

# ACLU

Maine



## 2021 WINTER NEWSLETTER

### DEAR ACLU OF MAINE MEMBERS,

**A**FTER NEARLY EIGHT years at the ACLU of Maine, I'll be finishing my tenure as executive director this spring.

When I was selected for this role, I knew I was joining an organization with a remarkable legacy across our state and country. It has been an honor to build on that legacy and lead the organization through some truly unprecedented times. Now, we find ourselves in a moment of relative calm, and it feels right for a transition in leadership as we gear up for the challenges to come.

Looking back at my time leading the ACLU of Maine, I am proud of all the work that we have done together. With the amazing support of the staff, the board and our supporters, the ACLU of Maine adapted and thrived. During the last eight years, we doubled in size and tripled our budget. We built a team that has tackled some of the most pressing civil rights challenges in the country – including criminal legal reform, racial justice, abortion rights, digital privacy, and voter protection – all while working to center the voices of impacted communities and building up the power of our coalition partners.

We have never been a more respected and central player in the state of Maine. In just the last 18 months, we led on key civil rights issue in Maine:

- We worked with coalition partners across the state to ensure the right to vote;
- We led the way in advocating for communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19;
- We won a series of surprising criminal legal reform victories in the legislature;

- We launched an intern and fellowship program that is emerging as a cutting-edge program for equity and capacity-building.

In the coming months, we are ready to build on our progress. I firmly believe in the power of leadership changes to unlock new potential for an organization, and the ACLU of Maine team will continue to advocate for civil rights and civil liberties.

One of the best parts of my job was meeting ACLU members from every corner of our state. Whether you

were testifying at the State House, sending letters to the editor, donating money or protesting in the streets, you made our work possible. Your support and encouragement inspired and energized me over these last

eight years, and we are a stronger organization because of our members. Thank you.

While the decision to step down from the ACLU was a difficult one, I'm looking forward to a new adventure. I have been a part of the ACLU since I was six, and the ACLU will always be a part of me. In this transition and beyond, I will continue to support the organization in every way I can. And while I will no longer be the executive director, you will find no louder cheerleader in the state of Maine. I know the ACLU of Maine will climb to even higher heights in the years to come.

Thank you for your support of the ACLU of Maine. It has been an honor to serve as the executive director for so many years.

With gratitude,

**"Looking back at my time leading the ACLU of Maine, I am proud of all the work that we have done together."**

# BELONGING, POWER & VOTING

The right to vote is under attack across the nation, and especially in the South. With midterms on the horizon in 2022, the ACLU is laser focused on protecting the right to vote, just as we have for decades. Why target the right to vote? As Alison explains in this edited and abridged version of a speech that she gave at the First Amendment Museum, it's because at the core of voting rights are questions and contests over who we consider a full citizen of this nation, who belongs here and who has power.

**N**OTHING CAPTURES OUR nation – its contradictions, its hypocrisies, its failures and its triumphs – like the right to vote. That's because the right to vote is revolutionary, and it's where power resides.

Excluding groups from voting means excluding them from power – maintaining white supremacy and patriarchy. Inclusion means the opposite – when everyone can meaningfully vote – without barriers and in representative districts – we have the power to remake the nation into one that is more representative of our great diversity, that is more just and where power is shared equitably.

## The right to vote is revolutionary, and it's where power resides.

The real transformation in voting rights and the contest over expanding the idea of citizenship and belonging in the United States came in the post-Civil War period. In putting the nation back together, the Reconstruction Congress understood that the federal government had the responsibility and the power to protect the rights

of formerly enslaved people from the tyranny of the states.

This was a radical departure from the original Constitution and Bill of Rights - where the focus had been on limiting federal power and preserving the states' sovereignty, and especially the property rights of slave owners. This is why some scholars talk about two constitutions – the 1787 Constitution and the post-Reconstruction Constitution, as amended by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments.

The Fifteenth Amendment, which was ratified in 1870, recognized the right to vote for the first time in our founding document. On paper, it enshrined Black men's right to vote. Fifty years later came the Nineteenth Amendment, which after generations of work by women's suffrage activists, enshrined women's right to vote. By themselves, the Fifteenth and Nineteenth amendments could not overcome centuries of white supremacy entrenched in our laws and customs. And the federal government and federal courts retreated from their duty to protect these new citizens.

It took a century of organizing, movement building and persistence by Black communities and their allies to pave the way for one of the greatest

achievements of American democracy: the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Over the years, the Voting Rights Act has extended and protected voting rights for Black voters, voters of color – including Native American voters and voters with limited English proficiency – and voters with disabilities.

But this flourishing came to a screeching halt with one of the worst Supreme Court decisions in recent history – *Shelby County v. Holder*. In it, the Supreme Court gutted one of the most important provisions of the Voting Rights Act – ending the Justice Department's ability to block discriminatory changes to election law in states and counties with a history of voter discrimination. The *Shelby County* decision has empowered states to pass all manner of voter suppression tactics including polling place closures, voter ID laws, voter roll purges and onerous voter registration procedures.

This is where we find ourselves now: Decades of flourishing in voting and participation after the passage of the Voting Rights Act has been followed by a swift backlash. How long will this backlash last? What will its long-term effects be? How can we resist the backlash, and sustain our movement? The story of voting rights is unfinished and the end is not guaranteed. We are writing that story now.

[Listen to Alison's speech at bit.ly/voting-speech](https://bit.ly/voting-speech)

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# IN 2021, I'M THANKFUL FOR

“All the ACLU supporters who have stood by us during the pandemic, allowing us to keep defending the rights of Mainers.”  
**JOELLE RUTEMBESA, FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE**”

“The ACLU of Maine's staff and board for their dedication and commitment to expanding and protecting civil rights and civil liberties for all Maine people.”  
**ALISON BEYEA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**”

“The young people who fight for justice and equity in Maine. Their devotion and passion are inspiring!”  
**TIFFANI ORTIZ, COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT FELLOW**”

“The support of colleagues, partner organizations and community members, who have advanced equity and social justice during a tough time.”  
**EMMA BOND, LEGAL DIRECTOR**”

“Maine's Freedom of Access Act, for protecting the public's right to access information about their government.”  
**ANAHITA SOTOOHI, LEGAL FELLOW**”

“The intrepid journalists who hold government officials accountable and shed light on injustice.”  
**QAINAT KHAN, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR**”

“My incredible colleagues, who I'm constantly learning from and who inspire me.”  
**LUCA DEANGELIS, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**”

“A new law that eliminates cash bail for most low level offenses, getting us closer to a world where the amount of money you have does not dictate the justice you get.”  
**MEAGAN SWAY, POLICY DIRECTOR**”

“Our ACLU supporters' heartfelt commitment to expanding and protecting civil rights in Maine.”  
**LAURA RETHERFORD, DIRECTOR OF LEADERSHIP GIVING**”

“Working alongside a supportive team that fights for the rights of Maine people everyday.”  
**MARGARITA SALGUERO-MACKLIN, OFFICE MANAGER**”

“Our advocacy to improve Maine's elections laws, so we continue to lead on voting rights.”  
**ZACH HEIDEN, CHIEF COUNSEL**”

“All the young activists and organizers who are demanding a better world and refusing to take no for an answer.”  
**MICHAEL KEBEDE, POLICY COUNSEL**”

“Having the privilege to work alongside Maine youth again. It has reminded me of the joy and hope that young people bring into our world.”  
**GRACE HOOKE, ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR**”

“Our members, donors, volunteers, board and allies for their commitment to reimagining the criminal legal system in Maine.”  
**PABLO ANAYA, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS & ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT**”

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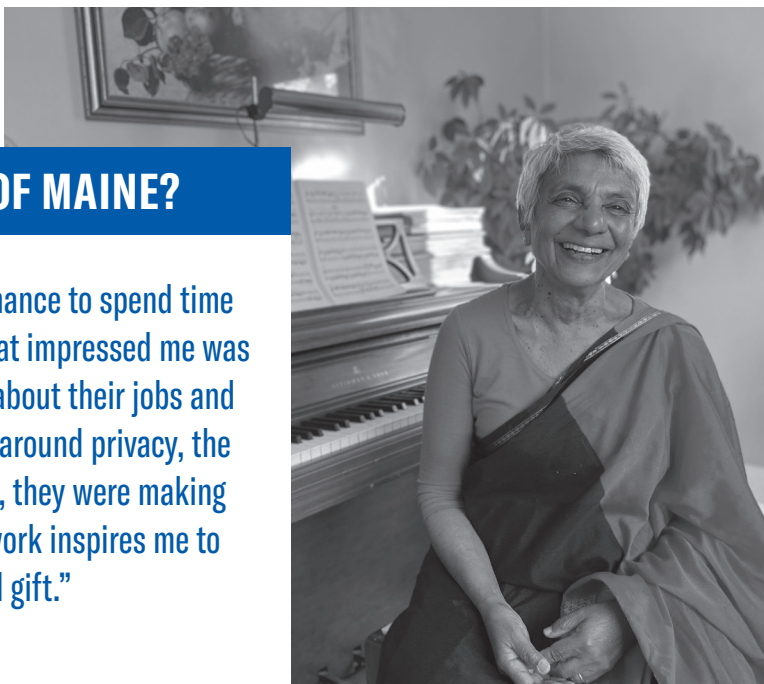
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**WHY GIVE TO THE ACLU OF MAINE?**

“When I first retired to Maine, I had the chance to spend time with some of the lawyers at the ACLU. What impressed me was that these young people were passionate about their jobs and making such a difference. Whether it was around privacy, the criminal justice system, or women’s rights, they were making Maine a better and stronger place. Their work inspires me to support the ACLU of Maine with an annual gift.”

— Nala Fernando



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