

# ACLU

## Maine



# SUMMER NEWSLETTER

## AN INSPIRING LEGISLATIVE SESSION

IT HAS BEEN an inspiring few months in the Legislature, especially for criminal legal reform. We've had successes this session that have been years in the making.

This session, we worked relentlessly on an ambitious set of priority bills to reform the criminal legal system, to preserve privacy and civil rights in the digital age, and expand voting rights.

All told, we testified on **nearly 200 bills** to support civil rights and civil liberties, from immigrants' rights to the right to counsel, from reproductive freedom to juvenile justice.

One of the most inspiring moments of the legislative session came when LD 1668, a bill to close Maine's only youth prison, passed in both bodies of the Legislature. This bill was written and lobbied by formerly incarcerated young people at Maine Youth Justice, and the ACLU's policy counsel, Michael, provided the advocates with support and guidance along the way.

It was an electric feeling the day that the Senate voted to pass the bill, and it reminded us of the change that we, the people, can create.

And speaking of we the people, the ACLU couldn't do this work without you. Our volunteers and members made **more than a thousand calls** in support of civil rights and civil liberties this legislative session. Together, we made sure our elected officials took votes that moved us toward a more perfect state.

Onward!

**MEAGAN SWAY, POLICY DIRECTOR**



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# HIGHLIGHTS

## Criminal Legal Reform

### LD 1703

After years of public education and advocacy, Maine will no longer impose cash bail for most minor crimes (known as Class E misdemeanors). Cash bail is one of the most profoundly unfair parts of our criminal legal system, creating two systems of justice. Wealthy Mainers charged with the same crimes are able to pay bail and await trial at home, while poorer Mainers languish in jail for days, even weeks, because they can't afford their freedom.

### LD 967

A core goal of our legislative work this session was to stop locking people up for minor crimes. Nowhere is this more evident or more tragic than in the failed policy of arresting and incarcerating people as punishment for substance use.

We worked closely with advocates in recovery and harm reduction to lobby for LD 967, a bill that would make minor drug possession a civil violation. People would have the option of paying a fine or receiving a health assessment.

In a huge victory, the House passed our bill, 77-62. We could not

Read the amazing press we received supporting LD 967 [bit.ly/LD967](https://bit.ly/LD967)

## PASSED

- ✓ Pathbreaking facial recognition law
- ✓ Significant bail reform
- ✓ Voting rights package

have gotten this far without our coalition partners, including people in recovery who bravely shared their stories, tirelessly advocated, and started to remove the stigma of substance use. Together, we changed the hearts and minds of Maine legislators.

While the bill didn't make it through the Senate, we ended the legislative session having gotten farther than most predicted we would, with a solid foundation for the work ahead.

### LD 994

In a significant step toward harm reduction and public health-informed policies, Maine will no longer punish people for possessing or exchanging safer use supplies, such as clean syringes and fentanyl testing strips. Harm reduction measures are proven to reduce transmission of infectious diseases and keep people alive.

We brought this bill because our allies in the harm reduction world told us that the need to remove criminal penalties was urgent, and

# FROM THE SESSION

## BLOCKED

- ✓ Three anti-trans bills
- ✓ Six anti-abortion bills
- ✓ Four voter ID bills

we're proud to have gotten this victory for a public health approach to drug policy.

### Voting Rights

Maine continues to lead on voting rights and access to the ballot. Working with our voting rights coalition, we passed a package of laws to make voting more accessible, even as 22 other states have passed laws creating unnecessary barriers to voting.

#### The changes in Maine:

- An online voter registration system
- Popular innovations from last year's presidential election to facilitate voting during COVID will become permanent, including ballot dropboxes and extended early voting,
- Mainers over 65 and voters with disabilities can apply to automatically have absentee ballots sent to them every election
- Clarifying the law to permit students to use their school IDs to vote

We also defeated four voter ID bills

that would have made it harder for Mainers to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

### Privacy & Technology

#### LD 1585

Maine has enacted the strongest statewide facial recognition law in the country. The law prohibits almost all government uses of facial recognition, including for surveillance purposes. Law enforcement uses are carefully limited to preserve civil rights and civil liberties. Maine is just the latest in a nationwide movement led by the ACLU to defend core constitutional rights from the threat of facial recognition.

### Racial Justice

#### LD 2

Early in the session, the Legislature voted for and the governor signed into law, an act to implement the use of racial impact statements in

the legislative process. If we are going to undo systemic racism, we need to know whether policies will have a disparate racial impact before they become law.

### Reproductive Freedom

Along with our reproductive rights partners, we defeated six bills that would limit access to abortions. Maine continues to provide access to important reproductive healthcare for all people, including requiring MaineCare to cover abortions.

### LGBTQ Rights

Maine was not immune to the wave of anti-trans bills introduced in dozens of state legislatures. Along with our LGBTQ+ partners and brave trans advocates, we were able to stop these bills, which would have barred trans girls from participating in sports and would have let Maine shelters discriminate against trans women.

## MEET OUR NEW ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR

We're excited to welcome Grace Hooke to the ACLU of Maine team. She will be taking over our volunteer and intern/fellow programs. If you're interested in becoming a volunteer, contact Grace! [ghooke@aclumaine.org](mailto:ghooke@aclumaine.org)

"By joining the ACLU of Maine, I hope to be one small part of the work to create a more just community for all Maine people. I look forward to helping grow our volunteer program and working with our future leaders through our internship and fellow programs."



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