



ACLU and the Kentucky Legislature

Summary of How Civil Liberties Fared in the 2015 General Assembly

The American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky is one of the nation's foremost defenders of civil liberties and civil rights. Founded in 1955 as the state affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, we are a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization with 2,000 members, more than 12,000 e-activists, and thousands of supporters across the commonwealth, and over 500,000 nationwide. 2015 marks our 60th year of protecting civil liberties in the commonwealth.

The ACLU of Kentucky worked with allies and members to organize and lobby on a number of issues. Here is a summary of our victories and the work still ahead:

Reproductive Freedom: Stopping Anti-Choice Legislation, Pregnancy Protections

VICTORY! Only three anti-abortion bills were filed this session, as opposed to the average 8. Two of those bills SB 4 (would require two trips to a clinic ahead of an abortion) and SB 7 (would require a woman seeking an abortion to undergo an ultrasound and listen to a description of the fetus regardless of her wishes), passed the Senate with a 31-5 vote. The bills did not receive a hearing in the House.

There was rare, positive reproductive freedom legislation that passed this session. HB 218, the pregnancy anti-discrimination bill that calls for reasonable accommodations on the job for pregnant and nursing mothers, passed 95-0. Unfortunately, it did not receive a hearing in the Senate.

LGBT Rights: Statewide Fairness Protections/Anti-Trans Bill

For the 16th consecutive year a bill that would create state civil rights protections for LGBT Kentuckians barring discrimination in the workplace, in housing, and in public accommodations were filed in the House and Senate. The bills had 21 co-sponsors. It was carried in the Senate for the first time by Sen. Morgan McGarvey.

One of the higher profile bills of the session was Sen. C.B. Embry's anti-trans "bathroom bully bill." SB 76 would have required students to use the restroom of their "biological sex." It was first defeated in committee. Then it was brought back for vote and passed out of committee. It passed the Senate on a vote of 27-9, which included three Republicans voting against the bill. The bill didn't receive a hearing in the House, but in a last ditch effort was tacked on to another unrelated bill as an amendment in the Senate. The measure finally died on the last day of the session when the Senate voted to remove the amendment.

Criminal Justice: Abolition of the Death Penalty

There were several steps taken toward the repeal of Kentucky's death penalty-lawmakers from both sides of the aisle filed repeal bills, and for the first time ever two death penalty cost study bills were introduced. With your ACLU-KY Union support dollars, we were able to bring death row exoneree Kirk Bloodsworth to Frankfort to share his story with lawmakers, and join repeal bill champions Rep. David Floyd and Sen. Gerald Neal at a press conference on the issue.

Voting Rights: Restoration of Voting Rights for Former Felons

The work to restore voting rights to former felons in Kentucky continues. This year HB 70 was filed by a new primary sponsor, Rep. Darryl Owens. The bill passed the House early in the session, but once again, did not receive a hearing in the Senate.

Criminal Justice Reform: Reducing Mass Incarceration

A number of bills were filed, including measures by Rep. Brent Yonts to amend the penal code and reduce incarceration rates in the commonwealth. A compromise bill to tackle the heroin epidemic was signed into law. Its measures include a needle exchange option for localities, expansion of the use of medication which can stop a drug overdose, increased access to treatment options for those suffering with addiction, and a revision of the definitions for heroin trafficking that includes a move to mandatory minimum sentencing for more than two grams of heroin.

Immigrants' Rights: Driving Certificates

Rep. Larry Clark filed a bill to update Kentucky statutes to ensure that all motorists are able to take the driving exams, access insurance, and register their vehicle regardless of their immigration status. The bill received an information-only hearing; no vote on the legislation was taken. It provided an opportunity for Kentuckians who are directly impacted, and a law enforcement officer to share their insights with legislators. Rep. Clark received feedback from his colleagues on the bill and is working to move the bill even further forward in the 2016 General Assembly.

Get Involved!

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