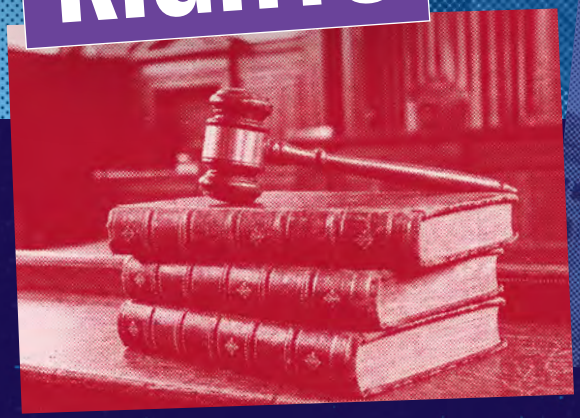
ACLU Wisconsin

2025-26
ANNUAL REPORT

RECLAIMING *Our* RIGHTS





aclu-wi.org

BUILDING *Power* TOGETHER



Our every action matters. Whether we wake up and choose to learn something challenging, speak to someone who isn't similar to us, to choose compassion rather than only righteous anger, to read the news and remain engaged in our community, to support our neighbors, or to show up at polling places and exercise our right not just to vote – but to collectively construct opportunities for a future that will serve us all. We learned that we are at our best when we are in service to each other and our shared future.

If nothing else, this past year has taught our team that the greatest power is relationships that endure. Whether under intense pressure, when afraid or accepting a hard truth that requires us to knuckle down and get to work, or during moments of accomplishment and joy, relationships strengthen our resolve and encourage us to deepen our engagement in the work of defending our democracy.

Our collective power, our ability to tell stories of our lives and to connect the dots between issues and communities, to unite to shared purpose, to humanize people and refuse to be consumed by despair – that is the engine that keeps us at work, even as the conditions of Wisconsin and the nation made us ask difficult, often painful questions of ourselves and this project of democracy.

Whether in collective outrage that big brother is watching our every move, recording where we go and where we sleep, who we spend time with, our path to work or toward activism or community support, Wisconsinites recognized that surveillance is a racial justice, immigration, and First Amendment issue, a reproductive justice and LGBTQ+ rights issue, and leads us evermore into a carceral state which impacts us all.

An important, and forever, part of our mission is to make sure each Wisconsinite can live a life of dignity. We recognize the daily indignities that people who are incarcerated face, the way that prison conditions reveal the undercurrent of 'expendable and unforgivable' that cannot align with thinking of each other as neighbors. If we continue to object to a jail-to-deportation pipeline, let us also object to conditions of cruelty for those who are incarcerated and will return as our neighbors. As our new chapter unfolds, let us have clarity that we are each impacted by government overreach, that all issues are inextricably linked as are our very lives.

We – our team, board, all members, donors, volunteers and supporters – are the watchdogs of Wisconsin. Conditions change; our awareness of consequences, intentional or unintended, and our work to protect, defend, and advance a fairer Wisconsin continues.

Work never stops, no matter who leads.

In Solidarity,

Dr. Melinda Brennan



Jen Bizzotto
Staff Attorney



Kate Braun
Development Operations & Grants Manager



Dr. Melinda Brennan
Executive Director



Ryan Cox
Legal Director



Nolan Flynn
Digital Strategist



Kwesi Foli
Comms Coordinator



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Abby Homuth
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Tina Itson
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Zachary Kester
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Alex Larson
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Melissa Ludin
Statewide Coalition & Relations Advocate



Alyssa Meinecke
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Jon McCray Jones
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Amanda Merkwae
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Staff Attorney



Emma Shakeshaft
Senior Staff Attorney



Sarah Siegel
Deputy Executive Director



Moisés López Soltero
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James Stein
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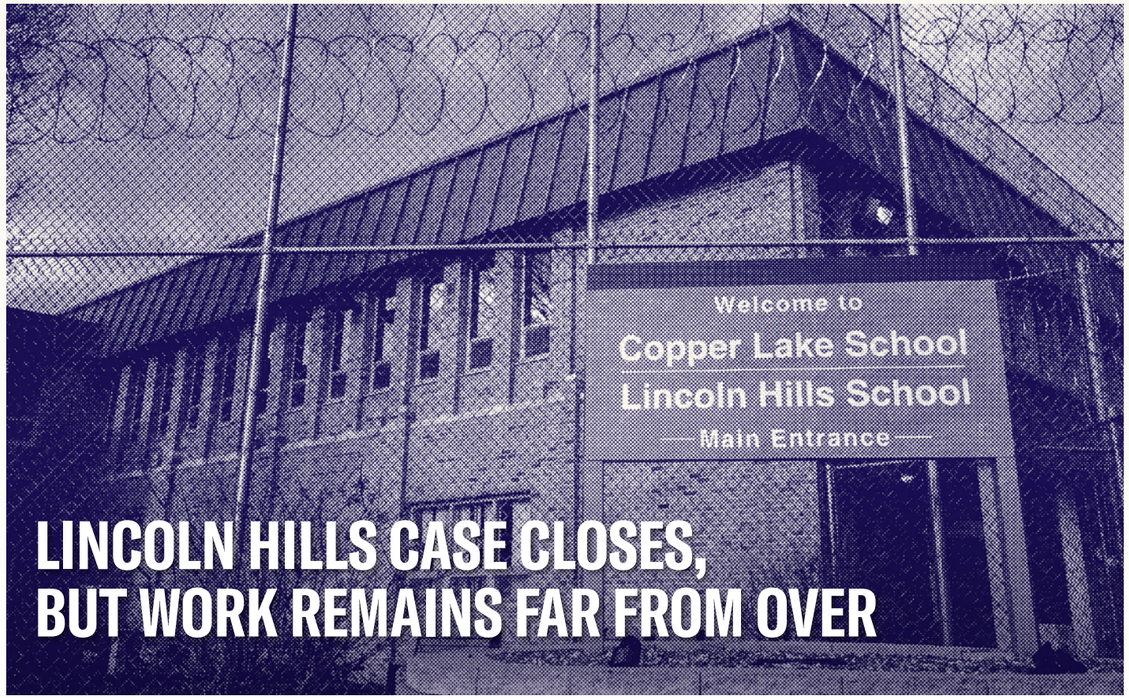


Arielle Winter
Organizer

2025-2026 STAFF NOT PICTURED

Sinyetta Hill
Systemic Equality Intern

Jade Weise
Paralegal



LINCOLN HILLS CASE CLOSES, BUT WORK REMAINS FAR FROM OVER

Ten years ago, the conditions at Wisconsin's two juvenile prisons weren't just unconstitutional – they were unconscionable.

Life for youth inside Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake was nothing short of a nightmare. The facilities were overrun with stories of abuse, negligence, and corruption so horrifying they became the subject of a DOJ investigation and were eventually raided by the FBI.

But even after federal authorities intervened, staff were fired, and new leadership took over, the 150-200 kids trapped inside Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake were still suffering. Children faced weeks and even months in solitary as a punishment, often only leaving their cell for an hour a day, sometimes chained to a desk. When our team visited the facility and later got access to body cam videos, we witnessed excessive uses of force, teenagers pepper sprayed in hallways and through the doors of their locked cells, and youth shuffling from place to place in chains.

It was clear the problems plaguing these facilities would not be solved through a handful of personnel changes and tweaks at the margins. When the ACLU of Wisconsin, along with our partners at the Juvenile Law Center and Quarles & Brady, filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of the children incarcerated in Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake, we knew they needed a complete overhaul – and ultimately must close. We understood that the road ahead was going to be a long one.

In 2018, the parties reached a settlement that set forth the standards for treatment moving forward and appointed a court-ordered monitor to oversee compliance. Over the years, we saw slow but tangible progress. Eventually, the facilities eliminated pepper spray — it is no longer even stored on campus. They also dramatically limited the use of solitary confinement, mechanical restraints like handcuffs, and strip searches.


WISCONSIN PUBLIC RADIO

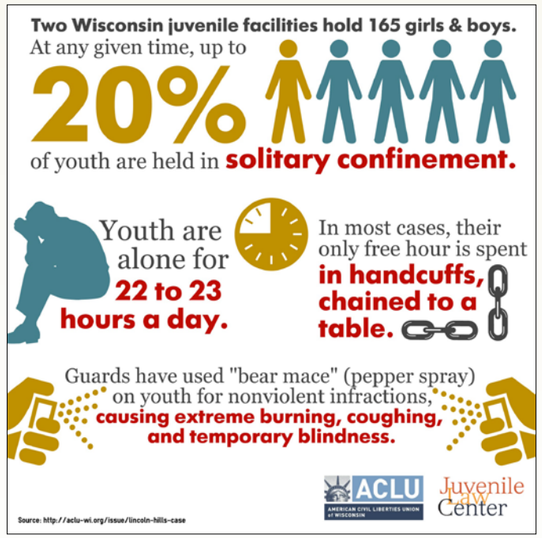
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JUSTICE, NEWS, PRISONS

Judge ends court oversight of Lincoln Hills youth prison

Youth facilities in northern Wisconsin remain open despite deadline for closure

BY SARAH LEHR • JANUARY 28, 2026



Earlier in 2026, the monitor found Lincoln Hills in substantial compliance with every requirement in the consent decree for a second consecutive time, prompting the court to dismiss the case and end the settlement.

While the settlement agreement is no longer in effect, the protections for young people will continue. Notably, the key provisions of the consentee decree – which prevent punitive solitary confinement and limit pepper spray, mechanical restraints, and strip searches – are now codified in the Wisconsin Administrative Code. They will govern the treatment of children at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake, as well as all new state-run secure facilities for youth.

The facilities today are a far cry from where we started, and we are happy to see the significant headway made over the years. Yet we know that no child should grow up in a prison — even an improved one. The truth is that being away from home and school, locked behind bars in a concrete cell, is not an appropriate environment for any child to develop.

Adolescence is the time when kids are figuring out who they really are. They need people who believe in them and prop up their sense of self-worth. They need the space to try things out, make mistakes, and mature. They need safety and care and time to heal from past harm. Lincoln Hills may have reached "substantial compliance," but at the end of the day, these are still children who ask us why they can't talk more often to their moms.

And progress at Lincoln Hills doesn't fix the systemic racism and societal failure that leads a child there in the first place. Wisconsin incarcerates Black youth at a rate 16 times higher than white youth, and racial bias corrodes the criminal legal system at every turn.

So what's next?

The state committed to closing Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake eight years ago, and it has failed to keep that promise. Closing these facilities remains the right move, and the state should act urgently to shutter them once and for all.

But moving young people from Lincoln Hills into smaller facilities is only a first step. It is no doubt preferable for the youth incarcerated there to be closer to home, no longer hundreds of miles away from their families.

But the real solution – the one we should be aiming for – is to provide communities with resources that support young people and avoid incarceration. Wisconsin must embrace rehabilitation that keeps young people in their schools, communities and families and invest in alternatives that support young people and help them thrive at home and in their own communities.

The Lincoln Hills case may be closed, but the work of imagining a vision for youth justice rooted in humanity, accountability, care and dignity remains far from over.

"We urge state officials to proceed rapidly to where children involved in the juvenile justice system are served at home or placed in residential facilities much closer to their families and support networks."

– Tim Muth
Senior Staff Attorney

ACLU Wisconsin

Lincoln Hills Timeline

January 2017: ACLU of Wisconsin Challenges Abusive Conditions
The ACLU of WI, Juvenile Law Center, and Quarles & Brady file a class action lawsuit on behalf of young people confined at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake, challenging the use of solitary confinement, pepper spray, physical restraints, and other harmful practices.

June 2017: Federal Court Finds Constitutional Violations
A federal judge finds that the use of solitary confinement, pepper spray, and restraints violates young people's constitutional rights and orders the parties to develop a preliminary injunction. The ruling marks a major step toward ending practices that were cruel, unnecessary, and counterproductive.

March 2018: Wisconsin Moves to Close Lincoln Hills
Following years of investigations and the ACLU of WI's class action lawsuit, the Wisconsin Legislature passes legislation requiring Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake to close by January 1, 2021. The ACLU of Wisconsin and its partners warn that the abusive practices challenged at Lincoln Hills must never be replicated elsewhere.

2018: Settlement Secures Sweeping Protections
Wisconsin agrees to settle the lawsuit. The agreement phases out punitive solitary confinement and pepper spray, strictly limits other solitary confinement and mechanical restraints, restricts strip searches, requires deescalation training, and establishes independent monitoring to hold the state accountable.

2019: Monitoring Shows Progress, and Work Still to Do
The first monitoring reports show that significant problems remain, prompting the ACLU of WI to continue pressing for reform and closure. Later reports document improvements, including reductions in strip searches, room confinement, pepper spray, and mechanical restraints.

2021–2022: Conditions Deteriorate
Years after lawmakers promised closure, Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake remain open. Court monitoring documents declining compliance, increased uses of force and restraints, and inappropriate solitary confinement. In June 2022, the monitor again reports worsening conditions, and the ACLU of WI and Juvenile Law Center renew their calls for change.

2025: Facilities Reach Substantial Compliance
After years of court-ordered oversight, the monitor finds Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake in substantial compliance with every provision of the consent decree for the first time. The reforms include eliminating pepper spray and dramatically reducing reliance on strip searches, confinement, and mechanical restraints.

January 2026: Court-Ordered Monitoring Nears Its End, Protections Remain
A second consecutive monitoring report finds substantial compliance with all provisions, triggering the process to end the consent decree. But the protections won through the lawsuit will endure: key restrictions on punitive solitary confinement, pepper spray, mechanical restraints, and strip searches are now written into Wisconsin's Administrative Code and apply to state-run secure youth facilities.

The work continues. Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake remain open despite the state's earlier commitment to close them. The ACLU of WI continues to advocate for their closure and for community-based alternatives that give young people the support and opportunities they need.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Tim Muth dreamt of working for the ACLU long before he ever did. Born in upstate New York and raised in Oklahoma, Tim has admired the ACLU since childhood, recalling: "I was reading banned books that the ACLU was fighting to put back on the shelves." He attended undergrad in Dallas, then Harvard Law School, and then moved to Milwaukee with Linda, his wife of now 43 years. The ACLU was always on Tim's horizon, a destination on a long, winding road, But no journey is linear, and sometimes we need to take a detour to reach where we are going. Even if that detour lasts 30 years.

For three decades, Tim worked as a business litigation attorney at Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren, becoming a distinguished litigator over an illustrious career.

But one devastating day led him down a different path. On April 30, 2014, a Milwaukee Police Officer shot 31-year-old Dontre Hamilton to death, firing at him 14 times. He was killed right outside Tim's office.

The brutality of Dontre's killing – and Tim's proximity to it – horrified Tim, and he knew he needed to do more. Dontre's memory stayed with him, and it led him to answer the call he had first heard all those years ago as a child. Soon after, he retired from his corporate law firm and went to volunteer with the ACLU of Wisconsin.

Tim's first case was one he will never forget. At Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake, children as young as 14 were routinely subjected to pepper spray, solitary confinement and strip searches. After interviewing the kids about the horrendous conditions they were living in, the ACLU of WI took the case.

The youth spoke to Tim about their dreams, their futures, and what they wanted to accomplish in life. Despite facing so much individual and systemic harm throughout their lives, they wanted more for themselves. They deserved far better and they deserved a chance. The profound racial injustice endemic in Lincoln Hills struck Tim immediately, as he described, during his first visit, "a group of us white people in business casual looking at faces of Black Boys behind cell doors."

From his first visit in 2016 to his last in 2025, the prison has "dramatically improved." Solitary confinement was banned. Pepper spray was banned. Strip searches – once pervasive and used recklessly – are now virtually non-existent. Tim sees the Lincoln Hills case as a testament to the progress the ACLU can help accomplish, but it also underscores how the struggle for justice extends far beyond a lawsuit or the halls of a courtroom. Although the conditions at the facilities are far better than they were when we started, the ultimate goal of closing them altogether remains work still left to be done.

Tim's experience in those first site visits illustrates who he is as a lawyer and as a person: unwaveringly committed to treating all people with humanity and dignity. From Tim's work on Lincoln Hills to his unwavering commitment to immigrants' rights, Tim has made an indelible impact on the lives of countless Wisconsinites. That's why it's no surprise that his favorite part of his ACLU career were the people – those he represented in court and those he worked within the community and in the organization – "people of all different backgrounds united in a common front."

Leading with quiet strength, humility and selflessness, Tim used his talents to make Wisconsin a better place – and he brought out those same qualities in everyone he worked with. We are endlessly grateful to Tim for his decade of service to the ACLU, and we miss him already!



STUDENTS' RIGHTS DON'T END AT THE SCHOOLHOUSE GATES

Last summer, the ACLU of Wisconsin and the ACLU's State Supreme Court Initiative filed an amicus brief on behalf of a 12-year-old student asking the Wisconsin Supreme Court to protect students' constitutional rights when police question them at school.

The case centered on a police interrogation of a 12-year-old student who was pulled out of class and brought to a school office, where a school resource officer questioned him. A fully uniformed and armed police officer stood between him and the closed door. The student, who had no prior experience with the police, was subjected to confrontational and accusatory questioning and never read his Miranda rights.

We argued that questioning a student in this manner violates the Wisconsin Constitution. The brief further urged the Court to decide this case under the Wisconsin Constitution, instead of or in addition to the U.S. Constitution, to fully protect Wisconsinites from eroding civil rights on the federal level.

In April, SCOWI issued a decision in which they agreed the student was undergoing a custodial interview and their answers should have been declared inadmissible because police did not read him his Miranda rights. The ruling established an important new standard to protect the due process rights of students.



Students retain their constitutional rights, including the right to remain silent and to seek the advice of counsel, when interacting with law enforcement, even in the school environment. We all have rights when interacting with law enforcement – no matter where we are or how old we are – and these core constitutional protections are every bit as valid in schools as they are for adults.



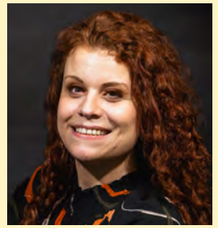
WISCONSIN INTRODUCES PACKAGE OF BILLS AIMED AT IMPROVING WISCONSIN'S PRISON CONDITIONS

In the 2025-26 legislative session, lawmakers introduced a suite of bills aimed at meeting long-neglected but basic needs of incarcerated people in Wisconsin.

Incarcerated people are often locked in solitary confinement for days, weeks, and even months on end with no knowledge of when they will be removed. When incarcerated people are sick or in need of medical treatment, they are often refused timely care, if they receive treatment at all. Even the most basic things – like looking out the window to look at the sky and sun, or talking briefly to a friend or loved one on the phone – are often out of reach.

The daily indignities that incarcerated people suffer should outrage all of us. Being incarcerated shouldn't warrant inhumane treatment. And it most certainly should never be a death sentence.

These bills recognize the humanity of people who are incarcerated. The ultimate goal of incarceration is rehabilitation, which means giving people access to basic needs, including hygiene products, natural light, the outdoors, recreational programming, and free connection to their loved ones, including phone calls. These bills would allow people placed in solitary confinement to read books and to write, participate in structured programming, and ensure that pregnant people continue to get prenatal care. They would guarantee a minimum wage of $2.33 per hour. Although these measures didn't become law, they established an important baseline framework for more humane prison conditions that we and our coalition partners can build upon.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Building Power, Dignity, and Hope Through Reentry

By Melissa Ludin, *Statewide Coalition and Relations Advocate*

"I haven't worked for 15 years. I don't know how to do this, and I need support."

Those words, shared by a person preparing to return home from incarceration, capture why our Know Your Rights training at the Milwaukee Reintegration Center is about much more than understanding the law. Incarcerated peoples' willingness to be vulnerable especially in a room with others was a demonstration of strength. Reentry requires more than information. It requires the courage to ask for help, challenge pride and ego, transform how we think, and begin imagining who we want to become.

With the ACLU of Wisconsin partnership with **My Way Out**, we facilitate Know Your Rights training for people preparing to graduate from the Building a Path to Success Program. We cover interactions with law enforcement, probation and supervision, and privacy rights involving phones and social media. We also practice self-advocacy, remaining calm, and deescalating encounters that could affect a person's safety, freedom, and future.

As a facilitator, I am also there to listen to what participants need. By continuing to listen, I am able to connect participants with other programs and resources in our community. When someone expresses interest in becoming involved in criminal legal reform work or developing new skills, I connect them with people who will help them pursue those goals after their release.

Each time I enter the Milwaukee Reintegration Center, I am reminded of the importance of human dignity. While waiting to enter one day, I heard people being called for a legal visit by their bed number. That is why I begin differently. I ask each participant to introduce themselves by name and share one thing they like about themselves. I tell them it is nice to meet them. Those interactions may seem small, but they matter.

Knowing your rights is a powerful tool, but knowledge alone is not the goal. The goal is for people to recognize their own power and carry that knowledge home to their children, families and communities.



CRIMINAL LEGAL REFORM



COMMUNITY CONTROL OVER POLICE SURVEILLANCE

The proliferation of surveillance technology by Wisconsin law enforcement agencies – including Flock cameras and other Automated License Plate Readers (ALPR) technology, drones, ShotSpotter, cell-site simulators ("Stingrays"), AI-powered integrated camera networks, and open source intelligence software – has occurred in most places without any community input or control and presents significant threats to Wisconsinites' civil rights and liberties. ICE and DHS are rapidly expanding its surveillance interface in local communities. Surveillance is being used to monitor and prosecute political protesters, people seeking and providing reproductive health care, and LGBTQ+ communities. These are not projections – these are present-day realities carried out by bad actors within the federal government and local jurisdictions.

Local police surveillance tech is also ripe for abuse. In Wisconsin and across the country, law enforcement officers, many in leadership positions, have been accused of misusing surveillance tools for personal reasons, including stalking romantic interests.

This year, we continued to fight the expansion of police surveillance infrastructure in Milwaukee and across Wisconsin and advocated for robust frameworks for evaluating new and existing surveillance technology through **Community Control Over Police Surveillance (CCOPS)** laws, which have already been adopted in 26 jurisdictions from coast to coast, including Madison, Wisconsin and St. Louis, Missouri.

In April 2025, we published an open letter to the Milwaukee Common Council urging them to implement a two-year pause on the adoption of any new surveillance technology. Then in May 2025, we sent a coalition letter to the Common Council on behalf of 19 organizations urging implementation of a CCOPS ordinance in the city of Milwaukee. After a Milwaukee Police officer was criminally charged with misconduct in public office for using Flock's license plate readers to track the location of his girlfriend and her ex 179 times, four alders called for urgent reforms to police surveillance technology and advocated adoption of a CCOPS framework in Milwaukee.



Community Education

We hosted multiple training sessions for ACLU of WI supporters and community partners throughout the year to educate Milwaukeeans about the dangers of unchecked surveillance and how to give effective public testimony at municipal meetings in defense of privacy and civil rights. In January 2026, we joined Milwaukee Film for their screening of "MLK/FBI," the first documentary to uncover the extent of the FBI's surveillance and harassment of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to highlight the role of surveillance in targeting dissent now and in our recent past. In February 2026, we held a virtual webinar entitled "Know Your Rights: Surveillance, Privacy, and Technology."

THE FIGHT AGAINST FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY IN MILWAUKEE

WHAT IS FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY (FRT)?

Facial recognition systems are built on computer programs that analyze images of human faces for the purpose of identifying them. Law enforcement use of FRT poses a number of serious threats to civil rights and civil liberties, making it dangerous both when it fails and when it functions. Facial recognition automates discrimination. FRT consistently shows racial and gender biases that persist despite improvements in algorithm training data. The error rate of facial recognition systems has led to wrongful arrests of many individuals across the country. FRT is also increasingly being integrated with other technologies to create vast, interconnected mass surveillance networks that monitor residents.

At an April 2025 meeting of the City of Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission, the Milwaukee Police Department expressed intent to trade over 2.5 million booking photos and other data in exchange for "free" facial recognition software after admitting to using facial recognition search results from other Wisconsin law enforcement agencies for years, in secret, without any local policy in place. The Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office was also pursuing a contract for the technology.

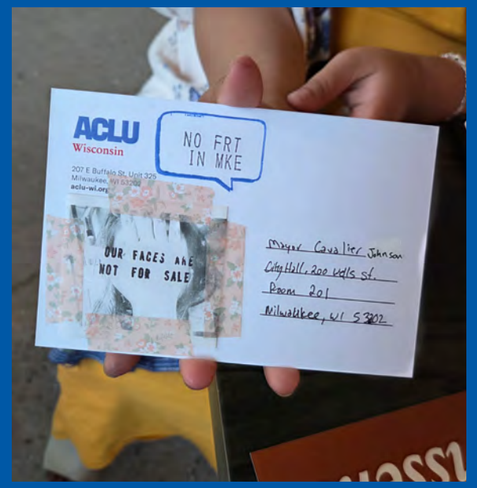
Over the next eleven months, we joined countless concerned Milwaukee residents and community organizations in the fight against FRT in Milwaukee, and we won. We testified before the Fire and Police Commission, Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission, and Milwaukee County Board. In June 2025, we sent an open records request to the Milwaukee Police Department to force transparency regarding their past use of FRT in secret. We mobilized residents to demand their elected city and county leaders reject the use of facial recognition in Milwaukee.



WINS

In June 2025, the Milwaukee County Board passed a resolution requesting the development of a comprehensive policy framework for facial recognition technology that does not suppress First Amendment related activities, violate privacy, or otherwise adversely impact individuals' civil rights and liberties.

At a February 2026 City of Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission meeting, over 100 members of the public turned out in opposition to MPD's proposed use of FRT. Dozens of people testified during public comment – all against FRT. The following day, MPD Chief Norman announced a moratorium on the use of facial recognition by MPD. A few weeks later, Sheriff Ball announced she would also no longer pursue FRT for the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office.



SHAPING THE NARRATIVE

Between April 2025 and March 2026, we spearheaded a transformative effort to shape the public narrative surrounding police surveillance across Wisconsin, exposing how these expanding technologies threaten fundamental civil liberties. Through testimony at public meetings, press releases spotlighting law enforcement abuses and transparency failures, compelling op-eds, analytical blog posts, educational social media content, and engaging podcast appearances, we connected critical dots showing how surveillance tools have historically been weaponized against marginalized communities and civil rights activists. We highlighted the heightened, unique risks these invasive technologies pose under the current federal administration, sounding the alarm on automated tracking and data-sharing risks. By bringing this urgent message to wider audiences and driving coverage that yielded nearly 90 surveillance-related media mentions throughout the year, we elevated community control over police surveillance to the forefront of the statewide civil rights agenda.



THE JAIL-TO-DEPORTATION PIPELINE IS FUELING MASS DEPORTATION

In 2022, the affiliate published **The Jail-to-Deportation Pipeline in Wisconsin** report that investigated the nature of immigration enforcement in Wisconsin. Our original report detailed the close collaboration between local law enforcement and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and how this relationship was fueling the deportation of immigrants. The report revealed that law enforcement agencies across Wisconsin had received millions of dollars in federal grant funding for providing ICE with information on incarcerated immigrants who are identified as or were suspected to be undocumented.

In July of 2025, the affiliate published an updated edition of **Jail-to-Deportation Pipeline in Wisconsin**; the revised report shows that the relationship between local law enforcement and ICE is growing as more county sheriffs have agreed to participate in federal immigration enforcement since the start of the second Trump administration.

Key takeaways from the updated report include:

- As of July 2025, thirteen Wisconsin law enforcement agencies have formalized partnerships with ICE through active 287(g) agreements (As of this September, it's up to 20).
- From Federal Fiscal Year 2021-24, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and 29 counties received over $7 million in federal funds through the SCAAP program in exchange for data sharing with ICE.
- From October 2021 through June 2025, ICE sent more than 3,300 immigration detainers.
- Recent open records requests also found that at least three Wisconsin counties get paid to detain and transport individuals for ICE.

  Update: As of September 2025, the four counties that we know are actively jailing ICE detainees include Brown, Dodge, Douglas, and Sauk.

287G + AB24

April 1st 2025 – March 31st 2026

Since the second Trump Administration began, immigrant families nationwide have faced constant threats of raids, deportations, and separation from loved ones. Wisconsin's 2025-26 state legislative session saw both attempts to bring that federal cruelty into state law, and a determined pushback from advocates, community members, and elected officials who refused to let Wisconsin become an instrument of the mass deportation machinery.

ACLU of WI worked alongside partners to oppose a bill that would conscript local law enforcement into immigration enforcement and support a package of protections designed to keep families together and restore the community trust that mass deportation campaigns have shattered.







Forcing Sheriffs to Do ICE's Bidding (AB-24) - VETOED (Win)

This bill would push local county sheriffs into harmful roles they were never meant to play – tools of mass deportation. If law enforcement refused to do ICE's bidding, this proposed law would strip away funding for essential county services. 822 ACLU supporters contacted their legislators in opposition to this bill, which was ultimately vetoed by Governor Evers.

The "Keep Families Together" bill package was a direct response to dangerous bills like AB-24. The bills in this package sought to protect and restore community trust through proposals to safeguard sanctuary spaces, ban state support for immigration detention centers, demand transparency and "no secret police" by requiring all law enforcement officers to identify themselves, and invest in due process through funding legal support for immigrants.

Fighting Local 287(g) Agreements: A Success Story

In September 2025, the ACLU of Wisconsin discovered that the Village of Palmyra Police Department signed an agreement to participate in Wisconsin's first Task Force Model 287(g) program, the most expansive form of the agreement that directs local law enforcement to conduct immigration investigations in the field and make immigration arrests. Until then, the 287(g) agreements in Wisconsin have only been in the form of the Jail Enforcement Model – which delegates immigration duties to jail personnel – and the Warrant Service Officer Model, under which local law enforcement serve immigration detainers.

We filed an open records request seeking more information about the agreement, connected with concerned Palmyra residents, and provided testimony before the Palmyra Village Board. Following the outpouring of concerns and months of thoughtful advocacy and conversations led by local community members, the Palmyra Village Board and Police Chief announced it would no longer pursue the 287(g) agreement in November 2025.

VOCES v. GERBER

Protecting Immigrants from Unlawful Detentions

As our Deportation Pipeline report explained, ICE uses local sheriffs' offices as a force multiplier, infiltrating communities with the use of our local resources. In fact, the main way ICE picks up undocumented immigrants is through local jails. Many sheriffs in Wisconsin choose to notify ICE of who they have in custody and then choose to hold certain individuals for an additional 48 hours after that person is legally entitled to be released under state law—simply because ICE has requested it.

Many sheriffs in Wisconsin are more than happy to comply with such voluntary requests from ICE. Yet, under state law, sheriffs only have arrest and detention power that is specifically granted to them by the state constitution or by the legislature. And neither the constitution nor the legislature has given sheriffs the authority to arrest people (or continue to hold them) for civil immigration violations, such as being unlawfully present in the country.

But that hasn't prevented roughly 50 sheriffs across the state from doing ICE's bidding and unlawfully detaining hundreds of people every year.

So, in the fall of 2025, on behalf of our client Voces de la Frontera, the ACLU of Wisconsin and co-counsel at Christopher & De León sued the top offenders: the sheriffs of Walworth, Brown, Marathon, Kenosha, and Sauk Counties. And we went straight to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, filing an original action petition asking that court to take the case directly. In December 2025, they agreed to hear the case.



Since then, the sheriffs have fought to keep the case out of the Wisconsin Supreme Court's hands and to delay a resolution of the case. We won the fight in the federal district court to have the case sent back to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and continue to seek that relief at the federal court of appeals as of the fall of 2026.

"No matter how many procedural barriers the sheriffs and the U.S. government try to impose, we will vigorously fight to ensure that the sheriffs are following state law and immigrants aren't being illegally detained," said Hannah Schwarz, Staff Attorney at the ACLU of Wisconsin. "And because we know that every day that goes by means more illegal arrests, we'll continue to oppose attempts to delay this litigation."

CIRRUS ROJAS v. OLSON

Fighting for Access to Bond Hearings in Immigration Proceedings

In the summer of 2025, the Trump administration broke with three decades of federal government policy and began indefinitely detaining all arrested immigrants who had entered the country without inspection. That meant even people who had been in the country for many years, had U.S. citizen children and strong ties to the community, and were contributing to the economy, were being held in ICE detention centers and local jails indefinitely, even if they had been granted bond by immigration judges who had found that they were neither a flight risk nor a danger to the community.

Jaciel Cirrus Rojas was one of those people. He has been in the United States since 2018 and has a U.S. citizen daughter who was six months old when he was arrested in the summer of 2025. Even though an immigration judge determined that he should be allowed to return to his family because he was neither a flight risk or danger to the community, DHS made the unilateral decision to ignore that bond order and hold him for months.

That's because the Trump administration decided that five presidential administrations' interpretation of a 1996 immigration law was wrong—including the first Trump administration's interpretation—and that people like Jaciel had to be detained until they were deported or granted the right to stay in the U.S.

Jaciel filed a habeas petition in federal district court, arguing that he was entitled to be released. When the district court ruled against him, we stepped in to take his case on appeal. Along with ACLU National's Immigrants' Rights Project (IRP), we took the case to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, arguing that the Trump administration's interpretation of the immigration statute was wrong and that people like Jaciel are entitled to bond hearings. Such a ruling would not only be a win for Jaciel's rights, but would ensure that this injustice could not happen again in Wisconsin.

In June 2026, our partners at IRP argued the case at the court of appeals, and in July, they secured a ruling agreeing with the ACLU's stance that folks like Jaciel are entitled to bond hearings and that the district court should have granted Jaciel's habeas petition, allowing him to be with his family while his immigration case proceeded.

Because of this case, tens of thousands of immigrants across Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana will no longer be subjected to indefinite detention, separating their families, and making it more difficult for them to present their cases to the immigration courts. Instead, like Jaciel, they'll be where they belong: with their families and communities.

1849 ABORTION BAN OVERTURNED

The ACLU of Wisconsin joined the Wisconsin Doulas of Color Collective, Freedom Inc., Wisconsin Abortion Support Network, and Reproductive Justice Action Milwaukee in filing an amicus brief at the Wisconsin Supreme Court in Planned Parenthood v. Urmanski, supporting the legal challenge to Wisconsin's 1849 abortion law and asking that the Supreme Court overturn it.

The brief states that the 176-year-old ban violates the Wisconsin Constitution's guarantee to afford equal rights to all people, arguing that the adverse effects of outlawing abortion fall disproportionately on marginalized communities, including people of color, rural residents, immigrants and undocumented people, and low-income populations.

In a victory for reproductive freedom, the Wisconsin Supreme Court issued a 4-3 ruling declaring the 1849 abortion ban to be unenforceable. The ACLU of Wisconsin continues to support the vital work ensuring all have the right and ability to live openly without discrimination and enjoy equal rights, bodily autonomy, and access to the health care they need. We continue to protect and defend Wisconsinites' rights to love who they love, be who they are, and control their own bodies.



After the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade on June 24, 2022, dismantling the constitutional protections for abortion that have existed for nearly 50 years, abortion providers ceased abortion care in Wisconsin for fear of prosecution under a law from 1849. On July 2, 2025, the Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down the archaic 1849 abortion ban. The ACLU of Wisconsin continues to provide relational support for the work of our community partners doing this vital work day in and day out.

If you or someone you know needs access to healthcare access, POWERS helps Wisconsinites navigate options.

POSTPARTUM MEDICAID EXTENSION

(Senate Bill 23, now 2025 Act 102)

This is what persistence looks like. After years of advocacy and a near-miss last session, expanded postpartum Medicaid coverage is now the law in Wisconsin. Following this hard-fought victory, low-income mothers are able to stay on BadgerCare insurance for 12 months after giving birth, up from just 60 days. 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 Wisconsin's reproductive healthcare system.





WHEN WE COME TOGETHER, OUR COLLECTIVE POWER SHINES THROUGH THE DARKNESS

In many respects, it is a terrifying time to be trans in America.

Every year, states across the country flood legislative sessions with anti-trans bills – the ACLU tracks hundreds of such proposals nationwide. In 2025, state lawmakers introduced bills that sought to punish medical providers for administering gender-affirming care to youth and prohibit trans people from updating their birth certificates to reflect their authentic identities.

While the onslaught continues, the LGBTQ+ community and their allies have responded in force, wholeheartedly rejecting any attempt to rob a person of their dignity and rights simply because of who they are.

We joined partners outside the capitol building to rally in support of trans liberation, and we testified in public hearings to speak out against a slew of anti-LGBTQ+ bills. At the local level, we spoke out against book bans designed to take queer literature out of libraries and school classrooms.

And in June, droves of supporters showed up to march with us in the Milwaukee Pride Parade, learn more about our work, and join our network of volunteers, growing our people power strength for the fights ahead.

Through everything – the recurring barrage of legislative attacks, the exasperatingly long public hearing days, where hundreds of folks travel to Madison waiting for hours on end simply to demand that our elected representatives stop playing games with trans lives, the rallies celebrating the strength of our queer and trans loved ones and neighbors, and the work we do to ensure everyone can live life on their own terms – the movement has shown that we can defend our communities effectively and collectively while still leaving room for moments of joy.

The experiences we have with one another – attending a rally together, organizing people to pack the Capitol Building, or simply exchanging a smile and laugh at Pride – are not only important when they move a project or advocacy campaign forward. They matter because the community we build together is what sustains us. We are not alone, nowhere close to it, no matter how much certain politicians want to convince us we are.

We'll keep fighting — and rising – together.



PRIDE MONTH

June is a month where we enthusiastically proclaim the joy, beauty, resilience, and courage of all LGBTQ+ people. Throughout the year, but especially during Pride Month, we celebrate the beautiful diversity of queer identity.

Through engaging programming and community-centric events, we aim to amplify pride, belonging, and solidarity within the LGBTQ+ community and across the ACLU and commemorate a vibrant and influential community that has made an incredible impact on this country and beyond.

We want to acknowledge the direct attacks our trans, non-binary, genderqueer, and gender diverse communities are facing. LGBTQ+ Wisconsinites – particularly trans youth – have been under constant attack by politicians who have made anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry and discrimination a central part of their political agendas. This was a moment for us to come together as a community, spread joy, and celebrate people exactly as they are.

Now more than ever, Queer Joy is a radical act—and a reminder of the power we hold when we come together. This year's Pride events were a chance to connect, recharge, and take meaningful steps toward protecting the rights of members of the LGBTQ+ community.



To honor Queer Joy, ACLU of Wisconsin staff and volunteers shared information about LGBTQ+ rights with people so that they are educated and able to advocate for themselves at Pride events in Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Madison. We also marched in the Milwaukee Pridefest, where YOU, our members and supporters, came together to support one another.

We also hosted our first-ever drag show, which we called "Justice is a Drag (Show). We had 65 event attendees who came together as LGBTQ+ community members and allies for fun and joy. It was a reminder that although we face many obstacles together, we will always show up and support one another.

We know how important it is that we stand in solidarity with our trans and non-binary colleagues as we work to create a more just, equitable, intersectional, and inclusive world. We'll never stop fighting for a world where all people can live authentically and be themselves.

BANNED BOOKS WEEK



Banned Books Week is the national book community's annual celebration of the freedom to read. Hundreds of libraries and bookstores around the country draw attention to the problem of censorship by mounting displays of challenged books and hosting a variety of events. Banned Books Week was launched in 1982 in response to a sudden surge in the number of challenges to books in schools, bookstores and libraries.

The ACLU of Wisconsin vigilantly defends First Amendment rights in schools. We believe in an educated citizenry and a society where ideas are openly disseminated and discussed. And throughout our history, we have worked to protect the right to access information and the right to make up our own minds. We continue to monitor and fight the wave of classroom censorship attacks we have seen these past few years by local school boards across Wisconsin.

This past year, the ACLU of Wisconsin highlighted the importance of our First Amendment Rights and celebrated by hosting nine 'Banned Books Club Chats', led by staff and attended by community members throughout the state. Nine books were discussed, telling the stories of many experiences throughout a variety of issue areas such as LGBTQIA Rights, Criminal Legal Reform, Immigration, Bodily Autonomy, and more. Staff and community members engaged in intentional conversation surrounding these issues, the relevance in our current moment, and shared the importance of continuing to write, engage with, and tell these stories for all.

'Banned Books Club Chats'

Handmaids Tale • Baldwin v Lorde • How To Date A Flying Mexican • The 57 Bus • Perks of Being a Wallflower • The Day You Begin • Looking For Alaska • The New Jim Crow

NEW PARTNERSHIPS BUILD CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



On January 10, 2026, 600 people gathered at the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra's symphony center for an evening that combined music, fashion, and civil rights. 'Crescendo' was an evening that showcased the work of local fashion designers bringing together fashion, orchestral music, and civic expression that highlighted the work of the ACLU of Wisconsin in an unique way.

In the summer of 2025, the ACLU of WI was invited to consider a partnership and collaboration with the Edessa School of Fashion, located in Milwaukee (and coincidentally in the same building at the ACLU of WI offices). A chance encounter in an elevator led to a conversation that resulted in the opportunity to share the work of the ACLU of WI to a new audience in a new way.

The evening was a celebration of fashion and protest – a way to highlight the importance of free speech and free expression. While students from the fashion school showcased their work, guests at the event learned more about civil rights and liberties and had the opportunity to express their first amendment rights. With those rights under attack, the event was a perfect opportunity to share with participants Know Your Rights materials, upcoming KYR trainings on protest and law enforcement encounters, and the value of voting and civic participation (all in a creative and dynamic way.)

This new partnership brought new opportunities for the affiliate to share its mission with people who were less familiar with the work of the ACLU of WI, even offering the opportunity to promote the event and Know Your Rights resources on local news outlets.

While some in the community had a hard time understanding how fashion and art intersect with social justice movements (one person left a message on Edessa's voicemail when they found out they were partnering with the ACLU of WI stating 'You gotta like turn even a fashion school political? I really don't get it.), The evening highlighted the importance of our first amendment rights and how raising our collective voices is a critical part of our democracy.



WEBSITE

VIEW VIDEO

ABOUT EDESSA SCHOOL OF FASHION

Edessa school of fashion is the only college with a 4-year degree program in Wisconsin and only fashion school in the country with Minority leadership. Led by Jeff Speller & Lynne Dixon Speller, Edessa's mission is to encourage a diverse body of motivated students to enhance their creative skills through the use of design, experience, and community engagement.



ART & SOCIAL JUSTICE

"Self-expression is one of our basic human rights, and the First Amendment is one that we at the ACLU of Wisconsin will continue to fight for."

–Tina Itson, *Director of Development & Engagement*

I've often found that my life and worldview has been shaped by intersections – the obvious ones (such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc) of course, but also the intersections of things that I have valued or prioritized in life. For me, one of those intersections has been the connection between art and social justice.

Growing up in a family that valued art and self expression (my father got his bachelors degree in art when I was in high school, my parents both sang in choirs and played instruments in local groups, my mother is an avid knitter and sewist), art was a part of my life growing up. Even with growing up working poor, my parents understood the value of learning an instrument and did what they could to ensure that my brothers and I had access to music. While I ended up a mediocre clarinet & piano player, I found my love of choral singing while in high school, and it is something that I continue to do to this day – singing in a local chorus in Milwaukee.

In addition to this love of music and the arts, values related to social justice were also instilled in me – I found myself in a career path focused on servant leadership, making my way to a role that works to find the resources needed to support organizational mission. The work of the ACLU of Wisconsin is a passion for me – from voting to free speech, LGBTQ rights and criminal legal reform – our vision of what the world could be is what motivates me daily. And so when the chance came to combine two of the things I love the most, our partnership with Edessa School of Fashion was an exciting opportunity.

One of the fascinating things I saw in the creation of this collaboration was the reaction of some people when they heard about the partnership between the two organizations. Some people didn't want to participate in the event because the ACLU was involved. And as we heard from the voicemail that Edessa received, some couldn't understand why you would mix art and 'politics' or social issues.

I had heard this comment before – when working in arts administration, many times we were warned about getting too 'political' or saw consequences for speaking out as an organization about issues that impacted the local community. Even the organization's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion was something that had to be 'sold' to particular donors or stakeholders.

But the thing is, the arts has a LONG history of having a key role in social justice movements, especially when it comes to fashion. From Zoot suits in the 30s, to hemlines in the 20s, bra burning in the 70s, and wearing your Sunday best in the 60s, fashion has played a role both in terms of protest and self-expression. And art itself is a form of self-expression that has deep ties in activism, both implicitly and explicitly, so much so that we see school boards across Wisconsin and the country working hard to limit what content students can consume (book bans) or perform (theatre, orchestra, etc.).

Ironically, much of what we deem to be 'acceptable' art, is deeply rooted in protest movements and other forms of social justice. In the orchestral world, Beethoven's 3rd symphony highlighted the ideals of liberty, equality, and human rights from the French Revolution, Shostakovich's 7th symphony was about global resistance against empire and his 11th symphony was a coded critique against state tyranny, oppression, and the abuse of government power. Stravinsky's Rite of Spring embodied the radical cultural liberation of the time, and Sibelius' Finlandia is a protest against strict censorship of the government. To say that art shouldn't be political is to ignore the very thing that inspires art to begin with.

Self-expression is one of our basic human rights, and the First Amendment is one that we at the ACLU of Wisconsin will continue to fight for – whether protecting protester's rights on the streets, expanding the protections from censorship in our public spaces, including our schools, or ensuring that we all have the right to be who we are, we will continue to fight to protect and expand these rights for all Wisconsinites.

RIGHT TO PROTEST



The ACLU of Wisconsin continues to fight for everyone's right to express themselves, which includes protecting protest rights, a free press, diversity of thought, freedom of religion, and much more. The ACLU of Wisconsin is always on guard to ensure that the First Amendment's protections remain robust — for everyone.

Recently, we've seen legislators routinely try to place new and excessive restrictions on these civil rights, attempting to criminalize protected dissent for the sake of what they say is public safety. The First Amendment protects your right to assemble and express your views through protest.

The ACLU of Wisconsin continues to engage in several arenas to protect First Amendment rights. Through community education, our Know Your Rights Training Series provides monthly training webinars open to the public, allowing folks to come together and learn about their rights in many issue areas including Protest Rights! People came together to learn about how to express their rights in a safe and impactful manner, whether it be on a micro or macro level within their communities.



In the legislature, we opposed an anti-protest bill, AB 88.SB 94. This bill was purportedly created to stop so-called "riots" by making it a Class I Felony to "incite" a riot. However, overbroad and ambiguous language used in the legislation could criminalize various aspects of lawful assembly and threaten punishment of innocent protesters who are not involved in and may not even be aware of any illegal activity during a demonstration. This bill also limits local control by prohibiting a government official from "limit[ing] or restrict[ing] the authority of law enforcement... to arrest or detain individuals involved in a riot or vandalism activity or take action to quell a riot or vandalism activity."

SB 94 passed the Senate, but both bills were defeated and never became law.



APRIL 2026 ELECTORAL WORK

This year, we executed a robust integrated campaign for the Wisconsin Supreme Court election, to protect Wisconsinites' civil rights and liberties and ensure a strong democratic process in Wisconsin while building capacity and power as an affiliate. We encouraged eligible voters in key areas throughout the state to vote, targeting historically disenfranchised groups, and to be informed about the election.



WORK ACCOMPLISHED IN THE APRIL 2026 WI SUPREME COURT ELECTION:

- Shared critical voting information to targeted voter demographics
- Ensured our elections remain fair and impartial through Election Protection work
- Worked with National ACLU on a targeted mailing and radio campaign in Milwaukee and Madison
- Recruited and trained volunteers and law students for our election protection program
- Held weekly phone banks with long-time partner **Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing (EXPO Wisconsin)**, sharing voter information with formerly incarcerated individuals who regained their right to vote
- Hosted a monthly Know Your Rights webinar series
- Reached voters throughout WI with mailers, social media content, and influencer work
- Launched a paid digital media program

ELECTION PROTECTION

A cross-departmental collaboration between the legal and organizing departments mobilized the volunteer Election Protection (EP) team of trained lawyers and law students on Election Day to address potential issues at polling locations and central count sites, in coordination with the broader Wisconsin Election Protection Coalition. The ACLU of Wisconsin organized trained legal volunteers across the state, particularly in key regions such as Madison, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Racine, Kenosha, and Eau Claire.

These volunteers signed up for at least one of three shifts – morning, afternoon, and evening. All in all, 40 volunteers completed 102 shifts, with 24 of them observing all day. Together, these volunteers observed 300 polling locations and 20 central count locations. In the EP command center, we assisted in responding to and resolving 81 tickets submitted by field volunteers and hotline callers.





SOCIAL MEDIA

Our social media presence for this election saw a particularly strong rise in engagement, with thousands of new followers across multiple platforms. Three individual Instagram posts were particularly strong. The candidate comparison was posted on March 18, the Motherhood for Good video on March 24, and the Election Day resources post on April 6. These three posts alone generated hundreds of new followers, were viewed over 354,000 times, received over 4,800 likes, and were shared over 4,600 times.

All in all, our total social media metrics were approximated as 2.17 million impressions, 53,500 reactions, and 14,300 shares, for an average engagement rate of 6.54%.

COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

The Communications Department deployed several tactics during the 2026 spring election cycle, including Get Out the Vote ads (both C3 and C4), and social media outreach across various platforms.



GET OUT THE VOTE ADVERTISING

Additionally, the Comms Department, in collaboration with Mosaic Communications, ran robust C3 and C4 digital advertising campaigns. The C3 campaign delivered over 21,000,000 impressions to approximately users, and the C4 campaign delivered 740,000 impressions to over 45,000 people. Over 2,800 people visited our voting rights page; in total, it is estimated to have been visited 128 million times.

ENCOURAGING AND EDUCATING THOSE WHO RECENTLY REGAINED THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE

Our organizing team, in partnership with our colleagues at Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing, hosted a weekly phone bank between the February primary and the April general election. Across these six phone banks, 16 volunteers completed 40 shifts, making approximately 2,400 calls and providing voting information to over 300 individuals affected by the system.

Our work this cycle helped ensure that the majority of our Supreme Court justices will protect Wisconsinites' civil rights and liberties for years to come.







NONPARTISAN VOTER EDUCATION

Know Your Rights Webinar Series: Our Development and Engagement Team hosted a monthly webinar series that garnered significant interest statewide. Between January and March, three webinars were hosted, covering protest rights, surveillance, and voting rights.

These three webinars' signup forms accrued 1,381 views and 636 submissions, for an average conversion rate of 49%. In total, 142 people attended at least one webinar, with 23 individuals are attending more than one.

DOJ v. WEC



On behalf of **Common Cause** and three Wisconsin voters, the **ACLU of Wisconsin**, ACLU national's **Voting Rights Project**, and **Law Forward** filed a motion in January to intervene in the Trump administration's lawsuit against the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) over its refusal to hand over confidential information about registered state voters.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) seeks to force WEC to turn over voters' sensitive personal information, including driver's licenses and partial Social Security numbers.

The DOJ's request for this data is reportedly in connection with never-before-seen efforts by the Trump administration to construct a national voter database that could be used to disenfranchise eligible voters across the country.

The federal government's request for sensitive voter data jeopardizes not only Wisconsinites' right to vote, but also their right to privacy, which is protected by state and federal law. USDOJ's lack of transparency about safeguards, access, and uses of sensitive voter data raises serious concerns about misuse or abuse — including risks that this information could be weaponized to justify aggressive voter purges that wrongfully remove eligible voters from the rolls. **We stand with Wisconsin voters and against this unlawful federal overreach**.

Our motion to intervene was granted, this May a federal court dismissed the case. This ruling protects against federal intrusions into Wisconsin's election system, ensures private voter data is safe from abuse, and prevents the Trump administration from playing politics with our right to vote.

The case is currently on appeal.

FIGHTING DISENFRANCHISEMENT



A part of the ACLU of Wisconsin's electoral work for the April 2026 election was a partnership with **EXPO (Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing)**, a longtime partner of the ACLU of WI on a number of issues surrounding criminal legal reform. Through collaboration with the Wisconsin Civic Power Table, Marianne Oleson of EXPO shared an ongoing project that their organization has been doing with the team at the ACLU of WI: reaching out to formerly incarcerated individuals who are now officially 'off paper' (have completed the entirety of their sentence, including extended supervision) and were now eligible to vote.

EXPO leadership shared that many individuals coming off paper are not aware that their voting status has been restored, and many remain disenfranchised due to misinformation. The carceral system makes it very clear when you enter the system that your right to vote has been taken away, but when it is reinstated, it ends up being a footnote in small print on a very long document.

EXPO has been actively working to change that. Utilizing a list they receive from the DOC on a regular basis, they are coordinating phone banks, door knocking, and canvassing to connect with individuals in order to make sure they are aware of their voting status, and to share information about voting.

Over the course of 40 volunteer shifts, we made almost 2400 calls and provided voting information to over 300 system-impacted individuals. In the lead up to the November 2026 election, the affiliate plans to continue this partnership, learning from this pilot year and identifying potential strategies to scale impact as we continue to fight disenfranchisement across Wisconsin.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

FY26 BY THE NUMBERS



OVER 300 POLLING PLACES

and 20 central count locations monitored by non-partisan EP volunteers trained by the ACLU of WI for the April 2025 election



1100+ PAGE VIEWS

of the new nonpartisan voter guide in the lead up to the April 2025 election

2400

formerly incarcerated voters were called during 40 volunteer shifts in support of our partnership with EXPO

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

196 attendees for the first three months of our new Know Your Rights webinar series

25+ trainings held

1000+ people trained

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

694 bills closely monitored in the 2025-2026 legislative sessions

153 bills - the ACLU of WI registered a lobbying position

999 MESSAGES from Wisconsinites were sent to legislators through the ACLU of WI

+22,000 ACLU of WI supporters were reached throughout the 2025-2026 legislative session

MEDIA VISIBILITY

3,380 total mentions, up **39.7%** over last fiscal year

1,950 online news mentions

11.5B potential reach, up **35.5%** over last fiscal year

LEGAL METRICS

2000+ legal intake requests

5 Amicus Briefs filed at the Wisconsin Supreme Court

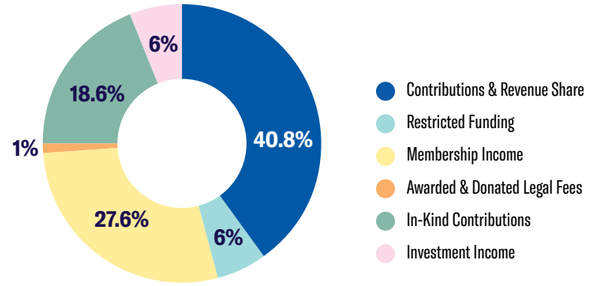
3 new legal cases

3 new enforcement actions

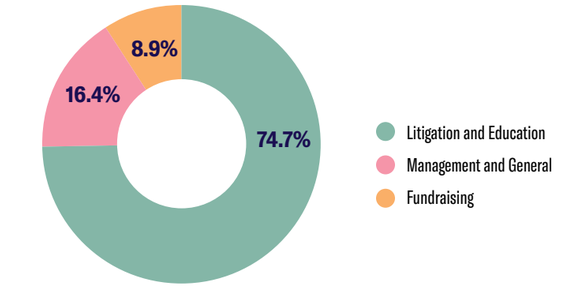
FY26 FINANCIALS

Audited Combined Financials

Support & Revenue	FY2026
Contributions & Revenue Share	$2,432,496
Restricted Funding	$358,968
Membership Income	$1,642,397
Awarded & Donated Legal Fees	$60,099
In-Kind Contributions	$1,109,754
Investment Income	$352,367
Total Support & Revenue	**$5,956,081**



Expenses	FY2026
Litigation and Education	$3,250,985
Management and General	$714,207
Fundraising	$389,417
Total Expenses	**$4,354,609**



ACLU OF WISCONSIN BOARD MEMBERS

William Sulton *President*
Angela Lang *Vice President*
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OUR MOMENT. OUR RESPONSIBILITY. OUR FUTURE.



Closing Reflections from
Melinda Brennan,
Executive Director,
ACLU of Wisconsin

I was born, raised, and educated in Wisconsin, the daughter of an interracial couple and Mexican American. Growing up here taught me what fairness looks like, what it means to show up for your neighbors, and how much a community can do when people decide to look out for one another. For five years now, I have had the honor of leading the ACLU of Wisconsin, and I believe in this state more today than when I first started in my role.

Wisconsin has a long record of moving the country forward. Progressive reform took root here. Working people organized here and won protections that spread nationwide. Our public schools and universities became models for the nation, and generations of Wisconsinites stood up for free speech and equal rights when it was hard to do so, and they did it anyway.

Behind much of that history is a simple idea: our schools, universities, and public institutions belong to everyone. A child's future should not be decided by the family they were born into, the size of their parents' paycheck, or the color of her skin.

That idea reaches every part of this state, from the bluffs of the Driftless area and dairy farms of the heartland to the shores of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior, the Northwoods, and our cities, small towns, and tribal nations. We are farmers, factory workers, teachers, students, public servants and small business owners. We, as Wisconsinites, are immigrants and the children of immigrants, descendants of enslaved people, and are Indigenous people whose roots here go back thousands of years. We, as Wisconsinites, are hard workers who value public education, and have proven we can work together to achieve great things.

We share the same basic values. We believe in honesty, integrity and hard work. We believe every person matters. And we understand that when a neighbor loses a freedom, we know ours is at risk too. We believe in the promise of the Constitution, however incomplete it remains generation after generation. Those values do not belong to any political party – they belong to all of us.

Wisconsin's history also has painful chapters. Progress here has been uneven, and some neighbors have been shut out, mistreated, denied basic rights. What I am proudest of is that people in every generation refused to accept that and pushed this state to do better.

Wisconsin now has another chance to lead. Civil rights and civil liberties are under attack and the decisions made here will be felt well beyond our borders of Wisconsin. As the ACLU of Wisconsin looks ahead to our 100th anniversary in 2030, we are ready to meet that challenge.

WE WILL...

- **Protect immigrant families** by challenging agreements that turn our local police into federal immigration agents.
- **Defend marriage equality**, reproductive freedom, and access to abortion and contraception, and fight discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, including by protecting healthcare for transgender, nonbinary, and intersex people.
- **Push for criminal legal reform** that reduces incarceration, stops punishing people for being poor, stop disproportionate rates of Black and Brown people from being incarcerated, takes on the profit motives in our prisons and jails, and gives communities a real say over police surveillance and their personal data.
- **Defend the freedom** to read, learn, and speak by fighting censorship in our schools and libraries.
- **Protect our democracy** by fighting election subversion, safeguarding the right to vote, and bringing more people into the political process, especially those who have long been left out.

Each of these fights matters on its own. Taken together, they describe the Wisconsin we are working toward, where rights are real in everyday life, justice within everyone's reach, and every person has a voice. We want to win cases and pass good laws, but we also want protections that last, and a model other states can follow.

In October 2026, the Milwaukee Brewers won their first World Series, a team from baseball's smallest market that beat the odds by playing with and for one another. On the night they won, the whole state celebrated together: from our rural communities to our big cities, kids in their first Brewers caps, and fans who had waited since 1982. Nobody asked where anyone where they came from, what was their faith, who they loved, or how they voted. Wisconsin has shown the country what's possible before, and we can do it again.

Wisconsin builds our future our way.
Stay engaged.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

DONATE

Your gift to the ACLU of WI Foundation is tax-deductible to the extend allowed by law and supports litigation and civil rights education in Wisconsin and across the country. The ACLU receives no government funding and does not charge its clients for legal representation. Our work depends entirely on private donations and legal fees earned from successful cases.

JOIN OR BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

Our Guardians of Liberty

Strengthen our lobbying efforts and grassroots activity by joining the ACLU of Wisconsin. Paying annual dues of $35 or more entitles you to a membership in the state and national ACLU. Monthly donors also reduce our costs, meaning that a greater portion of your gift goes directly to fight injustice

VOLUNTEER

There are many ways you can take action as a volunteer – through legal Election Protection and tabling opportunities to opportunities to activate your local community. Join our team of dedicated volunteers and make a difference.

EVENTS

From volunteer opportunities to Know Your Rights webinars, the ACLU of Wisconsin is creating more ways for you to connect with us and with others across the state who care about civil rights and liberties. Attend an in-person or virtual event to get more connected and learn more about our work



ACLU Wisconsin

RECLAIMING *Our* RIGHTS

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