

**A NEW ERA**

# FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE



**ACLU**  
Wisconsin

ACLU OF WISCONSIN  
2024 ANNUAL REPORT



# LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DR. MELINDA BRENNAN

## We Won't Stop Fighting for Wisconsinites' Rights

We are living through a moment when fascism knocks at our doors. While the fight continues, in all truth, the fight cannot and hasn't stopped in our nearly 100-year history. While our established rights now must be fought for, and when the very recognition of our humanity requires fight and care, we must collectively act.

We must hold Wisconsin systems accountable for respecting the people's will. We must vigorously defend our rights, affirm our existence, and chart a path for our current and future needs. These elements of our work, in partnership and community, require the deepest levels of enduring engagement, and we are renewing our commitment to just that as a team.

As a critical battleground state, we have an outsized impact on the nationwide election. Our team serves our state by providing credible, trusted information for voters across many races. We show up for the community with accessible education about knowing their rights—while protesting, interacting with law enforcement, or in school—empowering others to exercise their First Amendment rights and navigate challenging encounters.

Whether in community lawyering, community education, or fighting in the state legislature, we work as defenders of democracy—preserving, educating, informing, and expanding our rights, demanding equal treatment under the law.

In policy, we fight for legislation that can improve our collective quality of life and keep us alive, as in the case of life-saving transgender healthcare for all ages and reproductive healthcare that should be freely accessible to each of us.

We — the staff, board, donors, volunteers, members, and partners — remain steadfast on the frontline in the fight for democracy. The fight continues at every level of influence, from neighborhoods to cities, from counties to the state, and the representatives we send to the Senate and House. Our every action matters, including how we support each other as this work endures. Let us remind each other that the power remains in each of us.

We've deployed all our tools — from community education and community circles to giving testimony and training others to share their voices, lobbying, using open records requests to uncover the truth, and fighting in court — in this past year, and we will continue resolutely in the coming year.

In Solidarity,

Dr. Melinda Brennan

## STAFF



ABBI ADAMS  
*Theoharis Intern*



HAYLEY ARCHER  
*Staff Attorney*



KATE BRAUN  
*Grant Writer*



DR. MELINDA BRENNAN  
*Executive Director*



LIAM BYRNES  
*Law Clerk*



RYAN COX  
*Legal Director*



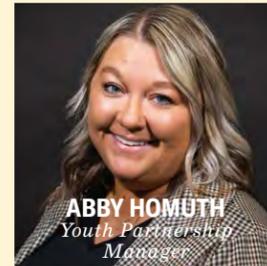
PERIS FLAGG  
*Development Project Manager*



DAVID GWIDT  
*Deputy Communications Director*



SINYETTA HILL  
*Systemic Equality Intern*



ABBY HOMUTH  
*Youth Partnership Manager*



TINA ITSON  
*Development Director*



NOUR KALBOUNEH  
*Legal & Community Engagement Coordinator*



ABBY KANYER  
*Deputy Director of Community Engagement*



ZACHARY KESTER  
*Development Relations Manager*



ALEX LARSON  
*Senior Accountant*



MELISSA LUDIN  
*Coalition Relations Advocate*



ALYSSA MAUK  
*Director of Communications, Program & Strategy*



LAN MCCAULEY  
*Digital Strategist*



JON MCCRAY JONES  
*Policy Analyst*



AMANDA MERKWAE  
*Advocacy Director*



CONOR MILLER  
*Campaign & Political Manager*



TAYLOR MUNDT  
*Law Clerk*



TIM MUTH  
*Interim Legal Director*



MARIA ROBBINS  
*Organizer*



DR. EMMA SHAKESHAFT  
*Staff Attorney - Researcher*



SARAH SIEGEL  
*Deputy Executive Director*



JAMES STEIN  
*Deputy Advocacy Director*



ARIELLE WINTER  
*Organizer*



# DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

## PROTECTING VOTING RIGHTS IN WISCONSIN

### Democracy Work in a Key Battleground State

Beginning in 2021, National ACLU developed the 2024 Presidential Battleground Initiative to build organizational alignment and affiliate readiness to combat the greatest threats to our democracy and safeguard voting rights nationwide. The initiative aims to ensure affiliates in battleground states are equipped to do everything in their power to protect the integrity of elections, ensure that every eligible voter’s voice is heard and that their ballot is fairly counted in the 2024 election. The ACLU of Wisconsin, in many ways, is the tip of the spear in the battleground initiative, focusing on voting rights and education, election protection, and the expansion of early voting sites.

### Voting Rights and Voter Education

One of the cornerstones of a healthy democracy is access to free and fair elections. Information is power, so the ACLU of WI recently launched its 2024 Voter Guide, developed in partnership with Common Cause Wisconsin and Disability Rights Wisconsin. The guide contains everything anyone needs to know about voting in Wisconsin. It provides valuable information to voters with unique circumstances, such as voting with a disability, criminal conviction, and people who are experiencing homelessness. The guide is available in English, Spanish, Hmong, and Burmese.

### Expanding Early Voting

The ACLU of WI made strides in expanding early voting access within Milwaukee, successfully advocating for the funding of 14 early voting locations, including two new sites at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee and Milwaukee Area Technical College and a replacement in the Midtown area, one of the most used early voting sites in the Midwest. We took steps to engage, empower, educate, and encourage first-time Gen Z voters and nearby college staff and residents to vote and vote early.

Between canvassing, tabling and text-banking, we reached 51,447 voters and encouraged them to vote in the election, raising awareness about the new early voting sites. Additionally, our digital ads generated 643,000 impressions.



### Protecting Our Right to Vote

The ACLU of Wisconsin is committed to protecting our democracy on election day and beyond.

Our Legal Department, in coalition with Law Forward and supported by a committed team of volunteer lawyers, operates an Election Protection Hotline. This hotline is a vital resource for voters encountering issues or obstacles during voting. Whether it’s questions about voter registration, polling locations, or instances of voter suppression, our legal team is ready to provide real-time assistance and guidance.

Election Observers are crucial in monitoring elections for systemic issues impacting voters. In coordination with our partners at the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, ACLU-WI volunteers will be provided training and assigned to cover specific polling places during the election. We have ACLU-WI volunteers serving as election observers in every community, on the ground, and across the state to ensure our elections remain fair.



# 2023-24 LEGISLATIVE SESSION WORK

## Wisconsin's Legislative Session

We are grateful for your support in fighting a barrage of harmful legislation during Wisconsin's 2023-24 state legislative session, which began in January 2023 and lasted through the Senate's final floor votes held in March 2024.

We fought against bills that targeted LGBTQ+ Wisconsinites and singled out trans kids. As Wisconsin's prison crisis looms large and worsens by the day, many legislators in both parties ignored evidence-based opportunities for reform, police oversight, and policies that create safer

communities, instead opting for an outdated "tough on crime" approach that fuels our mass incarceration problem. Extremist conspiracy theories and election denial fueled debates on voting rights issues this session. Many bills were introduced to censor information and expression and expand the surveillance state.

Fortunately, the vast majority of bills we opposed this session did not become law, and the ACLU of Wisconsin is not done fighting, and neither are our supporters.



Legislators also introduced a bill that would force transgender and intersex incarcerated people into Wisconsin jail and prison placements that do not match their gender. This legislation would violate the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act and increase the likelihood of experiencing sexual or physical abuse and worse mental health outcomes for trans and intersex people incarcerated in DOC facilities and counties' jails. We testified against this bill, and it failed to pass.

Legislative attacks on the transgender community are linked with rises in hate and transphobic sentiment where they are levied, and we hold our elected officials accountable for exacerbating a hostile atmosphere toward the most marginalized in our state.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**1,229** Number of bills introduced by the Assembly

**1,113** Number of bills introduced by the Senate

**617** Number of bills we closely monitored this session

**178** Number of bills on which we registered a position

**74** Number of bills we opposed that failed

**37** Number of bills we submitted testimony on

**4** Number of bills we supported that were enacted

**22,000** ACLU supporters reached throughout the session

## The Fight for LGBTQ+ Rights

This year, Wisconsin legislators launched an unprecedented attack on LGBTQ+ Wisconsinites. Twelve bills introduced were part of a coordinated, hate-driven campaign to push LGBTQ+ people, particularly trans youth, out of public life.

Multiple bills introduced during the 2023-24 legislative session tried to control what youth can and cannot read, learn, and, most troublingly, who they can and cannot be. AB 510, dubbed the "Parental Bill of Rights," would have allowed parents to opt students out of "instruction about gender identity, sexual orientation, racial identity, structural racism, or institutional racism." We have seen across the country when classroom instruction is censored, it is mainly material by and about LGBTQ+ people, people of color, and other marginalized groups. We spoke out against this bill, and while it still passed, AB 510 was ultimately vetoed by Governor Evers.

In addition, legislators introduced trans athlete bans at the K-12 and college levels, proposing to unfairly exclude trans students from participating in sports teams consistent with their authentic gender identity. While AB 377 bill was initially passed, it was later vetoed by the governor.

## Criminal Injustice System

Another area of focus for the legislative session was legislation related to policing and the criminal legal system. Some bills that became law despite our opposition that will negatively impact people in Wisconsin include:

### → ACLU-WI Opposed: 2023 Act 3

While bail was intended to ensure people return to court to face charges against them, it has morphed into widespread wealth-based incarceration, perpetuating a two-tiered system of justice: one for the wealthy and one for the rest of us. Act 3 exacerbates inequities in pre-trial detention while failing to fix the broken cash bail system. Governor Evers signed it into law after passing the legislature with bipartisan support.

### → ACLU-WI Opposed: 2023 Act 12

Under this law that overhauled the state's shared revenue program, legislators made desperately needed state aid contingent on maintaining police staffing and funding levels. Act 12 also guts the policy-making authority of the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission and reinforces the school-to-prison pipeline by requiring officers in Milwaukee Public Schools. These anti-democratic moves strip autonomy from local governments, override local control of law enforcement, and sabotage the ability of communities to conduct proper police oversight and make budgetary decisions.

### → ACLU-WI Opposed: 2023 Act 29

This law imposes harsher penalties for those who supply drugs that lead to an overdose while ignoring the reality that often, friends and family members of overdose victims are most likely to be prosecuted under the "death by distribution" law and flies in the face of research showing fear of prosecution prevents people from making critical 911 calls that could save lives. This law was signed by Governor Evers after passing with bipartisan support.

### → ACLU-WI Opposed: 2023 Act 253

This law increases the cost of law enforcement open records by authorizing police and corrections agencies to charge a requestor for the price of redacting audio and video content disclosed in response to a public records request. While amendments to the bill provide some exceptions, we opposed the bill because the lack of transparency and police accountability creates further distrust between law enforcement and the community.



## Surveillance

We fought against several bills that would expand government surveillance of local information, the contents of digital communications, and student conduct in schools. The proliferation of cell site simulators (aka "Stingrays"), geofence warrants, and other cell phone tracking tools used by law enforcement in Wisconsin and nationwide has triggered constitutional alarm bells for privacy experts.

Many of these bills failed to pass, including a bill that would have expanded the ability of police to capture phone call data and to include the "to" and "from" addresses of email messages, records about instant message conversations, data associated with social networking identities, and information about the websites you visit; a bill that proposed to "card" people before they use social media or when they visit particular websites by requiring age verification to access websites, exposing adult Wisconsinites to harmful surveillance, violating the First Amendment by requiring internet users to provide personal information to companies that purport to be able to verify their ages before they're able to access protected speech.

## Voting Rights and Democracy

As an end-run around the governor's veto and an affront to voting rights, Republican-led legislation passed joint resolutions proposing amendments to the Wisconsin Constitution, which placed two binding referendum questions on April 2, 2024. These statewide referendums ultimately amended the Wisconsin Constitution to make it more difficult for local governments to administer elections and uphold our democracy.

These vague, confusing amendments could prevent election officials from using polling places in non-public buildings or even using tables, chairs, electrical outlets, or any other privately owned equipment. The same politicians who put these questions on the ballot stripped millions in funding from the state budget to support election administration.

We advocated for critical amendments to the surveillance bill that became law this session, ensuring there are checks on police access to cell phone location information to comply with the Fourth Amendment. 2023 Act 232 requires cell phone companies to disclose a person's cell phone location to law enforcement without a warrant in limited emergencies, enacted into law with our amendments.

## DEFEATED

There were some wins during the legislative session that the ACLU-WI is celebrating. Some bills that we opposed failed to pass or were vetoed by the governor this session including:

- Mandatory minimum for felony gun possession
- Anti-protest bill
- Automatic Revocation
- Criminalizing License Infractions
- Mandatory Bail Amounts for Prior Bail Jumping Convictions
- Limiting Prosecutorial Discretion and Diversion Opportunities
- Limiting Recourse for Individuals Killed by Police

In addition, attempts to remove the nationally recognized administrator of the bipartisan Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC), steps to subvert the will of Wisconsin voters by threatening to impeach a newly elected Supreme Court justice before she decided her first case, and legislation proposing to dissolve the WEC altogether demonstrate our legislature's resolve to undermine democracy and Wisconsin's faith in elections.

We opposed several measures limiting Wisconsin's access to the ballot box and making election administration more difficult, including bills to remove voters from the voter registration list, create a modern-day poll tax, and restrict election observers. Luckily, none of these bills became law.

**MISSED OPPORTUNITIES**

# Bills ACLU-WI Supported that Failed to Pass

## Expungement Reform

In Wisconsin, approximately 1.4 million people have a criminal record, resulting in many collateral consequences that can make successful re-entry a daunting task. If passed, AB 37/SB 38 would have allowed the court to order expungement after a sentence has been completed, removed the arbitrary age limit of 25, and provided necessary legal clarity for both employers and employees. The bill passed the Assembly yet failed to receive a vote in the Senate Committee of Judiciary and Public Safety.

## Cannabis Legalization

Cannabis legalization is wildly popular in Wisconsin. A 2022 Marquette Law School study found that 69% of Wisconsin registered voters and the majority of voters in every political party supported legalizing recreational weed. Yet, Governor Evers' proposal to legalize and regulate recreational cannabis was stripped from the 2023-25 Biennial Budget and legislators failed to hold a public hearing on a standalone legalization bill.

## Expanding Postpartum Medicaid Eligibility

Expanding access to postpartum care is a critical step towards addressing birth equity in the face of systemic racism and structural barriers that exist in our healthcare system. AB 114/SB 110 would expand postpartum eligibility for BadgerCare from 60 days after pregnancy to 12 months of continuous coverage during the postpartum period.

## Safe Harbor

Despite significant bipartisan support over multiple legislative sessions, AB 48/SB 55 – which would have prevented a young person under age 18 from being prosecuted for “committing an act of prostitution” – failed to receive votes in the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety and the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety. Young people should be protected from exploitation, sex trafficking, and abuse – not criminalized.

## Supporting DACA Recipients

Four bills were introduced to allow undocumented Wisconsinites with DACA status to pay in-state tuition at Wisconsin's public colleges and universities, obtain occupational licenses for professions from teaching to nursing to plumbing to real estate to cosmetology, and receive a tax credit. All of these measures would help incentivize young Dreamers to remain, live, and work in our state.

## Expanding Access to Birth Control

Access to contraception is critical to an individual's autonomy, equality, and ability to participate in social, economic, and political life. AB 176/SB 211 would expand access to birth control to patients who are at least 18 years of age by allowing pharmacists to prescribe and dispense birth control such as patches and oral contraceptive pills.

## Protecting Indigenous Students' Right to Wear Tribal Regalia

AB 210/SB 199 protects Indigenous students' rights by not allowing school boards and charter schools to prohibit a student who is a member of, a descendent of a member of, or eligible to be enrolled in, a federally recognized American Indian tribe or band from wearing traditional tribal regalia at a graduation.

## Monday Ballot Processing

AB 567/SB 685 would allow local clerks to begin processing absentee ballots the day before Wisconsin elections, allowing for a speedier vote-counting process on Election Day.

**MEET**

# MELISSA LUDIN & JON MCCRAY JONES



## Melissa Ludin *Coalition and Relations Advocate*

Melissa Ludin is the Statewide Coalition and Relations Advocate for the ACLU of Wisconsin and has been with the ACLU of WI since 2019. Leveraging years of

experience building authentic relationships, storytelling, and leading statewide initiatives, Melissa focuses on issue-based organizing, community engagement, criminal legal system education emphasizing violence, restorative practice, policy efforts, and embodying a human-centered and authentic leadership style.

Her ability to establish trusted connections with diverse stakeholders, including those directly impacted, underpins her commitment to driving change and achieving results, drawing from her own experiences that began over 22 years ago during her incarceration at 19.

In 2016, after the unexpected death of a close friend, Melissa joined Ex-Incarcerated

People Organizing (EXPO) as a leader, with a determination to dismantle the prison system. Before 2016 and after her release from prison in 2007, Melissa was a mentor and connector for women across the state who were released from prison. Her dedication and expertise were recognized with a nomination as the first board president of the organization, which is led by people directly impacted by the criminal legal system. In addition, she was one of the co-founders of the FREE Campaign, a campaign dedicated to addressing the unique needs of directly impacted women and their families. Currently, Melissa serves as an appointed member of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council for Outagamie County and is part of coalitions across the state.

In 2022, EXPO nominated Melissa as the Most Influential Leader. She has shared her expertise on the penal system as a keynote speaker and lecturer on numerous panels across the state.



## Jon McCray Jones *Policy Analyst*

Jon McCray Jones joined the ACLU of Wisconsin in January 2023 as a Policy Analyst. His primary responsibility is to help develop and implement the ACLU of Wisconsin's

legislative and advocacy priorities by conducting rigorous research, tracking our legislative priorities, and building trusted relationships with community members and officials, which is key during the state legislative session. Jon's policy analysis includes everything from classroom censorship of LGBTQIA+ Rights to police reform.

A graduate of UW-Milwaukee with a B.A. in Philosophy and Political science, Jon brings his organizing experience from Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC), Citizen Action, and the Wisconsin Anti-Violence Education Effort (WAVEE) to this work.

He says, “It's hard to make the best out of your life when your community is over-policed, surveilled, discriminated against, and censored. Therefore, I joined the ACLU to fight against the oppression of marginalized communities and fight for equal opportunities and resources.”

# ACLU OF WISCONSIN LAUNCHES SYSTEMIC EQUALITY PROGRAM

**“I thought the training was extremely intuitive and clear.”**

We fully recognize that being stopped by police can be a stressful and sometimes life-altering experience that can go bad quickly. The burden of de-escalation and ensuring that constitutional rights are respected does not fall on private citizens but police officers. However, we cannot assume officers will behave in a way that protects our safety or respects our rights even after we assert them.



Five years into our Collins settlement, Black Milwaukeeans are still disproportionately stopped and frisked. In addition, with the recent passage of Act 12, Milwaukee Public Schools are now required to reinstate school resource officers (SROs), which have been directly linked to increasing the school-to-prison pipeline, especially with Black students.

The ACLU of Wisconsin embarked on a collaborative journey with other community organizations across the city of Milwaukee to create a Know Your Rights training program for interactions with law enforcement.

Alongside Black Space, a community organization that provides free group therapeutic experiences for Black and Brown communities, the Community Engagement department ran more than six trainings for nine different Milwaukee city and county-based organizations. Over 120 individuals participated in the Know Your Rights training sessions, and the affiliate hopes to grow this number moving forward. The program will expand into other areas of Southeastern Wisconsin and cover topics ranging from Know Your Rights while Protesting to Voter Rights Trainings!



## IN THE COURT

### Here's a look at the 2024 ACLU of Wisconsin Legal Department

From legalizing marriage equality to filing open records requests about book removal decisions in various Wisconsin School Districts, the ACLU of Wisconsin plays a leading role in securing groundbreaking civil rights and civil liberties victories in the courts.

The ACLU of Wisconsin's legal team has grown this past year, adding a legal director and another staff attorney. We will continue to develop the team even more in the coming months. Almost 100 years after our founding, we remain fully and fiercely committed to doing the same meaningful impact litigation work for which the ACLU has always been known.

### LEGAL DEPARTMENT IMPACT

Over the past year, the Legal Department has examined its internal processes and priorities carefully, distilling where we will spend our limited resources. The department has adopted new sophisticated technology to assist the team in administrative work, from intake to investigation. The team has undergone department-wide professional development to expand their capacity and expertise in the ACLU's work, working closely with partners and coalitions on a broad docket of long-standing legal cases, not insignificantly.



**“We will do what we can with what we have to work with and always point our resources toward expanding the rights of those most injured by our government’s action or inaction.” – RYAN COX**

Ryan Cox is the **ACLU of Wisconsin Legal Director** and has been with the organization since October 2023. As legal director, Ryan leads the organization’s work to vindicate individual rights through impact litigation in the state and federal courts, investigate government action, and advocate for vulnerable populations. Ryan’s favorite part about working for the ACLU of Wisconsin is knowing that the work is essential to our communities and that the long hours are for a higher purpose.

When asked about his approach to leading the ACLU-WI Legal Department, Ryan said: “The Legal Department at the ACLU-WI is charged with a very sacred role, not just within the organization, but

within our larger democracy. For generations, the courts have played a primary role in enforcing and expanding marginalized communities’ civil rights and liberties – from integration to reproductive rights and so much more. We now find ourselves in a time where the courts may no longer protect some of these hard-fought rights, but our role as lawyers and legal professionals at the ACLU is to push those boundaries and resist injustice where we find it. I approach my work at the ACLU-WI with this core understanding: that we will do what we can with what we have to work with and always point our resources toward expanding the rights of those most injured by our government’s action or inaction.”



**“I love thinking deeply and creatively about legal interventions and policy changes that are more equitable for all Wisconsinites” – EMMA SHAKESHAFT**

Emma Shakeshaft has been a **Staff Attorney and researcher with the ACLU of Wisconsin** since 2018. She works to combat legal procedures that criminalize poverty and perpetuate racial inequality. Her primary focus areas are racial justice, criminal justice, the criminalization of poverty, and policing.

Emma says: “I wanted to be involved with social justice issues from a young age. I had a lot of questions about people, human rights, and legal systems. This interest and dedication led me to pursue a law degree and a PhD in sociology, specifically focusing on racial justice, criminal justice, and legal institutions. I wanted to know more about how law can impact people and how people can impact law. I am committed to

practicing law in ways that allow me to interrogate and challenge systemic inequality within legal systems using research and litigation. I greatly admire the important work of the ACLU, and I knew that if I practiced law, I would want to be an ACLU attorney.”

Holding a dual degree in law and sociology, Emma said, “Social movement lawyering and impact litigation was a natural fit for me as a sociologist. It is important to be informed about the civil rights issues we face, and it is equally important to act. For me, using sociological and legal tools allows me to do just that: learn, know, and act. I love thinking deeply and creatively about legal interventions and policy changes that are more equitable for all Wisconsinites.”



**“Legal cases are just one aspect of advocacy – our organization’s holistic approach uses community engagement, advocacy, social media, and more in the struggle against systemic inequalities” – HAYLEY ARCHER**

Hayley Archer joined the legal team as the newest **Staff Attorney** earlier this year. Although she’s new to the organization, she has previously represented employees whose rights were violated in the workplace, focusing primarily on issues around LGBTQ+ rights and gender. Hayley’s expertise is invaluable to our work at the ACLU of Wisconsin, where political attacks on gender, sexuality, and race continue to mount, particularly in schools across the state.

“Lawyering for social and political change motivated me to attend law school,” Hayley said. “This year, I joined ACLU-WI because its community-focused integrated advocacy work inspires me. Legal cases are just one aspect of advocacy— our organization’s holistic approach uses community engagement, advocacy, social media, and more in the struggle against systemic inequalities.”



**“Legal intake is a crucial tool that allows us to understand what is happening in our state” – NOUR KALBOUNEH**

Nour Kalbouneh is a **Paralegal at the ACLU-WI (having served for three years as Legal Intake and Community Engagement Coordinator)**. She runs the ACLU of Wisconsin’s legal intake process. She is responsible for reviewing and responding to all public intakes and identifying cases our legal team could act on. She also helps support teams across the affiliate, from legal to community engagement.

Nour understands firsthand the consequences of unjust, inhumane, and racist systems. She is part of the Immigrant Rising pre-law program. Nour plans to become a lawyer, where she will continue to fight against systemic racism and other forms of injustice.

At the ACLU, Nour is often the first point of contact for people seeking our assistance. She hears from people daily— on the phone, over email, and through the mail. In every communication and correspondence, Nour leads with respect, care, and compassion, doing whatever she can to support whoever is reaching out.

“Our legal intake process is not only meant to decide whether we can take on a case. We always send resources to individuals or refer them to other organizations when we cannot help; we keep track of different patterns we see across police departments, correctional institutions, jails, school districts, etc., and we take action in many ways that are not strictly litigation,” Nour said. “We receive over 2,000 intakes per year. Legal intake is a crucial tool that allows us to understand what is happening in our state.”

After evaluating each intake request, Nour assesses whether our organization can assist and alerts the legal team if we can. Whether or not we can offer individual legal representation, Nour works as hard as she can to connect people with resources and offer them guidance in getting the help they need.

## LEGAL INTAKE PROCESS

The Legal Intake process is one of the most important things we do at the ACLU. It is a direct pipeline that allows us to be the eyes and ears of what is happening throughout the state. Very few organizations collect as many intakes from incarcerated individuals as we do, and we need the legal intake process to hear about mass injustices and civil rights violations occurring at correctional institutions and jails.

Based on what we hear from legal intake, we can send open records requests, involve our advocacy, communications, and community engagement teams, and focus on the community’s needs. While managing legal intake can often be complex and tolling, it is crucial that we have an avenue for people to report civil rights and civil liberties violations in Wisconsin.



**“Being an ACLU lawyer** means standing at the frontlines of some of Wisconsin’s most complex and pressing civil liberties and rights issues of our time. It’s a serious responsibility that requires skilled attorneys and deeply dedicated, resilient people who do their work to serve their clients, community members, and colleagues” – **TIM MUTH**

**Tim Muth is a volunteer staff attorney at the ACLU-WI.** After a long and distinguished career at Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren S.C., Tim called the ACLU of Wisconsin in 2016 and asked if he could work with us pro bono. Eight years later, Tim remains an integral legal team member, leading numerous cases, including our recent lawsuit against the City of Milwaukee over its RNC protest rules. Tim also played an essential role in adding new faces to the legal team in the past year. He believes the future is bright.

“The growth of our legal team over this past year has been a joy to watch. We have added a few new brilliant litigators to our team and are building a solid foundation for the future. Being an ACLU lawyer means standing at the frontlines of some of Wisconsin’s most complex and pressing civil liberties and rights issues of our time. It’s a serious responsibility that requires skilled attorneys and deeply dedicated, resilient people who do their work to serve their clients, community members, and colleagues. What we’ve been able to do together and our impact in the last few months alone has been remarkable. With great new talent, we have recently filed important cases involving protests outside the RNC and for the rights of mothers in our prisons, and there will be more to come.

The people of Wisconsin should feel confident knowing that the ACLU of Wisconsin has a robust, intensely driven legal department going to work daily to help build the Wisconsin we all want to live in. Today’s legal team has a broad scope of talent with deep knowledge of reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, voting rights, and the rights of immigrants and incarcerated persons. This is the only organization in the state that can address such a broad range of civil rights and civil liberties issues. We are here for the people of Wisconsin—and we aren’t going anywhere.

I love the diversity of the ACLU staff! They bring diverse backgrounds, talents, and life experiences, and they are zealous advocates for freedom and justice in our state,” Tim said.



## ACLU-WI COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

# THE VOICE OF CIVIL LIBERTIES IN WISCONSIN

The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin (ACLU-WI) Communications Department is a key component of its mission to defend the civil rights and liberties of Wisconsinites. It serves as the organization’s voice, ensuring that its messages are heard loud and clear.

The Communications Department handles all media inquiries, press releases, and statements, often making it the first point of contact for journalists seeking information about the organization’s work. The department also manages the organization’s website, creates print materials and reports, and raises the profile of the affiliate’s social media presence, capitalizing on the growing importance of social media in advancing fair and balanced information to wide audiences.

“We want to use communications to build narrative power, tell stories, and convey the impact the work we engage in has on people’s lives.” – **DAVID GWIDT**



From left to right: Lan McCauley, David Gwidt and Alyssa Mauk

The communications department is led by **Alyssa Mauk, the Director of Communications, Program, and Strategy**, who has been with the affiliate since May 2020. Alyssa and her team are responsible for managing the organization’s public image, crafting its messaging, and ensuring that its mission and work are accurately represented in the media.

**Lan McCauley is the Digital Strategist**. Lan has been with the ACLU of Wisconsin since 2022. As a Digital Strategist, Lan produces content with the rest of the ACLU Communications team to empower people to exercise their freedoms.

**David Gwidt is the Deputy Communications Director** for the organization—and has been with the organization since 2019.

As communication manager, David writes press releases, blogs, op-eds, and other forms of written communication. Not only that, David is pivotal in ensuring that communications into our advocacy and community engagement work, leveraging his skills to advance the ACLU’s campaigns, legislative efforts, and organizing programs.



**“A major focus for us will be to make sure everyone in Wisconsin feels informed, prepared, and empowered to get and stay engaged.”**

– DAVID GWIDT

“Time and capacity are always the hardest things to manage for any team, but communications requires a full cross-departmental strategy to provide adequate support to all departments. Our team really has to dig in, learn, and become subject matter experts in everything our affiliate works on in order to create effective, strategic, and effective communications ideas,” **Alyssa** said.

“We also need time to innovate and grow with the times as the focus becomes more digitally focused. However, our team is extremely efficient and able to pivot when new things arise that need our attention quickly. I’m really proud of our entire affiliate for all the incredible work they do, and am so grateful to have David and Lan as partners to share that amazing work with as many Wisconsinites as we can!”

“As we head into a crucial year for our democracy—with crucial elections at the local, state, and national levels that will impact civil rights and civil liberties—a major focus for us will be to make sure everyone in Wisconsin feels informed, prepared, and empowered to get and stay engaged. We know that democracy is not a spectator sport, so we want to make sure Wisconsinites have the tools they need to exercise their power at the ballot box and in their communities,” **David** said.

“We also want to make sure that all the work we’re doing resonates with people and prompts them to act. We want to use communications to build narrative power, tell stories, and convey the impact the work we engage in has on people’s lives.”



**“Time and capacity are always the hardest things to manage for any team, but communications requires a full cross-departmental strategy to provide adequate support to all departments.”**

– ALYSSA MAUK



The Communications Department works closely with the affiliate’s legal, community engagement, and advocacy departments to publicize important legal cases, political campaigns, and community events. The communications department is crucial in raising public awareness about critical civil rights and liberties issues and the ACLU-WI’s work to address them.

“Our work intersects with the ACLU of Wisconsin’s integrated advocacy work. A good example of this is the 2024 Democracy Campaign. Ahead of the 2024 spring election, we launched our effort to educate voters on their rights and the resources available to them to cast their ballot,” Lan said.

“The initiative included an ad campaign aimed specifically to increase turnout for first-time voters, and our digital ads generated 634,330 impressions.

Our Know Your Rights voter guide has information about all things related to voting, including voter ID requirements, absentee and in-person voting, and resources on how to find more information about how you can vote. We also generated a candidate questionnaire for the Milwaukee City Attorney race and shared information about the confusing referendum questions appearing on the ballot, which also found exceptional reach on social media.”



# AWARD-WINNING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND WORKPLACE

2023 was an exciting year for the ACLU of Wisconsin in many ways, but our organization was highlighted across the city for two distinctive accomplishments in particular!



The affiliate was featured in the *Shepherd Express' Best of Milwaukee 2023* as the Best Place to Work for Social Justice! Blaine Schultz wrote "the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has a mission statement to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. The organization remains in demand and active now as much as ever." We were honored to receive recognition for our entire team's hard work and dedication.



ACLU of Wisconsin Executive Director **Dr. Melinda Brennan** was also named a 2023 Woman of Influence by the Milwaukee Business Journal. The award recognizes Milwaukee-area women who are leaders and making a difference in their professions and communities. Dr. Brennan was one of 30 women to receive the award. She and the other winners were profiled in the Milwaukee Business Journal and were honored in a ceremony last June.

# BOARD MEMBERS

**William Sulton**  
*U&F, President*

**Bill Lynch**  
*U&F, Secretary*

**Sara MacDonald**  
*Member*

**Xuan Nguyen**  
*Member*

**Angela Lang**  
*U&F, Vice President*

**Christine Munson**  
*U&F, Member*

**María Rodríguez**  
*Member*

**Jane Hereth**  
*Member*

**Nichole Yunk Todd**  
*U&F, Treasurer*

**Tricia Zunker**  
*U&F Member*

**Nieves Lopez**  
*Member*

**La'Tanya Campbell**  
*Member*

**Alonzo Kelly**  
*U&F, National Board Rep*

**Selika Lawton**  
*U&F, Member*

**Sheri Swokowski**  
*Member*

**Nat Godley**  
*Member*

**LaToyia Gibson**  
*Member*



Fiscal Year 24 financials will be available on the ACLU-WI website later this fall



# LOOKING FORWARD OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

## Fall 2024 Election

As part of our everlasting commitment to preserving and strengthening democracy, we are ramping up for another tireless year of electoral work. In the months ahead, we're focusing on equipping voters with the tools they need to cast an informed vote and holding elected officials accountable for civil rights and civil liberties issues that impact our state and communities.

To stay current on how we're preparing for the upcoming election or to get involved as an [Election Protection volunteer](#) or canvasser, go to [ACLU-WI.org/VotingRights](#).

## Supreme Court Race in April

This past April, we educated voters on candidates' positions in the Wisconsin Supreme Court race, highlighting important issues like abortion and voting rights. But the work is far from over. With so much at stake in the November presidential election, we know how important it is to have a Supreme Court in Wisconsin that will protect the rights and liberties of all Wisconsinites. We are already laying plans for what our work will look like for the upcoming race in April 2025, knowing that there will be a Supreme Court race in Wisconsin through April 2030.

## Strategic Plan

Developing an updated strategic plan has always been a priority for me since I started leading this team, and we have put this plan into action. This year, our leadership team, in concert with the rest of our staff, has collaborated and devoted time



to both imagining, reimagining, and dreaming of our way forward as we march toward our affiliate's biennial anniversary. Working with an outside consultant, we've already shaped our new mission and vision statements, reflecting on who we are as an affiliate, as well as who we want to be in the future.

Although the strategic plan will officially launch in April 2025, the work we've done so far has had a deep impact on our day-to-day work as an affiliate, fostering commitment and community and departmental collaboration. We are deeply committed to this work and cannot wait to share our future vision with you.

There is much work to do, and we hope you will join us in making that happen. Go to [aclu-wi.org/act](#) to find out how you can get involved and support the ACLU of Wisconsin.

Dr. Melinda Q. Brennan  
Executive Director

# GET INVOLVED AND JOIN THE FIGHT

As we move toward 2025, the fight for our civil rights and liberties is more important than ever. Join the ACLU of Wisconsin as we continue to demonstrate in communities across our state and beyond.



## JOIN

Become a member of the ACLU of Wisconsin. Stay informed on our work and the threats to civil rights and liberties.



## ACT

Want your voice to be heard? Sign up for action alerts, track bills in legislative sessions, and learn more about how you can speak out on issues you care about.



## VOLUNTEER

Get involved in your community! From legal observing to tabling to supporting community programming, there are lots of ways to show up for your community.



## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Know your rights and how to use them. Attend a Know Your Rights training or find our Know Your Rights materials online at [ACLU-WI.org/KYR](#).



## GIVE

Support the work of the ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation through your tax-deductible gift. Your support invests in communities, rights expansion, democracy defense, and more. Consider an annual gift, or contact us for more information about legacy giving.

Questions about how you can get involved? Contact us today!

**Follow us on social media**

 @acluofwi

 @ACLUofWisconsin

 @acluofwi

 facebook.com/ACLUofWi



**ACLU**  
Wisconsin

[ACLU-WI.org](http://ACLU-WI.org)