

ACLU

Maine

2025 FALL NEWSLETTER

Lift Every Voice

A note from Executive Director Molly Curren Rowles

The ACLU stands for ideals and laws that at their most basic level are concerned with participation. For democracy to work, people of all ideologies, religions, identities, and perspectives must be empowered as full and equal participants to vote, protest, demonstrate, and express their views and concerns. The ACLU champions individual freedom, with particular attention to the way discrimination, bias, and corruption can cut individuals off from access to legal, social, and political power.

By contrast, the Trump administration has



Executive Director Molly Curren Rowles met with supporters at Bev's Cafe in Kennebunk, July 2025.

moved aggressively to consolidate power within the executive branch, targeting perceived political "enemies" and dismissing or denying constitutional guarantees and legal norms. In doing so, it champions discredited and reviled ideas

of the past – like racism, eugenics, and fascism – to justify and normalize discrimination, disenfranchisement, and cruelty. The executive order on birthright citizenship, issued on the president's first day in office, was a paradigmatic example, as it violates the plain language of the 14th Amendment and relies on legal arguments that date from

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Justice Demands Action

AMONG THE MANY GREAT ORGANIZATIONS defending civil rights and liberties, the ACLU is uniquely suited for this moment. First, we have staff in all 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Second, we deploy a full complement of tools to fight injustice and bring us closer to creating a more perfect union. We are also a proudly nonpartisan organization that can focus on policy goals by fostering unique coalitions and refraining from petty party politics. These strengths bring a special obligation: we must challenge injustice everywhere without fear or favor, and we must do it with the tools that will get the job done.

Headlines about our work have focused on holding the president accountable to the Constitution, and we

take enormous pride in our successes challenging his unconstitutional attacks: one targeting birthright citizenship and the 14th Amendment, and another violating the First Amendment by silencing human rights advocates like our clients, Matthew Smith and Akila Radhakrishnan, with sanctions against the International Criminal Court.



No Kings! rally in Portland, June 2025.
We've joined rallies for democracy throughout Maine.

But the truth is that the president and the federal government do not have a monopoly on violating the Constitution. Many important decisions that affect our daily lives are made at the state and local levels. From local school boards to the Supreme Court, all officials are capable interfering with our rights. That's why the ACLU has to be everywhere.

For example, Maine's treatment of children with behavioral health disabilities is so deficient that it was sued by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2024 for violating the Americans with Disabilities Act. The state agreed to a meaningful settlement in that case, promising to improve services and ensure kids are not subject to unlawful confinement when they are entitled to health care and support. However, the Trump administration is pumping the brakes on enforcing civil rights laws. In July, we joined other advocates and asked Maine's federal court to let us present arguments for why the settlement agreement needs to be firmly and strictly enforced. If the federal government isn't willing to defend kids with disabilities and make the state take action, we will.

When it comes to people accused of crimes who cannot afford an attorney, there is nobody else to speak up on their behalf. The Constitution requires states to provide lawyers for people who cannot afford one, but Maine has failed at this for years.

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Lift Every Voice, cont.

the Reconstruction period after the Civil War.

While we could hardly have anticipated needing to re-litigate an issue that has been settled law since 1898, we are proud to have been a part of the first case filed to block the birthright executive order in January, *and* the first case heard this summer following the Supreme Court's decision to limit nationwide injunctions. On July 10, a federal court blocked the executive order and certified a nationwide class in *Barbara v. Trump*. Birthright citizenship is fundamental to our national identity as a multicultural democracy, and we will continue to fight against all attempts to turn back the clock.

The headlines are alarming, and it can be scary to speak up right now. But we are seeing many reasons to be hopeful and steadfast in the courts, at the voting booth, and in our communities. When rights are most threatened, we must defend them most loudly, and now is the time to engage. Your participation, support, and involvement are what make our work sing – and we are resolved and grateful, today and always.

In solidarity,

Molly Curren Rowles

Molly Curren Rowles, Executive Director

HONORING MAINE'S COMMUNITY

You can honor a friend or loved one with a tribute gift to the ACLU of Maine Foundation. Learn more and make a gift at [ACLUMaine.org/Give](https://aclumaine.org/Give).

In Honor of...

Aaron Rosenblum
from Patrick Mundt

Brenda Eigel
Marcia Watson

Carol Garvan
Christina Garvan

Deborah Deatrich's Birthday
Howard Israel

**Elaine and Clayton Keller,
Noah, Whitman, Michael Falk,
Shannon McKinnon, JonNorth
Radway**
Carolyn Braun

Ellen Lee Tucceri
Amy Jacobs

Jodi Nofsinger
Craig Bramley & Kimberly Simmons

Molly Curren Rowles
Alexia Pappas

Paul Friedman's Birthday
Sarah Foulger & Russ Hoffman

In Memory of...

Joel Keonick
from Eve Wolinsky

Ruth Ann Phimister
Evelyn Phimister

Catherine Peggy Chapman
Catherine M. Chapman

Vicki Rougeot
Jean Andre Rougeot

Robert Gensburg
Linda C. & Ernest H. Broadwater

Louis Scolnik
Greg Yannekis

Howard Reben
Solidarity Law/Jeffrey Young

Richard J. Sampson
Tinuviel Sampson

Joan Sturmthal
Syd and Deb Sewall

Joan Sturmthal
Betsey Remage-Healey

Jeannette Davis
Laurie Davis

Paul L. Nyhus
Katharine J. Watson

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS BACK TO SCHOOL

As you head back to school, don't leave your rights at home.



LGBTQ+ students' rights | Immigrant students' rights and school responsibilities | Student, faculty, and staff free speech | The rights of pregnant students and students with disabilities | Access to books and other media | Title IX | Tribal regalia at graduation and other ceremonies | Student clubs

[ACLUMaine.org/BackToSchool](https://aclumaine.org/BackToSchool)



Stay up to date! Sign up for email alerts and follow @ACLUMaine on social media for the latest news and ways to get involved.



Join us at an event near you. We're joining communities throughout Maine. Find an event at [ACLUMaine.org/Events](https://aclumaine.org/Events).

A Win at Maine's Top Court

AT THE END OF AUGUST, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court issued a landmark ruling strengthening the right against self-incrimination. It ruled police must stop questioning suspects if they invoke their right to remain silent or request a lawyer – even if the request is unclear or happens mid-questioning. This expands Maine state constitutional protections beyond the U.S. Supreme Court's restrictive view of federal Miranda rights.

The case, *State of Maine v. Derric McLain*, originated after Mr. McLain asked, "Is there a lawyer here?" during police questioning following an arrest. Instead of stopping to clarify or provide a lawyer, police continued the interrogation. Statements made in the interrogation were used as evidence against him at trial.

This decision ensures no person is denied their rights simply because they do not know which "magic words" to use during a police interrogation. The court noted this is especially important for groups that are more likely to have their speech interpreted as "ambiguous" by police, including youth, people of color, immigrants, women, and those of lower socioeconomic status.

Even when federal courts erode rights under the U.S. Constitution, this ruling shows that state courts and constitutions can serve as important sources of more expansive rights and freedoms here at home.

Building a Firewall for Freedom

THIS YEAR'S LEGISLATIVE SESSION ended on June 25. It presented opportunities to build a firewall against federal efforts to roll back our rights.

We weighed in on 135 bills affecting six priorities: bodily autonomy, data privacy, voting rights, the right to a fair trial, free speech, and due process. 85 were decided in our favor, and many will be heard next session.

VICTORIES

Bodily Autonomy: With coalition partners, we defeated all 16 bills undermining transgender rights and reproductive freedom. They ranged from restricting adults' access to gender-affirming care to completely banning abortion. Some of these bills passed the House but failed in the Senate. The close margins prove that your engagement matters and every vote makes a difference.

Additionally, we helped pass new laws strengthening patient and provider privacy, expanding access to family planning, and improving coverage for contraception.

Privacy: Big Tech pushed three bills to upend Maine's data privacy laws so companies could track what you do online and sell that data. We rallied a bi-partisan coalition to stop all of them.

Voting Rights: We helped defeat all bills targeting voting rights, including mandatory voter ID and ending absentee voting. However, Question 1 will be on your ballot this November. It would upend absentee voting,

limit ballot drop boxes, and more. This would make it especially difficult for seniors and people with a disability or unreliable transportation to vote. We're part of

the campaign to stop Question 1. Visit SaveAbsentee.me to learn more and VOTE NO on Question 1.

Public Defense: We championed a bill to fund new public defenders, strengthening Maine's ability to uphold the right to a fair trial. This is another part of ending this crisis alongside our litigation in *Robbins v. Maine*.

ONGOING WORK

Due Process: As the federal government carries out a "mass deportation" agenda, we are fighting to protect due process rights and prevent Maine law enforcement from becoming complicit in federal civil rights abuses. We championed legislation to limit state and local police involvement in federal immigration enforcement. It passed both chambers, but is still on the governor's desk. When the next legislative session begins, the governor will have three days to either veto the bill or allow

it to become law without her signature.

Privacy and Surveillance: Protecting data from corporate and government surveillance is more important than ever. The federal government is consolidating private information, and agencies from ICE to the Houlton Police Department are using surveillance technology to track drivers without any reasonable suspicion they have committed a crime. We are leading the charge to empower Maine consumers to control what they share. Our strongest privacy bill to date passed committee this year, building momentum for the next legislative session.

LOOKING AHEAD

The next legislative session is expected to begin in January 2026. While the federal government sows confusion and threatens our most basic freedoms, we must stay focused on local solutions. We are fortunate to live in a state with small districts that keep elected officials close to the people they represent. Roughly 9,300 people live in each Maine State House district. Some states have districts as large as a few hundred thousand. With these close connections, your voice truly is your power.

Maine has a proud history of protecting individual rights, and by continuing to advance progress here at home, we are strengthening the foundation of freedom and justice everywhere.

Visit ACLUMaine.org/2025LegislativeReport to read our full legislative report and learn more about specific bills.

Good Trouble Lives On rally in Brunswick



Justice Demands Action, cont.

Since 2022, we have been in court to make the Sixth Amendment's guarantees a reality. We won in the trial court this spring, but the state appealed our victory to Maine's supreme court.

We filed briefs with the Law Court in August, and oral arguments are scheduled for October. All the while, our policy team has been in Augusta demanding legislators provide the necessary staffing and funding to fix the problem – and championed a new law to fund new public defenders. Our communications team has been making sure everyone understands the stakes of this case and that all Mainers know the right to an attorney is a constitutional guarantee, not a privilege for the wealthy.

Everything important that we do at the ACLU of Maine and throughout the country is a collaboration – across the office, organizations, the state, and the nation.



Our legal director, Carol Garvan, met with supporters in Machias.



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WHAT'S INSIDE: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS BACK-TO-SCHOOL, CASE UPDATES, NEW LAWS IN MAINE, AND MORE!

JOIN THE FIGHT

We hope you continue joining us to create a more perfect union.

Make a tax-deductible donation by completing and returning the enclosed envelope, or give online by scanning the code or visiting ACLUMaine.org/Give, where you can also learn about planned giving, become a member, make a gift in someone's honor, and more.



We celebrated Pride in Bangor, Hallowell, and Portland.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

We've compiled resources in several languages so you can be prepared – from free speech at school to encountering ICE agents in your community. Learn more and spread the word at ACLUMaine.org/KnowYourRights.

