



Safeguarding Reproductive Liberty in Vermont

THE PEOPLE OF VERMONT are justifiably proud of our state's tradition of defending fundamental liberties and expanding civil rights protections. This year, we will again be called on to help lead the way forward, and the stakes could not be higher.

In the face of a nationwide assault on abortion rights, Vermont voters in 2022 will have the opportunity to make Vermont the first state to explicitly enshrine reproductive liberty in our state constitution by passing Proposition 5, the Reproductive Liberty Amendment.

In doing so, we can safeguard abortion rights while sending a clear message: the American people overwhelmingly support the right of individuals to make reproductive healthcare decisions for themselves and will not tolerate having this right taken away.

For years, anti-abortion politicians have been plotting to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, creating legal roadblocks and trigger laws to put abortion out of reach. The Supreme Court's continued refusal to block Texas' ban on abortion is only one indication of the intensifying rollback of reproductive liberties in this country.

In *Jackson v. Dobbs Women's Health Organization*, argued in December, the Court seemed poised to uphold Mississippi's ban on abortion at 15 weeks of pregnancy. From its inception, Mississippi's 15-week abortion ban was a stepping-stone to banning access entirely.

The ACLU has been on the frontlines defending abortion rights for decades, but we haven't lived through anything like this in the *Roe* era. And while we continue fighting back against disastrous anti-choice laws in other states, we have to do more than that—we have to advance a proactive strategy that reaffirms the centrality of this fundamental freedom in our lives.



A "honk and wave" for reproductive rights in Montpelier on February 5

The right to decide if, when, and how to have children is critical to an individual's dignity and well-being. With the fate of *Roe* hanging in the balance, state-level protections are vital to safeguarding people's access to reproductive health care. This year, Vermont can set an example of what is possible by codifying reproductive autonomy as a fundamental right for all.

The Reproductive Liberty Amendment is both a simple and profound affirmation of our values—values that Vermonters have cherished for generations. We're confident that Vermonters will vote their values in November, and our members should be proud to support this historic effort.

Pledge to vote yes on reproductive freedom at acluvt.org.

In the State House

AT THE MIDPOINT of the 2022 legislative session, we have several important policy initiatives underway to advance and defend the civil liberties of everyone who calls our state home.

Priority issues in our Smart Justice campaign are among the many we are working to advance this year and beyond. They include:

- **Ending qualified immunity** for police so that Vermonters whose rights are violated can get access to justice.
- **Removing armed cops from schools** because their presence disproportionately harms students of color, students with disabilities, and students from families with lower incomes.
- **Collecting better data on racial disparities** by establishing a Bureau of Racial Justice Statistics so we can identify and address systemic racism in our legal system.
- **Decriminalizing drug possession offenses** with a race equity and public health lens, as recommended by the Justice Reinvestment Working Group.
- **Raising the felony threshold for property crimes** to help fight unnecessary incarceration and the racial disparities in our criminal legal system.

We continue fighting for an end to the racist war on drugs, and for a legal system that is fair, equitable, and rooted in community-based solutions. The support of our members—including thousands of calls and emails to legislators in the past few months alone—have made all the difference in moving this agenda forward. We are very grateful for your continued support.

Welcoming new staff

Thanks to your sustained support, we are doubling down in the fight for the rights and liberties of all Vermonters. We have expanded our litigation, policy, and communications programs in recent months and are thrilled to welcome four new members to our team.



Stephanie Gomory
Communications Director

Stephanie (she/her) previously led communications at the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC). She holds a master's in public administration from Baruch College in New York City.



Hillary Rich
Legal Fellow

A graduate of Cornell Law School, Hillary (she/her) comes to us from Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, where she represented detained families and asylum seekers at the U.S. southern border.



Indi Schoenherr
Advocacy Fellow

A graduate of Vermont Law School, Indi (they/them) returns to the team after interning with the ACLU of Vermont and previously with the Vermont Human Rights Commission.



Harrison Stark
Staff Attorney

Harry (he/him) joins the ACLU of Vermont after working with the DC Office of the Attorney General and clerking for federal judges. He graduated from Yale Law School in 2018.

Litigation Updates

RACIAL JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

No student should ever be subjected to harassment or threats of violence, and yet racist bullying is a daily reality for students across the state.

In December, we filed a complaint with the Vermont Human Rights Commission (HRC) on behalf of “C.B.,” a former Vermont student who was subjected to racially motivated bullying and harassment—including derogatory racial slurs, references to white supremacy, and threats of physical violence—by classmates at Twin Valley Middle High School in Windham County during the 2020-2021 school year.

Despite receiving multiple reports about this abuse—from Twin Valley teachers and C.B.’s mother—school administrators took no meaningful action. At the time, C.B. was a tenth-grade student, new to Twin Valley, and the only Black student in the school.

The complaint alleges, among other things, that by failing to address severe and known racial harassment, Twin Valley unlawfully deprived C.B. of her right to a school environment free of discrimination.

We hope to win justice for C.B. and to send the message that the state needs to do more to prevent incidents like these from recurring.

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND FREE SPEECH

We continue to see too many examples of Vermont law enforcement overstepping its authority in our communities, including in response to protected First Amendment activity.

In December, our client Gregory Bombard’s lawsuit challenging a retaliatory arrest by Vermont State Police Trooper Jay Rikken was allowed to move forward after the State’s motion to dismiss was denied in its entirety. Bombard was arrested for making an obscene gesture, a clear form of constitutionally protected expression.

In January, we filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of Brattleboro resident and Black Lives Matter supporter Isabel Vinson, who was criminally cited by the Brattleboro Police Department in June 2020 for her online criticism of a local business owner’s derogatory Facebook posts about the Black Lives Matter movement.

Vinson is challenging a Vermont law that prohibits “disturbing peace by use of telephone or other electronic communications” for unconstitutionally restricting online speech.

This case is yet another example of law enforcement overreach in our communities, and demonstrates why restrictions on free speech are so often problematic.

**YOUR VOTE,
YOUR
PROSECUTOR.**

Hold Prosecutors Accountable

Vermont’s elected prosecutors, known as state’s attorneys, are some of the most powerful people in our legal system—making lifechanging decisions in our communities every day—and they are accountable to you, the voters.

This year, state’s attorneys are on the ballot in every county in Vermont, and we’ll be working to make sure voters have the information they need to make informed decisions on election day.

You can learn more about this campaign and your state’s attorney candidates on our website, at acluvt.org/states-attorneys.

**READ MORE ABOUT OUR LITIGATION DOCKET AT
[WWW.ACLUVT.ORG/CASES](https://www.acluvt.org/cases)**



Vermont

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Vermont

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WAYS TO GIVE

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- If you're 70½ or older, you can make direct transfers from your IRA without a tax penalty. Questions? Visit www.acluvt.org/give to learn more

DID YOU KNOW?



The stock market grew 20% in 2021.

Did you know you can make a gift of stock to the ACLU? Visit www.acluvt.org/give for stock transfer instructions.

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