



James Duff Lyall
Executive Director



ACLU Vermont

We Are Stronger **TOGETHER**

I've spent the past twenty years advocating for immigrants' rights and a humane immigration system, and met countless people impacted by ICE and Border Patrol violence, both citizens and noncitizens.

As an ACLU staff attorney in southern Arizona, I helped document the systemic abuse of children and families in detention centers, and in communities far from any border, where agents would interrogate, threaten, and assault local residents. I gave my first Congressional testimony on Border Patrol abuse in 2013, reporting many of the very same tactics now being deployed on city streets from Chicago to Minneapolis and beyond.

In 2016, I moved back to Vermont to become the executive director here at the ACLU of Vermont, and since then our affiliate has litigated and won multiple cases in response to civil rights violations by ICE and Border Patrol in northern New England, several involving the complicity of state and local officials.

Looking now at the surge in violent attacks by immigration agents in communities across the country, including right here in Vermont,

I share the anger and revulsion held by so many. I'm also frustrated by the predictability of it all—because in so many ways, what we are witnessing is nothing new. Experience has also taught me to be skeptical that our elected representatives will pursue meaningful solutions, absent sustained public pressure.

And yet, I'm also finding inspiration and even some hope in the way that our communities are responding to this moment—not only with newfound awareness of how dangerous and irredeemable these rogue agencies are, but also in the solidarity that is building throughout our Brave Little State, across party lines and a wide range of issue areas.

Every week, we see protesters in gatherings large and small speaking out against the Trump administration's latest attacks on our rights, including when ICE targeted several community members in South Burlington. We see state lawmakers moving to pass new immigrants' rights protections. And, most importantly, we see people connecting with their neighbors in meaningful ways—building communities where people look out for one another and know that others will have their back, too.

In the pages that follow, you will read stories of the resilience, community, and power of the people that have buoyed our work. Keep showing up for each other—it's the only way through the challenges that lie ahead.

PHOTO CREDIT: BOBBI LOCICERO

In The STATE HOUSE 2026

TAKE ACTION NOW

Your voice makes a difference. To learn more about how to get involved in our work visit acluvt.org/act.

We are in the final weeks of the 2025-2026 legislative session, and our team is hard at work on legislation to expand and protect our rights and liberties, while pushing back on bills that would threaten or restrict our freedoms and values.

Immigrants' Rights –No Secret Police

We helped put forward a slate of bills to expand protections for immigrants and local communities, and several have made excellent progress throughout this session. That includes legislation to ban law enforcement officers from concealing their identity, ensure that all law enforcement officers—including ICE and Border Patrol agents—can be held accountable when they violate people's civil rights, and protect sensitive locations like schools and hospitals from warrantless immigration enforcement. The South Burlington ICE in March underscores the urgency and importance of protecting immigrants' rights in Vermont.

Bodily Autonomy

In the face of changing federal regulations and attacks on gender-affirming healthcare, we are advocating for legislators to ensure patients and providers have the resources they need, including potential funding for care or start-up costs for the establishment of new clinics. In February, we also supported 45+ Vermonters in submitting comments opposing federal rules that would severely restrict access to gender-affirming care.

Economic Justice

Our economic system works for those at the very top, but too many people in our communities are struggling. We are urging lawmakers to ensure vulnerable Vermonters have access to emergency housing, protect the rights of tenants, and end excessive communications and commissary fees in Vermont prisons. To pay for these and other essential state services, it is time for the state to ask the wealthiest Vermont residents to pay their fair share in taxes—especially now, in the face of unprecedented cuts to federal funds and tax breaks for those who need them least.

Smart Justice

We have made tremendous progress towards a fair and more humane justice system in Vermont. We know that relying on harsher criminal penalties, more incarceration, and new systems of forced treatment is cruel and inhumane, and does not improve community safety.

This year we are working to eliminate low level traffic stops for minor infractions to address over policing and racial disparities on Vermont roadways, and to bar state entities from penalizing individuals for engaging in life-sustaining activities like sleeping on public property. We will continue opposing these kinds of harmful and counterproductive approaches, and we will keep working for greater public investments that more effectively promote community safety for everyone.

community support POWERS OUR WORK

Well before Inauguration Day last January, we were ready to hit the ground running—and so were you. With support from organizations large and small, volunteers showing up like never before, and an influx of new donors and sustained giving from our longtime supporters, Vermonters have been with us in the fight for our freedom every step of the way.

Indivisible X ACLU-VT

From hosting Know Your Rights trainings and Valentine's Day letter-writing parties to organizing rallies and fundraisers of all sizes in towns across the state, our friends in the 20+ Indivisible chapters across Vermont have been vital partners, spreading the word about our work and connecting us with new supporters in every corner of the state.

Small Businesses Give Back

Members of the Vermont business community have responded to ICE's violent attacks on immigrants and peaceful protestors in

Minneapolis this past January with an outpouring of support. It was an honor to be among the organizations that received donations from businesses like Café HOT, Red Hen Baking, SILO Distillery, and Jennifer Kahn Jewelry—and to see 50+ local businesses uplift the important work of our partners at Migrant Justice, the Vermont Asylum Assistance Project, and the Immigrant Legal Defense Fund.

Art Sales, Barn Parties, Tribute Concerts, and More

We have been so moved by the big and small ways that individual community members are stepping up during this difficult time. Community is what will see us through the challenges that we face—we see the posters you're putting up in coffee shops to share our work, the honk and waves on street corners, and donations to organizations like ours that make our work possible. Thank you for all your support!

GIVE TODAY

Help us defend the freedoms we're fighting for every day.



Donate Online

WAYS TO GIVE

Your support ensures that we have the resources we need to defend our democracy. Please consider making a gift to the ACLU of Vermont Foundation today. For full details visit acluvt.org/give.

DONATE BY MAIL

Checks can be mailed to:
ACLU Foundation of Vermont
PO Box 277, Montpelier, VT 05601

LEAVE A LEGACY

Include the ACLU in your will, leaving a legacy of liberty for generations to come.

MAKE A TRIBUTE GIFT

Donate in honor or memory of someone special.

MAKE A GIFT OF STOCK

We accept gifts of appreciated stocks or other marketable securities.



For any questions about your support, please contact: Development Manager, Stephanie Hunt at shunt@acluvt.org or call 802-223-6304 x 119.

The ACLU Foundation of Vermont is a 501(c)3 organization that supports the ACLU of Vermont's legal and education programs. Contributions to the Foundation are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Thank you for your service and dedication to the ACLU of Vermont!

- Dave Rapaport Burlington
- Ahmed Khanani Burlington

Welcome our new team member

Thanks to the generous support of donors like you, we are proud to welcome our new staff member, Emmy Auld.

Emmy is a community organizer who spent four years in rural Montana focusing on resource-based issues and advocating for democratic process in the courts.



Emmy is passionate about helping community members recognize their power to make change.

Emmy Auld
Field Manager



Delay. Dilute. Defeat.

*ACLU remains
clear-eyed
about what is*

AT STAKE
—and we have the playbook
TO WIN

With our nationwide network, the ACLU is uniquely positioned to advance litigation, policy, and community organizing in every corner of the country. While the Trump administration tries to divide and disorient us all, the ACLU remains clear-eyed about what is at stake—and we have the playbook to win. **We are working in the courts, in Congress and state legislatures, and in the streets to delay, dilute, and defeat an authoritarian agenda.**

Litigation

We are holding the line in courts across the country, forcing this administration to back down when it matters most. To date, the ACLU has taken over 260 legal actions against the Trump administration. We're fighting to preserve voting rights, protect our First Amendment freedoms, demand due process, and defend our democracy.

- In a victory for academic freedom and education equity, our colleagues in New Hampshire and their allies secured a victory in February against the U.S. Department of Education, ending its directive restricting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in schools and higher education institutions nationwide. The case highlights again why our institutions should resist preemptive compliance with any new federal directive that conflicts with state or federal law—just as we articulated legal guidance to various Vermont institutions last summer. Learn more at acluvt.org/guidance.
- The ACLU National Security Project and NYCLU joined partners in filing a lawsuit in December against the Trump administration seeking records regarding its illegal strikes on civilians in international waters. To date, over 150 civilians have been murdered in airstrikes that violate both domestic and international law, and we will continue working in the courts and in Congress to challenge their legality and bring some measure of justice to victims' families.
- Earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *Barbara v. Trump*, a class action lawsuit defending birthright citizenship filed by the ACLU alongside a broad legal coalition. Lower federal courts have repeatedly agreed with our position and blocked the administration from implementing its executive order. Stay tuned for updates in this and other cases of national importance at aclu.org/court-cases.

- Two legal battles for free speech and immigrants' rights have unfolded right here in Vermont, where the ACLU of Vermont and our co-counsel have defended **Mohsen Mahdawi and Rumeysa Öztürk**. The government unlawfully arrested and imprisoned these student scholars in retaliation for their constitutionally protected speech before Vermont federal judges ordered their release from ICE detention last year. In September, their cases were heard by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Learn more at acluvt.org/road-to-justice.

Legislation

Vermont is not the only state working to enact policies that expand civil rights and civil liberties. Forty-three states have passed policies from the nationwide ACLU's Firewall for Freedom playbook, restricting the use of local resources for federal immigration enforcement, strengthening free speech protections, ending book bans, securing LGBTQ+ rights, and more.

Vermont's Congressional delegation was part of a group of lawmakers who refused to co-sign the President's cruel deportation agenda, voting to block funding increases for the Department of Homeland Security. The ACLU and its

partners are playing a vital role in that fight, opposing at every turn the administration's efforts to terrorize immigrant communities nationwide.

Local Community

The Trump administration's unyielding attacks on democracy and our core freedoms have left many Americans feeling dispirited and disenfranchised. But as the year progressed, the American people showed their strong opposition, taking to the streets to make their voices heard in visible displays of peaceful resistance—including in a growing number of jurisdictions that voted for President Trump.

Our spring Know Your Rights tour has offered opportunities for neighbors to connect and learn more about their right to protest and to document ICE abuses—knowledge that is vital to defending our freedom and our communities from a hostile federal government.

When organized and supported, people can meet any crisis with discipline, courage, and solidarity. The Trump administration thrives on fear, silence, and divisiveness, and these moments of collective resistance shift the balance of power back to the people.

Our power is rooted in our protest. The ACLU is mobilizing our growing supporter and activist network to expose authoritarianism, amplify dissenting voices, and take action in our communities.

OUR ACTIVISTS

2,900,000 Online Activists

1,300,000 Members and Donors

846,005 People Power Activists

OUR IMPACT

1,000,000+ Actions Taken

33 Affiliates Led/partnered on No KINGS

290,000 People trained on protest rights

53,000 People trained on immigrants' rights



in the COURTS



Case against DCF advances

A Vermont judge ruled in December that claims against all three defendants in *A.V. v. Vermont Department for Children and Families, Copley Hospital, and Lund* can move forward.

The case stems from an inappropriate DCF “assessment” of expectant parent A.V. in 2022. Based on unsubstantiated claims about her mental health, and without ever speaking to her, the state obtained A.V.’s confidential medical records from Copley Hospital, where she planned to give birth, and Lund, a nonprofit she had a confidential conversation with earlier in her pregnancy. DCF also lied to a court to obtain custody of her fetus, and attempted to force her to undergo an involuntary c-section.

Immediately after A.V. had given birth—and before she could even hold her newborn baby—the state took custody of her child and fought for seven months to sever A.V.’s parental rights, until a judge finally reunited the family.

With this ruling, DCF and all direct service providers in the state should consider themselves on notice against future rights violations. Notably, this ruling also marks the first time a Vermont judge has considered Article 22, Vermont’s Reproductive Liberty Amendment, which was approved by an overwhelming majority of voters in 2022.

The Habeas Project of New England Expands to Vermont

Founded in 2025, The Habeas Project of New England provides support for immigrants facing unlawful detention without access to bond or meaningful judicial review. In February, we were excited to announce that, in partnership with the Vermont Asylum Assistance Project, we officially joined the coalition and are extending training opportunities to Vermont attorneys. The Project matches immigration attorneys with federally barred attorneys to pursue habeas relief in federal court.

We have a proven legal playbook to secure the release of people who are wrongfully detained by ICE—what we need now is more “people power” to defend the rights and dignity of immigrants targeted by the Trump administration.

Federal litigators looking to volunteer are encouraged to contact Monica Allard at mallard@acluvt.org to learn more about how to get involved.



“

Over the past year, I have tried to remember a single moment in my life that truly made me scream like I did on March 25, 2025. That was the date masked agents—most of them men—stole me off the sidewalk and the first time I ever screamed out loud. My two-minute scream is forever preserved online, embedded in legal documents and essays written by opinion writers, students, and strangers. That day, my neighbor heard me and because of footage from nearby cameras; so did people around the world. You may have heard my scream—and I hope that you will also listen carefully for the silenced voices of the untold number of immigrants, including children, who have been grabbed off of the street, who have been subjected to invasive searches, and who have spent years in for-profit prisons.

Everything that caused my scream that day tries to drown out all the beauty I’ve experienced and tried to offer the world with open hands and my voice—my work with children and youth, my teaching, my dreams, my future. It attempts to silence immigrants, academics, BIPOC communities, and those advocating for Palestinian human rights. But with others witnessing and understanding what happened, I feel heard. I feel some hope. My scream is not about me, it is bigger than me—it is about us.”

– Rümeyisa Öztürk



PHOTO CREDIT: BOBBI LOCICERO

IN THEIR WORDS

Over one year ago, our clients Mohsen Mahdawi and Rümeyisa Öztürk were wrongfully arrested and imprisoned by ICE in retaliation for their constitutionally protected speech. They have each faced tremendous challenges and won great triumphs over this past year, and they share their reflections on surpassing one year since their arrests and detentions made international headlines.

“As I reflect on my unlawful arrest at my citizenship interview exactly a year ago, I feel a mix of emotions. Above all, my heart grieves for the tens of thousands of lives lost in Gaza, and for the people enduring needless violence and bloodshed in Iran, Lebanon, and across our world.

I also feel deep solidarity with students who were targeted for speaking out for Palestinian rights, and with people in this country who face unjust detention and deportation. I reflect on the painful legacy of wrongful imprisonment that has touched generations of

my family. My time in prison was a shocking realization that I could be drawn into that same lineage, not in the land of my ancestors, but here in America, a nation that promises liberty and justice for all.

My ongoing legal fight has deepened my appreciation for the principles that sustain a democratic society: equal protection under the law, due process, and an independent judiciary.

I remain committed to ending wars. I will continue to advocate for the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people and to honor the democratic principles embedded in the promise of this nation. I believe we can build a world rooted in justice, compassion, and peace. I view my case as a test of this country’s Constitution. I will not be intimidated or silenced as I remain rooted in the belief that justice will prevail.”

– Mohsen Mahdawi



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DEFENDING DEMOCRACY, TOGETHER

The ACLU of Vermont Action Team is powered by volunteers from across the state who have the shared belief that everyone deserves to live in a community that is vibrant and thriving, where their rights and freedoms are not only respected but celebrated. Consider signing up today at acluvt.org/team.



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