officers with direct experience to the “Blue Lives Matter” bill. Left: College students Sandra Martinez and Pradyum Nencosur met with Rep. Al Gentry to talk about their experiences with the immigration system.

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We filed late last year, we are working with the Louisville firm of Lynch, Cox, Meyers LLP, and in the second case, we are also working with the New York firm of O’Melveny & Myers LLP, and in the second case challenges the authority of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to revoke EMW’s operating license on the basis of allegedly deficient hospital and ambulance transfer agreements (agreements that the Cabinet itself approved when it renewed EMW’s license). In our brief, we are also working with the Louisville firm of Lynch, Cox, Gilman & Goodman P.C.

ACLU-KY Legal Fellow
Heather Gathara

Over the past several months, there have been many developments in the Legal Program, both in terms of our docket and organizational structure. Perhaps most significantly, the ACLU of Kentucky’s Board of Directors authorized the hiring of a second attorney to fill a one-year Legal Fellowship. This marks the first time in our history that we have employed two full-time attorneys. After an extensive search and interview process, we were pleased to hire Heather Gathara for that position. Heather started working with us in March, and she previously worked for Ky’s Dept. of Public Advocacy where she served as a capital trial attorney for the past 5 years. She received her law degree from Boston College, and her JD from Georgetown.

Fortunately for Heather (and for us), she could not have started at a better time. This year alone, we have already partnered with the national ACLU’s Reproductive Freedom Project to file two separate lawsuits on behalf of EMW Women’s Surgical Center. The first challenges a newly enacted law forcing doctors to show women seeking an abortion ultrasound images, auscultate the fetal heartbeat, and provide a detailed description of the fetus prior to performing the abortion even over their patients’ objections. The second case challenges the authority of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to revoke EMW’s operating license on the basis of allegedly deficient hospital and ambulance transfer agreements (agreements that the Cabinet itself approved when it renewed EMW’s license).
The nominating committee of the ACLU-KY is pleased to welcome five individuals to new terms on the Board of Directors. Candidates were elected by the membership, who had the option to cast their votes online, by mail, or in person at our Annual Meeting on April 19th. The new members’ terms will last until spring 2020. The new members introduce themselves here:

JENNY HEITKEMPER

Jenny is Manager of Mergers & Acquisitions at Yum Brands, and has held numerous financial/accounting positions at Yum Brands and Humana over the past 15 years. Jenny has both an MBA and a Music Performance Degree, and has served as a board member and volunteer for local non-profit organizations, such as the Louisville Youth Orchestra and Jewish Family and Career Services. A 2012 graduate of Ignite Louisville, Jenny looks forward to serving the community as an ACLU-KY Board Member.

MICHAEL NOYOLA-IZQUIERDO

Besides active involvement in LGBTQ advocacy and immigration rights, I have volunteered for community development and social justice groups, including Common Ground in New Orleans after Katrina, God’s Love We Deliver (bringing meals to home bound people with HIV), New York Cares, Read to a Child (lunchtime program with school kids), St. Xavier Welfare Rights Projects, and Habitat for Humanity.

As a gay man and son of an immigrant, I bring a uniquely personal perspective to our work defending civil liberties. I don’t have to imagine what it’s like to be without basic human rights – I’ve lived it!

CURTIS STAUFFER

I am a resident of Louisville, who serves as the Assistant Director of Louisville Metro Government’s Develop Louisville Office of Housing & Community Development. Before starting this position in November 2016, I was Executive Director of the Homeless & Housing Coalition of Northern Kentucky in Frankfort. I led the non-profit’s advocacy and development efforts and oversaw its supportive housing voucher and AmeriCorps programs.

I earned my MA from Temple University and I have a BA from Macalester College. My local community involvement includes over 5 years of service on the St. John Center for Homeless Men Board of Directors and as a member of the Jefferson County chapter Economic Justice Committee of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth (KFTC).

PATTI PIATT

I live in Northern Kentucky and am currently employed as the Director of Food Services at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center. In my work I have been blessed with the opportunity to work with a diverse workforce who allowed me to reach out and learn about their cultures and values. I am committed to keeping Kentucky and the nation a haven of diversity.

As a lifelong activist, I have a passion for women’s rights. I have been a member of NOW, NARAL and have supported reproductive rights as a clinic escort and vocal supporter of a woman’s right to choose. I have protested in Frankfort, Lexington and Northern Kentucky in support of reproductive rights and healthcare. I have supported Black Lives Matter of Cincinnati as a marshal. I serve on the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention of Greater Cincinnati. My areas of focus are prevention, particularly in the LGBTQ community.

I feel that this opportunity to work with the ACLU will allow me the greatest opportunity to heed the voice of the people by continually reimagining the tactics and methods necessary to protect the civil liberties of all individuals throughout this great state, during one of the most consequential moments in our history.

JEFF JOHNSON

Dr. Jeff Johnson is in private practice in Danville, Kentucky. Dr. Johnson is a graduate of Centre College and the University of Kentucky College of Dentistry. He completed a residency in Pediatric Dentistry in 2003. He also has a Master of Public Health from the University of Kentucky College of Public Health. Before starting his practice, Dr. Johnson served as an Assistant Professor and Graduate Program Director in the Division of Pediatric Dentistry at the University of Kentucky College of Dentistry. He has four internationally adopted children (3 from Guatemala and 1 from South Korea). Dr. Johnson is actively involved in his community where he works to help better the lives of those around him. Whether it is through his practice as a pediatric dentist, his involvement in the Back Pack Kids programs, or his work in and for the local schools, Jeff is committed to those around him. Working to help find solutions for food insecurity, housing instability, and/or healthcare disparities, he has used his practice and position in the community to demonstrate servant leadership. Despite having grown up in a very rural Southeastern Kentucky town, his parents taught him that, regardless of our differences, we are all created equal.

Dr. Johnson works hard to instill those same principles and values in his own kids. In fact, it is for his own kids and countless others like them that he wants to serve on the ACLU-KY board.
Thank You to our Sponsors

The Wiltshire Dinner

The ACLU-KY would like to extend a very special “Thank You” to Susan Hershberg and the Wiltshire Pantry for an elegant dinner on March 25th. The annual celebration honors the committed partnership between the Fairness Campaign and the ACLU of Kentucky as well as the contributions of those who work daily protecting the civil liberties and the civil rights of all Kentuckians. This year’s event had a record breaking crowd of 500 attendees that mingled in a new event space, the Speed Art Museum. Special thanks to our generous sponsors who helped make this event a success, and Brymer Photography for capturing special moments throughout the evening!

Top: (clockwise) Chris Hartman, Dawn Wilson, Susan Hershberg, Randy Strobo, Michael Aldridge, Amir and Reena Piracha; Bridget Pitcock and Meg Hancock.

Left: (top to bottom) Kristen Massingill, Maggie Johnson, Missy Jackson, Kaila Story, Jaison Gardner; Becky Roehrig, Hon. Congressman John Yarmuth, Lisa Gunterman.
Since Election Day, our membership is stepping up to get involved and volunteer with our organization. In a matter of weeks, more than 100 members have helped advance our issue work by phone banking, stuffing envelopes, and helping with data entry in our Louisville office. More than 350 members statewide have filled out an interest form and stand ready to assist.

One outstanding volunteer is Roy Templeton of Louisville. He became engaged with the ACLU-KY after attending a screening of Oliver Stone’s film Snowden. Since then Roy has become a regular face around the office. He has performed data entry, attended rallies, helped out at phonebooks, and brings apples for the office to enjoy. “I feel like the work I do, in some small way, contributes to the ACLU mission,” Templeton said. “And it helps bring people together in a common, ‘Rule of law,’ purpose,” he added. Roy’s work has reaffirmed that one of the ACLU’s best assets is the dedicated members who support us.

The amount of work in the coming years is large. We need members in all corners of the state to take ownership of priority issues in their area and work so that we don’t go back. If you are interested in volunteering with the ACLU of Kentucky please visit www.aclu-ky.org and click on the “Get Involved” tab on the home page.