

# Dear Friends,

It is in times like these that we are uniquely positioned to work with one another to defend our civil rights. Despite the ongoing barrage of direct attacks against our communities, **Connecticut has come together** in a remarkable way to protect our friends, families, and neighbors. We have shown that **our joy, resistance, and perseverance will not be broken down**, and that we will continue to build coalitions and mobilize our people power.

Like all of you, we entered the new year fiercely prepared for what we knew was coming: **abuse of power and government overreach under the Trump administration**. Along with our colleagues at the national ACLU office and affiliates nationwide, we have been working at the Capitol, in the courts, and with communities to **fight back against a hostile federal government**.

Since January, the ACLU of Connecticut has been defending and advancing our civil rights and liberties by:



**Reducing the Scope & Role of the Criminal Legal System**



**Enforcing & Expanding Voting Rights Protections**



**Increasing Government Transparency & Accountability**



**Defending the Rights of Immigrants**



**Ensuring Access to Reproductive Care & Defending Bodily Autonomy**



**Protecting LGBTQIA+ Rights & Freedoms**



**Preserving First Amendment Rights**

This is a time of great challenge – **and great opportunity**. We need you and your courageous support to continue defending and advancing our most fundamental freedoms.

In solidarity,

**Chelsea-Infinity Gonzalez**  
*Public Policy and Advocacy Director*  
*ACLU of Connecticut*



**ACLU**  
**Connecticut**

# LEGISLATIVE SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Like always, the ACLU of Connecticut approached this legislative session with an ambitious vision and an indomitable spirit. However, early in the session, we had to pivot quickly to respond to the rapidly changing political landscape, giving us a unique opportunity to find community with one another and take our advocacy to new levels with more coalition work than ever before.

## PROTECTING IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS & IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

From day one, one of the most urgent calls to action appeared in the immigrants' rights space – both nationally and here in our state. As part of the Trust Act Now! Coalition, our team helped pass a version of the Trust Act that included **increased protections for immigrants in our state**. These increased protections contained a uniquely **critical enforcement mechanism** through a private right of action including declaratory and injunctive relief and an expanded definition of law enforcement, creating a meaningful way to gain relief and justice when the law is violated.

While the Trust Act Now! Coalition has worked diligently to advance these protections, **we are not done yet**. There is still much more work to do, and we are ready to build on this momentum.



## FUNDING VOTING LEGISLATION

This session, we began by advocating for the passage of no-excuse absentee voting legislation with the Connecticut voting rights coalition. However, when the proposed state budget failed to include **funding for the full implementation of the Connecticut Voting Rights Act (CTVRA)**, we shifted focus to ensure those critical resources were restored.

By the end of the session, **the coalition was successful in restoring the full \$1.4 million budget** to provide for staffing, database maintenance, translation services, and more for the CTVRA and the Secretary of the State's office. With this tremendous win, the wind is at our backs for next year when we continue our advocacy for the passage of **no-excuse absentee voting**, which did not pass this year.

In addition to this effort, we worked with the Unlock the Vote Coalition to **expand access to the ballot for people incarcerated in state custody**, leading to legislation aimed at helping provide absentee ballots to eligible voters. While this bill did not pass as a standalone bill, its core language was adopted into the budget implementer – a meaningful win for voting access.



You can read the full recap of our 2025 legislative session at [www.acluct.org/2025-end-of-session](http://www.acluct.org/2025-end-of-session).

## ADVANCING INCLUSIVE REPRODUCTIVE & LGBTQIA+ JUSTICE

Early in the session, the ACLU of Connecticut and other partner organizations like Planned Parenthood, Reproductive Equity Now, and Equality CT were called to **defend the Equality Amendment**. While this resolution was not passed, the coalition finds a certain sense of hope in the group of advocates and activists who provided **more than 200 testimonies**. Later in the session, it was this same community that gathered once more to **oppose, and ultimately defeat, an anti-LGBTQIA+ agenda** threatening to stifle young people's freedom of thought and freedom to be in our schools and libraries.

The ACLU of Connecticut was and will continue to be loud in our support for a bill that **strengthens our state's shield law**, mitigating risks to providers in our state and protecting those seeking reproductive care – which undoubtedly includes gender-affirming care.

## CHALLENGING THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

We continued **our long-standing advocacy for a housing bill** that would make it easier for people living with a criminal record to obtain housing while also working with organizations like Stop Solitary CT to **support the full funding of a permanent prison ombudsperson**. In addition, the policy team has played a key role in the search for a new Inspector General this session. We also stood alongside the **CT Domestic Violence Survivor's Justice Act (DVSJA) Coalition** in advocating for trauma-informed sentencing for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking – a fight we remain committed to.



## HOLDING THE LINE ON OTHER ISSUES IN THE LEGISLATURE

**Free Speech:** The policy team testified against a bill – which did not pass – regarding free speech on campuses including a provision that would make it a crime to protest with a mask on.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI):** We submitted both written and oral testimony against several AI bills that contained potentially harmful language, continuing to provide thought leadership and clarity about creating equitable AI policies.

**Police Accountability and Transparency:** Our policy experts opposed further restrictions on the public's already limited access to police and Department of Correction misconduct records, which raised significant concerns for transparency and accountability. We also raised serious concerns about a traffic stop bill – originally intended to reduce discriminatory policing – that was weakened by a cannabis-related amendment likely to invite racialized enforcement. Despite our opposition, it passed both chambers.

Engaged with more than

50

partner organizations in  
more than 8 coalitions

Lobbied more than

2,330

hours in and out of the  
Capitol building

Submitted more than

100

testimonies in 16  
legislative committees

# LITIGATION RECAP

This year, the ACLU Foundation of Connecticut is growing its legal team with the addition of a legal fellow, strengthening our ability to respond to ongoing civil rights threats from the Trump Administration – which is possible thanks to the support of our members and grant partners.

Here are some litigation highlights from the first half of 2025 – read more about these and other cases on our legal docket at [www.acluct.org/cases](http://www.acluct.org/cases).

## *Du v. Department of Homeland Security –*

We filed this case and then won a preliminary court order that **protects the immigration status of international students in Connecticut**. The order stops the government from changing students' status in the state without the court's permission as we await class certification.

*"No student should be afraid of detention, deportation, or disappearance. These students deserve to be here without fear of being unfairly and unjustly targeted by an administration that is disregarding the rule of law."* - Jaclyn Blickley, Staff Attorney

## *Massimino v. Benoit –*

We're appealing a ruling in a case about the **right to record the government in public**. Keith Massimino was recording the exterior of a police station from a public sidewalk when two Waterbury police officers interrogated and arrested him.

*"Our ability to observe the government is key to participating in democracy, and vital when it comes to things like holding the police accountable."* - Dan Barrett, Legal Director

## *ACLU v. Trump –*

The ACLU Nationwide and affiliates across the country have filed **more than 140 legal actions** against the Trump Administration. With your support, the ACLU is fighting for, and winning on, issues such as:

- Protecting immigrants' rights and due process
- Challenging censorship of education, arts, and more
- Safeguarding our right to protest and free speech
- Pushing back on attacks against transgender people
- Defending against executive overreach and abuse of power

**Learn more about our national litigation.**



## *Mustafa v. Byars –*

We're working to vindicate the **right to access court records** showing the moments when Justin Mustafa was injured by a prison guard, which the Department of Correction wants hidden from the public.

*"Public oversight of our prison system is vital, so we requested copies of the videos. Any time a person is injured in prison by a government employee, that's a serious thing meriting public discussion."* - Chelsea-Infinity Gonzalez, Public Policy and Advocacy Director





# Celebrating the Success of Smart Justice

After **more than six years** of powerful advocacy to end mass incarceration and increase transparency and accountability in the criminal legal system, we officially marked the **close of our Smart Justice program this summer**. The campaign began in 2018 as part of an unprecedented nationwide effort to **bring the voices of people directly impacted** by the criminal legal system into the halls of power to share their expertise, create change, and reduce the state's jail and prison population.

Smart Justice has built a strong foundation – one that has changed what is possible in Connecticut. The campaign did not just make history, **it changed the way advocacy is done in this state**. The ACLU of Connecticut remains deeply committed to this model of change and will continue to fight for justice and equity in the criminal legal system at the legislature.

## Some of the many victories Smart Justice secured for Connecticut included:

- First-in-the-nation mandating of data collection and public reporting on prosecutorial decision-making;
- Creation of the Council on the Collateral Consequences of Criminal Records in 2019;
- Passage of a sweeping police accountability bill in 2020, which included the creation of the Inspector General role to investigate police use of deadly force;
- “Parking lot advocacy” during the 2021 virtual legislative session to ensure passage of a landmark Clean Slate bill; and
- Advocacy to end discrimination in occupational licensing and housing access, stop deceptive police interrogation tactics, restore the right to vote for people on parole, and abolish prison gerrymandering.



# THE ACLU OF CT IN COMMUNITY

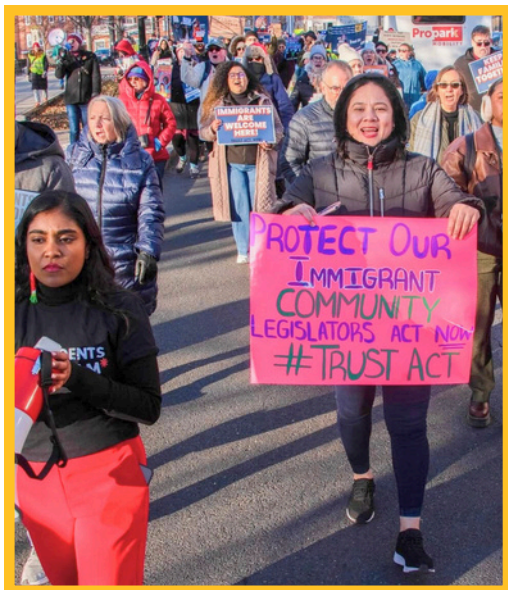
**Real change starts in the community.** That's why we've been showing up across the state to listen to, learn from, and stand with all people fighting for a more just and equitable Connecticut.

Shortly after the presidential election, we worked swiftly to begin a **series of sold-out statewide town halls with thousands of participants** where we created a space for community and an opportunity to hear directly from you the things you were most concerned about. Our team made every effort to accept your invitations and be with you at these local events, standing firm in our solidarity with one another.



At these events, our team would have countless conversations with various communities, all of which brought us to the realization that there was an urgent need for easily accessible and understandable information on how to protect and enforce our most fundamental rights and

freedoms. **Working with community advocates, activists, and organizers, we hosted dozens of “Know Your Rights” trainings across the state** where people could share information, ask questions, and learn more about their rights and how to assert them when necessary. This includes a **series of resistance events aimed at teaching folks actions they can take to push back against the rise of authoritarianism.** We also made thousands of connections with community members by **attending statewide protests and rallies** to stand up and fight back for our rights.



During a most unprecedented time, we have witnessed the utmost example of **pure resilience and perseverance** from you all. Together, we are fighting to protect and preserve democracy here in Connecticut. **We could not do this work without you – and we would not want to.**



**Do you know your rights?**



# & IN COALITION WITH YOU ALL.

In a time where we are faced with a barrage of attacks against our most fundamental freedoms, Connecticut's advocacy organizations and community activists created a unique opportunity for **intentional power-building and dynamic coalition work**. The ACLU of Connecticut worked closely with, and will continue to work with, several fresh and familiar organizations to defend and advance our civil rights and liberties.



## Trust Act Now! Coalition

With a clear focus on power-building strategies to encourage legislators to protect immigrants' rights, the Trust Act Now! Coalition has set up strong foundations to continue our advocacy for the next session.



## Ben & Jerry's Partnership

As a new corporate partner, Ben & Jerry's has elevated our engagement with communities, helping us fundraise for ourselves and partners, shift and build narratives, and highlight the joy in our resistance. We are grateful for Ben & Jerry's partnership this year – for the smiles and ice cream!



## Voting Rights Coalition

Several organizations and community advocates came together this legislative session to restore the funding required for implementing policies that protect and advance our voting rights, collaborating to host lobby days, workshops, and more.

## Connecticut Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA) Coalition

In its first year, the CT DVSJA Coalition gained incredible momentum this legislative session, laying the groundwork to reform the way a survivor's experiences are considered in sentencing by the state's judicial system.





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## WHAT'S INSIDE?

- Letter from Our Public Policy & Advocacy Director
- Highlights from the Legislative Session
- 2025 Litigation Recap
- Celebrating the Smart Justice Campaign
- ACLU of CT in the Community
- The Power of Coalition Work

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We comprise three nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations: the ACLU of Connecticut, a 501(c)(4) organization which does legislative and organizing advocacy work; the ACLU Foundation of Connecticut, a 501(c)(3) which does litigation and public education work; and the ACLU of Connecticut Rise PAC, a nonpartisan PAC committed to defending and expanding civil rights by building relationships, public awareness, and the political power of those directly impacted to create political change.