



The next generation

THERE ARE MANY roles in the struggle for civil rights and civil liberties. These battles are waged and won by people struggling together in the courtroom, in the legislature, in the press and in the streets. Some people want to be lawyers and expand the scope of the Constitution in the courtroom. Some people are interested in management so that lawyers and organizers can do their work in a supportive workplace. Some people are interested in messaging and storytelling to change hearts and minds. Some people are interested in building people power. Some people are interested in drafting laws and building support for them in coalitions and in the legislature.

The struggle needs people working in all capacities. We want to help recruit and train the best and brightest for all these arenas in the fight for a more just future. At the ACLU of Maine, we are committed to training the next generation of civil rights and civil liberties advocates. That's why this past year we've been focused on creating a robust internship program for budding Maine leaders. We are able to pilot this internship program thanks to the generous support of Debra Lipscomb, Denham Ward and the Abbagadasset Foundation.

Equity is at the heart of our work – we pay our interns and fellows fairly, and we work to recruit candidates from historically disadvantaged communities. We make sure that they get one-on-one mentorship and supervision, that they are involved in strategy meetings, and that they are invited to participate and offer their ideas.

Already, we've been lucky enough to work with and learn from some incredible Maine high school and

We're proud to support the internship program the ACLU of Maine is developing, and we're excited to play a role in creating a robust pipeline of new civil rights and civil liberties leaders.

DEBRA LIPSCOMB & DENHAM WARD

college students. Here are just a sample of the projects they've completed:

- Helping coordinate a digital collaboration between the ACLU of Maine, the Portland Museum of Art, and Maine Inside Out called People. Not Prisons.
- Creating data trackers and organizing data to support our policy team;
- Researching civil rights education data in Maine and drafting FOIA requests for our legal team;
- Document review and policy research on the ICE facility planned for Scarborough; and
- Pitching suggestions for our voter education communications plan to our staff.

We're excited for the great work that lies ahead!

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THE RIGHT TO COUNSEL

THE STAKES CANNOT be higher in a criminal trial: the defendant is facing the power of the state and the possible deprivation of their liberty. As we know, the criminal legal system disproportionately ensnares and punishes Black people and other people of color.

Having a criminal record creates barriers to returning to life on the outside: barriers to housing, employment and public assistance, the things a person needs to get their life back on track. It's no mistake that the racial disparities of the criminal legal system exacerbate racial disparities in other aspects of life for Black people and other people of color: poverty, housing instability, and access to economic opportunities to name a few.

Recognizing the high stakes of a criminal trial, it's well-established law that under the Sixth Amendment, states are required not just to provide an attorney, but to provide a competent attorney to people accused of crimes, who are at risk of losing their liberty, and who cannot afford a lawyer. And Maine is failing in its constitutional obligation.

In 2019, a report from the Sixth Amendment Center found serious flaws in how Maine assigns attorneys to defendants who can't afford one. In part, the report found the state has extremely low standards for attorneys and fails to supervise them. Its standard of pay for these attorneys is abysmally low. Recent reporting by the Maine

Monitor found an alarming number of private attorneys the state contracts with have been sanctioned for unethical, and even criminal, behavior. As a result, low-income people in Maine are not getting the representation they are constitutionally entitled to receive.

Our executive director, Alison Beyea, along with our chief counsel, Zach Heiden, and our legal director, Emma Bond have engaged in advocacy for years. They've urged the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services (MCILS) and the Judiciary Committee in the Legislature that Maine needs to implement the Sixth Amendment Center's recommendations. Most importantly, they have argued that MCILS must ensure court-appointed attorneys are qualified, properly trained, and supervised. Just this winter, Zach was at an Appropriations Committee hearing testifying in support of fully funding MCILS, so that it can adequately supervise, train and pay the attorneys tasked with this vital work.

Maine leaders have been on notice about the state's failure to meet its constitutional obligation, and they have not remedied the failure. Every member of the legislature and the Governor took an oath to uphold the Constitution. Following the Constitution isn't up for debate. Maine must do better for its most vulnerable residents, and we'll make sure that it does.

Making your voice heard

WE'RE DEEP INTO the legislative session. Our rock star volunteers and members have already phonebanked, called their legislators and written public testimony for important racial justice and juvenile justice bills we are supporting.

There will be other bills where we'll be calling on you to make your voices heard. But you don't have to wait for us! Writing letters to the editor and testifying at public hearings on bills you care about are important ways to get involved.

We asked our communications director, qainat khan, how to make your message stand out.

Q: What makes a strong letter to the editor or testimony?

A: I'd start with our website. We have a great resource in the Legislation section with tools and tips about writing testimony and letters to the editor.

A lot of communications experts advise starting with **a shared value**. These can be things like equality, justice and second chances. If we start with something we can all agree on, it calls people in and people are more willing to keep reading or listening. The other thing is to name a problem and **offer a solution**. People want to be for something. Often, your solution is going to be supporting a particular bill.

Finally, writing about a personal connection to the problem and



solution can be a compelling story. But you can't leave it there. You should **connect your personal experience to the big picture**.

What is the larger structural problem that requires a policy solution? We know these problems are structural, not just personal.

Note: This framework comes from The Opportunity Agenda. They have more great resources on their website.

Q: How do you begin with writing? It can be so hard getting started!

A: I would do a little research on the topic. How have organizations like the ACLU or other organizations you support written or talked about the topic? What is their messaging like? Poking around on their websites or social media is a good place to start.

I would also read local news in Maine about the topic. These local news stories might have some good Maine data, or can point you to sources for data. Reports are also a great place to find data and find convincing ways to talk about a particular topic. You don't have to read an entire report, you can often get the highlights from the executive summary.

Q: What if people feel like because they're not an expert, a legislator—or anyone—won't want to listen to what they have to say?

A: The people you elect are accountable to you! And so much of building a movement is about having conversations with your neighbors and changing their hearts and minds. That's why you should put aside any doubt that your voice does not matter. It does.

Need more legislative advocacy tools and tips? Visit bit.ly/advo2021



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