

ACLU Kansas 2019 Directors' Report

A LOOK BACK ON THE YEAR IN CIVIL LIBERTIES

FROM THE LEGAL DEPARTMENT

2019 brought no shortage of injustices to challenge legally. With 20 active cases, we continue to work with various parties across the state to ensure the protection and enforcement of civil liberties and civil rights.

Our 2019 successes of note include:

- We compelled Johnson County's Elections Commissioner to disclose the names of eligible voters whose ballots had not been counted in last year's primary.
- We won a settlement for a Muslim engineer in his religious discrimination lawsuit.
- We successfully settled a First Amendment suit filed on behalf of Shawnee Mission School District students.
- We helped a man who was literally "banished" from the state.

- We ensured that a newly admitted prison inmate received the addiction treatment he needed to stave off life-threatening withdrawal.

Our ongoing work includes our defense of Kansas State University students banned from the State Capitol building for unfurling a Medicaid expansion banner and our representation of two environmentalists who were targeted with retaliatory investigations.

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We continue settlement negotiations with the Secretary of State's office in our 2018 "Crosscheck" suit. *Fish v. Schwab* (previously *Fish v. Kobach*), our thus-far successful challenge to the state's Documentary Proof of Citizenship (DPOC) law which disenfranchised 35,000 voters, remains on appeal in the 10th Circuit.

In 2020, we will be working to increase compliance with federal voter registration laws to ensure all Kansans have the opportunity to participate in our democracy. We also will continue to work to eliminate arbitrary barriers to political speech for speakers regardless of their beliefs or party affiliation. Finally, we will continue to advocate for students facing discrimination in schools.

Lauren Bonds, Legal Director

www.aclukansas.org
P.O. Box 917; Mission, KS 66201



FROM THE POLICY DEPARTMENT

The Policy team's goal is to pass good laws and stop bad laws, at all levels of government, from municipal to state bodies. We research the civil liberties implications of proposed policy, provide testimony regarding those implications to legislative committees and local governments, and directly engage and lobby elected officials. Along the way, we've developed critical relationships with elected officials that we leverage in support of the ACLU of Kansas's policy agenda.

This year brought mixed results in the legislature, but sweeping reforms in municipal government. In just the past few months, 12 Johnson County communities passed non-discrimination ordinances containing protections for LGBTQ people. We were proud to play a role in that effort, alongside partner organizations and buoyed by strong community support, and we are working to promote similar ordinances in other cities.

In the state legislature during the session, criminal justice reform bills stalled despite broad bipartisan support. Still we saw success in the passage of some corrections to election processes, including mandating the resolution of signature mismatches, and instituting the ability for County Clerks to allow voting at any polling place in the county, not just a specific precinct.

Looking ahead to 2020, we will lead the effort to pass vital criminal justice reform, particularly as it relates to violations of

probation conditions. These violations account for more than half of all new prison admissions. Our team is issuing a report which will detail county-by-county supervision policies and will identify reforms that would reduce mass incarceration, recidivism, racial disparities, and excessive fees. We are also looking ahead to legislation to expand early voting access for all eligible voters in Kansas.

Most concerning for 2020 is a looming threat that would roll back the Constitutional guarantee to reproductive rights, via a proposed amendment to the Kansas Constitution. We are already deeply engaged on this matter and will need every Kansas ACLU member's strong support as we focus on defeating this measure in the legislature—and preserving Kansans' reproductive rights.

Letitia Harmon, Policy Director

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FROM THE FIELD DEPARTMENT

The Field team engages in strategic, state-wide, grassroots organizing, deploying skilled organizers who build community capacity and power by developing local volunteer leaders. This year, we developed and hosted a statewide series of Organizing Leadership Training sessions, which produced 100 volunteers versed in shaping public narratives, mapping and mobilizing connections, and moving into grassroots action.

With the upcoming 2020 election, our ongoing voting rights work could not be more important.

In our Safe and Welcoming campaign, we are working to pass an ordinance in Wyandotte County that would formalize ICE non-compliance and institute a municipal ID program—providing vital access to community services for ID-insecure populations including immigrants, re-entering citizens, children aging out of foster care, and the homeless.

We have assembled 36 community organizations and over 3000 community members in support, signaled by mailings to and engagement with Unified Government Commissioners. In October, in partnership with coalition members, we hosted a public meeting where community leaders stressed the need for the ordinance before a sizable audience. As Wyandotte County momentum builds, we're looking to expand Safe and Welcoming campaigns to other cities in Kansas.

Our Smart Justice
campaign works
to amplify the

need for criminal justice reform at the state and county levels. Our coalition of 20 organizations is meeting with legislators and engaging the newly formed Criminal Justice Reform Commission, sharing our policy recommendations. Smart Justice Strategy Teams in targeted counties across the state are preparing for the upcoming legislative session.

With the upcoming 2020 election, our ongoing Citizen Participation (voting rights) work could not be more important. This year, we launched county clerk-focused efforts to advocate for better access to the ballot box, facilitated legislative preview events in seven counties to educate volunteers on campaign priorities, and trained volunteers to carry out nonpartisan Get Out the Vote efforts.

For the 2020 election, we will inform potential voters how state and local elections affect their rights and their everyday lives, we will encourage Kansans to get out and vote, and we will mobilize election protection volunteers to ensure that anyone encountering problems at their polling place has a resource for resolution.

Ellen Glover, Field Director

FROM THE COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

In the Communications department, our essential role is to bring injustices to light. From prisons to polling places, cities to rural towns, we amplify community voices and help other departments shift conditions on the ground.

We are particularly proud of our success in expanding multiple audiences and averaging two news stories a day, given legacy media's retreat into hyper-local coverage. This year, we appeared in more than 950 local, national and international stories. Demonstrating our reach, national coverage of the affiliate included several appearances in

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FROM THE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The Development team partners with supporters to ensure there is adequate funding for all of the important work outlined in this report, and much more. We endeavor to connect members personally to the ACLU's work so that you can see and feel the positive impact of your support.

While it's true that the ACLU has grown significantly at both the state and national level, so have the threats to freedom, fairness, and justice—at an astonishing rate. The fact is, we are spread thin, and there is so much more we need to do. In the coming year alone:

- We need a permanent, Western Kansas presence on the ground to fight voter suppression and unjust criminal “justice” practices, both particularly affecting immigrant communities. In 2020, we plan to hire a field organizer to be based there.
- We need to augment our legal team to allow us to pursue necessary legal work on behalf of Kansans across the state.

As we face the imminent threat of a constitutional amendment limiting reproductive freedom, we will need dedicated staff and expert support. The challenges at the national level are just as daunting. Since 2017, the ACLU has filed more than 240 legal actions against the Trump administration, challenging mass injustices

The New York Times and *The Washington Post*. We've continued our pace of steep social media and website audience growth, reflecting the inspirational and explanatory power of digital advocacy. We published eight guest opinion columns and collected 27 newspaper editorial board endorsements praising our work.

In 2020, we will continue to seek new audiences across media outlets and to expand the reach and underscore the impact of the affiliate's efforts on behalf of all Kansans.

Mark McCormick, Director of Strategic Communication

such as the Muslim bans, family separation, and discrimination against women and LGBTQ people. Many of these case will take years to resolve. Nationwide the ACLU's annual caseloads amounts to more than 2,000.

None of this work is possible without your vital support. ACLU supporters are the true safeguard for freedom and justice in Kansas and nationwide. On behalf of the staff and board of directors of the ACLU of Kansas, thank you for your continued support. We are in the fight of our lives for the sake of our democracy, and every contribution, no matter the size, truly matters.

Karen Casebolt, Development Director

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