

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOUNDATION of VERMONT

# ANNUAL REPORT 2010

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# 2010 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOUNDATION OF VERMONT, INC.

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Board of Directors, Committees, and Staff. . .inside front cover

## WHAT IS THE ACLU?

he American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont is an organization of Vermonters dedicated to the defense of individual liberties guaranteed by both the U.S. and Vermont constitutions. The American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Vermont is the legal and educational arm of the ACLU, and it goes to court in defense of these essential liberties.

Both the American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont and its foundation are affiliated with the national ACLU, which was formed 90 years ago.

The principles guiding the ACLU are simple and clear:

- The right to free expression above all, the freedom to dissent from the official view and majority opinion.
- The right to equal treatment regardless of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, age, or disability.

• The right to be left alone — to be secure from spying, from the promiscuous and unwarranted collection of personal information, and from interference in our private lives.

These guarantees of liberty are not self-enforcing. Those with power often undermine the rights of individuals and groups who lack the political influence, the numerical strength, or the money to secure their birthright of freedom. That is why ACLU programs — in the courts, in the legislatures, and in the public forum — have most often been on behalf of people with the special vulnerability of the powerless.

We are all vulnerable. No group or person is permanently protected. That is why the ACLU accepts, as a first principle, the truth — validated by experience that the rights of each person are secure only if those of the weakest are assured. The ACLU stands on this ground; if it fails to do so, it and liberty may perish.

"The ACLU has stood four-square against the recurring tides of hysteria that from time to time threaten freedoms everywhere. . . . Indeed, it is difficult to appreciate how far our freedoms might have eroded had it not been for the Union's valiant representation in the courts of the constitutional rights of all people of all persuasions, no matter how unpopular or even despised by the majority they were at the time."

Former Chief Justice Earl Warren

#### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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By Virginia Lindauer Simmon, president in 2010

### here is no such thing as an achieved liberty; like electricity there can be no substantial storage and it must be generated as it is

enjoyed, or the lights go out." These words, written in 1953 by Robert H. Jackson, Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court from 1941 to 1954, could not be more true.

Infringements on our privacy arise from ever more sources. Among these are CCTV (closed-circuit TV) cameras that monitor public and private areas, capable of recognizing faces and identifying automobile license plate numbers; genetic information such as DNA; global positioning systems on our cell phones and our automobiles; microchips in passports — all of these and more can track our every move.

I think it's safe to say that, as futurist and author Charlie Stross implied in a 2007 speech, we've reached the point where we need to set aside asking what technologies are available for infringing on our privacy and shift to asking what we're going to do with those technologies.

There's little doubt that the culture is shifting. Every day I find a new way to worry. When I go to *The New York Times* Web site to read an article, for example, and find advertisements targeted specifically to me — promotions for Vermont products, say, or L.L. Bean slacks — I get nervous.

But while it might feel creepy to me, this action is enabled by "cookies" on my computer that anonymously tell the *Times* site where I've been and don't identify me personally. They can be cleared off my hard drive, although I've found that oft-visited Web sites launch much more easily if their cookies are left alone.

Well, according to award-winning investigative journalist David Goodman, the featured speaker at this year's ACLU of Vermont annual meeting, another kind of cookie has arisen that isn't so sweet and not so easily removed, because it's selfreactivating. You can Google "super cookies" for information on how to protect from them.

Goodman also spoke of how the student records of No Child Left Behind are being used as a military recruitment tool; and how, for under \$10 a month, you can buy a service that "tracks," through triangulation, cell phones using GPS-like navigation; and how the U.S. Army is one of the major sponsors of the video game Halo 3.

Those CCTV cameras can instantly send you a ticket if you jaywalk or run a red light; those RFID chips in your passport could, if hacked, identify you as an American to a possible terrorist; and online health records — well encrypted, we hope — might still be at risk if someone has the time and desire to decode them.

If you use a computer, a lot about you is searchable online. We can argue whether it's better or worse that everybody's information is out there. The culture is changing, and in 20 years we'll have a group of adults who grew up in this world and won't consider it such a big deal.

We're foolish, though, if we think that the list of dangerous technologies



we've identified today will be the same list tomorrow. The explosion of such methods will only continue, and the necessity to identify and address them is of prime importance.

Which brings us back to Charlie Stross's question: What are we going to do with the emerging technologies available for infringing on our privacy?

The ACLU is uniquely positioned to address exactly these issues. To continue Justice Jackson's electricity analogy, the ACLU can act as the power company, ever watchful to make sure those lights stay lit — the ACLU's legacy to you.

Your legacy can be to make sure of that by contributing to the ACLU Foundation of Vermont or naming the ACLU as beneficiary in your will.

It has been a privilege to serve as your president and board chair.

By Allen Gilbert, executive director

### his was the year that government transparency and accountability bubbled to the top of many people's lists of civil liberties concerns.

On Page 7 in "2010 In Perspective" you can read more about the specifics of the open government issues that arose. But it's unlikely that it was just the events of this particular year that made people question how open their state and local governments are. Rather, 2010 seemed to represent a point when people looked at the sum total of government intrusions on their liberties over the last 10 years and wondered what had happened.

The decade began with the terror of the 9/11 attacks. In response, government promised enhanced security but at the price of greater intrusion into everyone's life. Government took on new powers that previously would have been rejected out-of-hand. We now submit to full body scans at airports or rigorous pat-down searches. Our cell phones are used by government as tracking devices. Credit card, bank, and travel records are monitored to show where we've been and what we've spent.

We've been kept in the dark on many national security issues. We have gotten used to our federal government taking actions the press may not report or Congress may not debate.

This approach to governing seems to have seeped into Vermont government as well. In 2010, we saw state and local government agencies try to keep citizens in the dark regarding alleged racial profiling, police actions against prisoners, public works deals gone sour, law enforcement internal investigations, utility mismanagement, and possible Taser stun gun abuse.

During a heated debate last spring in the Vermont House, the presiding speaker ruled discussion of the constitutionality of a particular bill out of order. Constitutionality is for the courts to decide, he said.

This year reminded us at the ACLU of the need — articulated in our strategic plan — to focus as much of our resources as possible on the direct defense of civil liberties. Our litigation and public education efforts expanded into new areas. Our legislative advocacy work — with assistance from Loomis fellow Serena Hollmeyer Taylor — saw significant successes (and, admittedly, some failures).

Here are some highlights of the year:

- Held a very successful "Reckoning with Torture" event at the University of Vermont that featured readings from documents obtained by the ACLU through Freedom of Information Act requests.
- Sponsored other well-received public education events, including our second annual Banned Books Week program with Vermont authors reading from censored works, our sixth annual "Bill of Rights 101" student conference, and our fifth annual civil liberties conference — this year on the theme of government transparency and accountability.
- Saw steady growth in activity on our social media sites and in the



readership of our "Civil Liberties Journal" blog.

- Worked with several different coalitions — women's rights groups, news media groups, drug law reform groups, mental health and disability rights groups, and the national Innocence Project in advocacy efforts.
- Helped plan and participated in a new book discussion series on civil liberties issues.
- Won important victories through litigation work done by staff attorney Dan Barrett and cooperating attorneys.
- Led a workshop on school finance reform at a National ACLU conference in Orlando, Florida. Our *Brigham* lawsuit remains one of the most successful litigation efforts in the country in providing schoolchildren with equal access to education opportunities.

Please keep abreast of our work. Navigate to our Web site (www.acluvt.org), visit us on Facebook (ACLU-Vermont), catch our tweets on Twitter (ACLU\_VT), and subscribe to our e-updates (info@acluvt.org).

### **A SUMMARY OF MAJOR LEGAL ACTIONS DURING 2010**

#### Freedom of Expression

Crowell v. Wrinn: In March we filed suit on behalf of four peaceful protesters who were arrested by the Brattleboro police when they silently held signs aloft during a speech by Gov. James Douglas. The action alleged that the defendant police officers' actions violated the protesters' First Amendment right to free expression and their Fourth Amendment right against unreasonable seizure. We were able to come to a good resolution of the case, with the town eventually agreeing to compensate our clients, pay the ACLU's costs and fees, adopt a new police department policy governing treatment of protesters, and undergo training on the subject.

Cooperating attorney: Stephen L. Saltonstall (Law Offices of Stephen L. Saltonstall, Manchester); Staff attorney: Dan Barrett

#### **Domestic Surveillance**

ACLU v. Office of the Attorney General: As part of our ongoing effort to document and educate the public about the ways in which Vermonters' activities are monitored by their state and local governments, we requested public records from the attorney general's office in January showing whether and, if so, how it obtained cell phone location information. This data can be used to track a person's movements by showing how the person's cell phone makes contact with nearby cell towers. The attorney general's office refused to tell us whether it even had documents responsive to our request, so we filed suit. After extensive briefing, we were able to learn

that the attorney general obtains cell phone location tracking information without warrants or judicial oversight, through an antiquated subpoena power known as an inquest.

Staff attorney: Dan Barrett

#### **Substantive Due Process**

Stone v. Middlebury: In May 2009 we filed suit on behalf of a Middlebury store owner who was singled out by the town's health board and forbidden from selling the plant salvia divinorum. There is no legal prohibition against selling or possessing salvia in state or federal law, so we challenged the town's actions in court. We reached a settlement with the town late in 2010. The town agreed to withdraw the ban, and we agreed to drop our lawsuit.

Cooperating attorney: Roger Kohn (Kohn Rath Blackwood & Danon, Hinesburg); Staff attorney: Dan Barrett

#### **Open Records**

Galloway v. Town of Hartford: Over the Memorial Day weekend, Hartford police officers were called to the scene of a reported burglary. After entering the home in question, the police discovered a naked black man in one of the home's bathrooms, seated on the toilet. Apparently believing him to be a burglar, the police struck the man, pepper-sprayed him, handcuffed him, and dragged him from the house — only to be told by neighbors that he was the homeowner and suffered from a chronic medical problem. Our client, investigative journalist Anne Galloway of VtDigger.org, requested police records relating to the incident and was flatly denied by the Hartford police. We sued on Ms. Galloway's behalf under Vermont's public records act and have forced the police to surrender a substantial number of the documents that they asked the court to hide. The litigation is continuing, and we are hopeful that we can help our client fully vindicate the public records act as a mechanism of open government and citizen oversight of the police.

Staff attorney: Dan Barrett

Bain v. Clark: Stephen Bain is an incarcerated Vermonter who submitted an open records request for the Windham County sheriff's radio logs for a certain day. Although radio logs are innocuous, routine records showing rudimentary information about police officers' responses to dispatcher calls, the sheriff denied Bain's request. Bain sued, and the superior court agreed with the sheriff, concluding that Vermont's public records act forbids anyone from accessing any record generated by a police agency. On appeal to the Vermont Supreme Court, we weighed in as an *amicus curiae* urging the court to interpret the public records act in the same way that most other jurisdictions do — by mandating disclosure of police records unless the police can demonstrate that disclosure poses a concrete harm such as endangering one's right to a fair trial. We await the court's decision.

*Staff attorney*: Dan Barrett

Prison Legal News v. Prison Health Services, Inc.: We have agreed to represent Prison Legal News in its suit against prison medical contractor Prison Health Services, Inc. Our client is a nationally known West Brattleboro-based monthly publication that deals with prisoners' rights and prison conditions. As part of an ongoing investigation of the for-profit prison industry, Prison Legal News has requested records of claims, settlements, and judgments made against the corporation formerly used by Vermont to provide medical care in its prisons — a contractor in the news last year in connection with the death of Ashley Ellis at Northwest State Correctional Facility in Swanton. The contractor has refused to provide the information, so we have stepped into the case to argue that, as many other states have concluded, Vermont courts should treat private contractors performing state functions as equivalent to state agencies for public records purposes. We anticipate recruiting a cooperating attorney to litigate the case with us.

Staff attorney: Dan Barrett

#### Seminar: Accountability and Transparency in Government

On November 18 we hosted a seminar and continuing legal education event at Saint Michael's College dealing with public records, open meetings, and campaign finance disclosure requirements. We were able to assemble lawyers, elected officials, and journalists to address these topics, and an informed group of approximately 60 attendees participated with thought-provoking discussion that underscored the need for Vermont government institutions to work harder to fulfill the promise of open government. We were pleased that a number of current and future officeholders also took part or attended, including Secretary of State Deborah Markowitz, Secretary of State-elect Jim Condos, Auditor Thomas Salmon, Sen. Jeanette White, Sen. Vince Illuzzi, Rep. Ken Atkins, Rep. Anne Donahue, and Rep. Tom Koch. Our thanks also to presenters Greg Sullivan (Malloy & Sullivan, Hingham, Mass.), Paul Gillies (Tarrant, Gillies, Merriman & Richardson, Montpelier), Jim Barlow (Vermont League of Cities and Towns), Mike Donoghue (Vermont Press Association), Anne Galloway (VtDigger.org), and Kristin Carlson (WCAX-TV).

#### **Online Advocacy**

We are posting online more documents relating to our legal advocacy work so that members, supporters, and the public can learn about the issues that the ACLU of Vermont litigates. Last spring we began placing the filings in all of our current cases on our Web site at http://acluvt.org/legal/ docket. The enthusiastic feedback we have received from supporters, journalists researching stories, and attorneys who want to know more about bringing civil rights and civil liberties claims leads us to believe that it's a good idea. We are also trying to help bring paper-based Vermont Supreme Court procedures into the digital age by scanning and posting certain appeals documents online so that members of the public can know what issues are coming before the court.

#### **Other Matters**

This past year the ACLU-VT investigated a number of issues that did not lead to litigation but might in the future. These include racial profiling, airport screening, and Taser stun-gun usage by police. Complaints about racial profiling are vexing because of the Legislature's rejection of a limited proposal that police departments record the race of individuals stopped by officers. Despite legislators' apparent belief that profiling "doesn't happen here," we hear complaints about it frequently. Without stop data, however, it is difficult to demonstrate to a police department that one of its officers is disproportionately stopping non-white Vermonters. Taser usage is another troubling side of policing in Vermont. The electronic stun guns are unregulated except for whatever policy individual departments may put in place. The attorney general has shied away from suggesting that uniform policies be implemented statewide. The lack of consistent policies and some departments' insistence on using stun guns on individuals who peacefully refuse to follow a police officer's verbal instructions are likely to lead to increased litigation. Finally, we are monitoring the problem of Vermonters who have reason to believe that they have been placed on a government watch list, with the result that they are subjected to invasive searches every time they board a flight. Because the law involved is a complex area of federal administrative law, we are watching the progress of a suit by the Pennsylvania ACLU on behalf of a woman who has been placed on such a list.

## ACLU-VT and ACLUF-VT STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES, FY 2010\*

Support and Revenues Memberships\$	<b>ACLU</b> 44,196	ACLU Foundation	
Revenue-sharing	44,190	\$	141,768
National ACLU grant	148	Ψ	141,700
Gifts:	110		
Annual campaign			48,755
Memorials/Honorariums			1,115
Foundation.			7,000
Bequests			7,677
Donated Items and Services			14,303
Events			15,215
Public Education			749
Net National Shared Income			26,090
Interest and dividends	182		10,368
Unrealized gain (loss) on investments.			9,457
Realized gain (loss) on investments			57,767
Miscellaneous	1,037		
Total support and revenues	45,563	\$	340,264
Expenses Program services Legal Public education	15 022	\$	96,154 43,151
Legislation <u>\$</u>	15,022		
Total program services	15,022	<u>\$</u>	139,305
Supporting services			
Fundraising	3,441		61,813
Management and general	19,235		145,104
Total supporting services	22,676	\$	206,917
Total expenses	37,698	\$	346,222
NET CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	7,865		(5,958)
NET ASSETS – BEGINNING	44,721		1,390,212
NET ASSETS – ENDING <u>\$</u>	52,586	\$	1,384,254

\*These statements of activities cover the fiscal year beginning April 1, 2009 and ending on March 31, 2010, and were prepared by ACLU staff based on an annual audit report by outside independent auditors.

#### **2010 IN PERSPECTIVE**

# GOVERNMENT — KEEP IT TRANSPARENT, HOLD IT ACCOUNTABLE

By Allen Gilbert, executive director

ccess to public records was written into Vermont law in the 1970s in the wake of the Watergate break-in and cover-up. No one wanted government on any level to act the way the Nixon administration had acted.

At about the same time, the state's open meeting law was put into place. In simplest form, the law says that with rare exception — the public's business is to be conducted in public.

None of this was revolutionary. The laws might have been new, but the basis for them was not.

The right to hold government accountable is guaranteed in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (the right "to petition the Government for a redress of grievances"). Article 6 of the Vermont Constitution says, "That all power being originally inherent in and consequently derived from the people, therefore, all officers of government, whether legislative or executive, are their trustees and servants; and at all times, in a legal way, accountable to them."

It is this right that underlies Vermont's public records and open meetings laws. Government is accountable to the people at all times.

In 2010, serious questions were raised whether Vermont's public records and open meeting laws are able to provide citizens with the access they need to exercise this right. Officials routinely deny requests for records. Public bodies meet in closed sessions without giving adequate reasons for closing out the public.

The only recourse to address violations is through litigation, which is expensive. Newspapers, which once brought most open records and public meetings cases, aren't going to court nearly as often because of diminished resources. So private citizens and groups like ours are left to act as enforcers. But even if a plaintiff prevails in court, judges may, but are not required to, award fees and costs. Few judges order such awards.

Government is also accountable to citizens at elections. Article 8 of the Vermont Constitution states that citizens have a right to elections that are "free and without corruption." Government must ensure that such conditions are met. Yet Vermont has earned failing grades from national watchdog groups that analyze states' campaign finance laws. Access to campaign finance reports is poor. Personal financial statements are not required of candidates running for statewide offices; nearly every other state has such a requirement. Many states extend the requirement to legislative candidates.

We became involved in a number of open government disputes in 2010. Several are described in our legal docket. We also hosted a conference on government accountability and transparency at Saint Michael's College. We ended the year making plans for legislative action that would make government more transparent and hold it more accountable.

A tangent to the theme of government accountability is police accountability. We receive numerous complaints alleging police misconduct. Racial profiling, treatment of young people around underage drinking issues, use of Tasers — the complaints run the gamut, and they seem to be increasing.

The discouraging thing is that short of a lawsuit, it's hard to sort out whether an officer acted inappropriately. The public is left not knowing who's a good cop and who's not. Police are left with a black eye that may or may not be deserved.

We think it may be time that police officers be licensed the way that members of nearly every other profession in the state are licensed. Public confidence in public officials requires public accountability. Right now we don't have that for law enforcement. Officers are certified when they finish their initial training at the Vermont Police Academy. But that's it. There's not the ongoing, independent oversight that's applied to teachers, lawyers, plumbers, beauticians, architects, doctors, and others. There needs to be an independent body that accepts complaints from the public, regularly reviews license renewals, investigates cases that may warrant license revocation, and reports to the public.

Hopes are high among numerous government watchdog groups that important changes can be made in 2011 to ensure Vermont government remains a public enterprise.



Sarah Star is presented with the Curtis Award by Executive Director Allen Gilbert.

#### The American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont presented its 28th Annual David W. Curtis Civil Liberties Award to Sarah Star for her steadfast commitment to equal justice under the law.

Major social and legal changes are never fully accomplished simply through the stroke of one pen or the announcement of a single court decision. Instead, they are won in pieces, some large and some small. Sarah Star stepped in to provide legal representation to a woman whose civil union had ended and child custody battle had turned acrimonious. The case of *Janet Jenkins v. Lisa Miller* reached national attention when Janet's partner, who had borne their daughter, "renounced" her sexuality, left the state with the child, and sought help from a Virginia church group and national anti-gay legal group to fight the visitation rights ordered by a Vermont judge. The story is not yet over, but the case has set one more important precedent that, under the law, same-sex couples are entitled to the same treatment as heterosexual couples.

#### JONATHON B. CHASE COOPERATING ATTORNEY AWARD

The American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont presented its 23rd annual Jonathon B. Chase Cooperating Attorney Award to Stephen L. Saltonstall in recognition of his work defending the rights of protestors.

Stephen L. Saltonstall believes deeply in the importance of the free speech clause of the First Amendment. He has defended the right of a middle school student to wear a T-shirt critical of a president, the right of an elderly woman to protest in the streets of Bennington, and in 2010 the rights of nuclear power opponents to protest at a speech by Gov. James Douglas. Each case may, by itself, seem insignificant, given the challenges facing our country. Yet Steve has recognized each case as one more link to be forged in a chain that protects what may be a citizen's most fundamental right. The case of *Crowell v. Wrinn* in Brattleboro this year resulted in a settlement favorable to our clients and to the civil liberties of all Vermonters.

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Stephen L. Saltonstall

#### **DEVELOPMENT AWARD**

The American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont presented its 21st annual Development Award to David S. Clark in recognition of his dedicated and energetic work in ensuring that the American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont has the financial resources needed to accomplish its work.

David S. Clark has devoted many hours to the ACLU of Vermont during his two terms on the ACLU-VT board. His measured remarks have lent a tone of civility to vigorous discussions. His service on our Public Education Committee has led to banned books posters in libraries and the start-up of a new book discussion series on civil liberties. He has helped to organize fundraising receptions and passed out ACLU information at his local farmers' market. He has reached out to many different types of people in an effort to interest them in our work. Through all of his endeavors, David has appreciated that our strength depends on our members and the financial support they give us. He has asked them to support us with their dollars, and he has set a personal example of the stewardship all can practice. Our organization is the richer, in energy and dollars, because of his service.



David S. Clark receives the Development Award from Executive Director Allen Gilbert.

#### TIMMY BOURNE AWARD FOR EXCEPTIONAL VOLUNTEER SERVICE



Serena Hollmeyer Taylor listens as Executive Director Allen Gilbert reads her award.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont presented its 23rd annual Timmy Bourne Award for Exceptional Volunteer Service to Serena Hollmeyer Taylor in recognition of her contribution of time and energy to the American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont.

Organizations dedicated to worthy causes run on the fuel of passion, principle, and committed volunteers. Serena Hollmeyer Taylor embodies all three things. Her passion for the equal treatment of even some of the most marginalized of our society's citizens has infused her work with the ACLU and with other groups for whom she has worked. Her principles are rooted in a world view born of her background, intelligence, and temperament. To say that she has been a committed volunteer masks her service to us also as a Loomis fellow working in our legislative advocacy program. She has never flinched when asked to do the mundane or the impossible. We are grateful for her interest in, and commitment to, the ACLU.

#### HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THE ACLU

I want to support the vital work of Vermont's American Civil Liberties Union Foundation.
Please list my/our name(s) as follows:
□ I prefer not to be listed. Name(s): Mailing address:
E-mail: Phone:
<i>Please make checks payable to:</i> ACLU Foundation of Vermont. Gifts are tax-deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. <i>Clip and return to:</i> American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Vermont, 137 Elm Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05602. <b>Your support is deeply appreciated.</b>

# By including the ACLU in your will, you can leave a legacy of liberty for generations to come.

Thousands of passionate civil libertarians have stepped forward and expressed their most cherished values by making a deeply meaningful gift to the ACLU in their estate plans.

We invite you to remember the ACLU in your estate plans and become part of this special group of ACLU supporters who have made freedom, justice, and equality a personal legacy.

To learn more or to take advantage of our estate planning resources, visit www.aclu.org/legacy or call toll-free 877-867-1025.



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2010 Annual Report

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