

2020 ANNUAL REPORT





Letter from the ACLU-CT's Executive Director and Board President

ACLU of Connecticut Friends,

The story of 2020, from this summer's protests against the police murders of Black people, to efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, to voting rights and the national presidential election, is the story of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx organizers – especially women – fighting for their and their loved ones' survival. It is the true story of America and Connecticut, and as we turn the page on 2020 and look to the future, the most pressing issue facing our country and state is the question of how those in power will respond to the clear mandate for racial justice.

In this year's annual report, you will see how the ACLU of Connecticut continued fighting for equity, justice, and liberty during a year that has tested our democracy daily. When the COVID-19 pandemic reached our state in March, all of us at the ACLU of Connecticut had to adjust. Our office became fully remote; the regular legislative session shut down. Like millions across the country, our staff began juggling work and family care, all while facing the uncertainty of the pandemic and deeply personal challenges.

Yet we knew that defending civil rights and civil liberties is most critical during these times of emergency, when our marginalized neighbors are at risk of being left behind and the systemic racism in our country is particularly endangering Black people. As you will see in these pages, our staff gave their all in 2020 and showed an unswerving commitment to protecting the rights of the most marginalized in Connecticut.

Fighting back against the systems that made this year worse than it needed to be is going to take long-term work, in 2021 and beyond. Nationally, we stand ready to hold the Biden/Harris administration and Congress accountable for making real, systemic racial justice changes, not just to undo harms of the Trump administration but to push forward. In many ways, the question of what happens at the state and local levels is even more critical, especially in places like Connecticut where it may be all too easy for even progressive elected officials to become complacent.

Throughout the past year and as we look to the future, we remain grateful for you, whose support makes it possible for all of us to keep fighting for the fair, equitable and compassionate Connecticut we want to live in.

With gratitude,


Ben Solnit
ACLU of Connecticut Board President


David McGuire
ACLU of Connecticut Executive Director



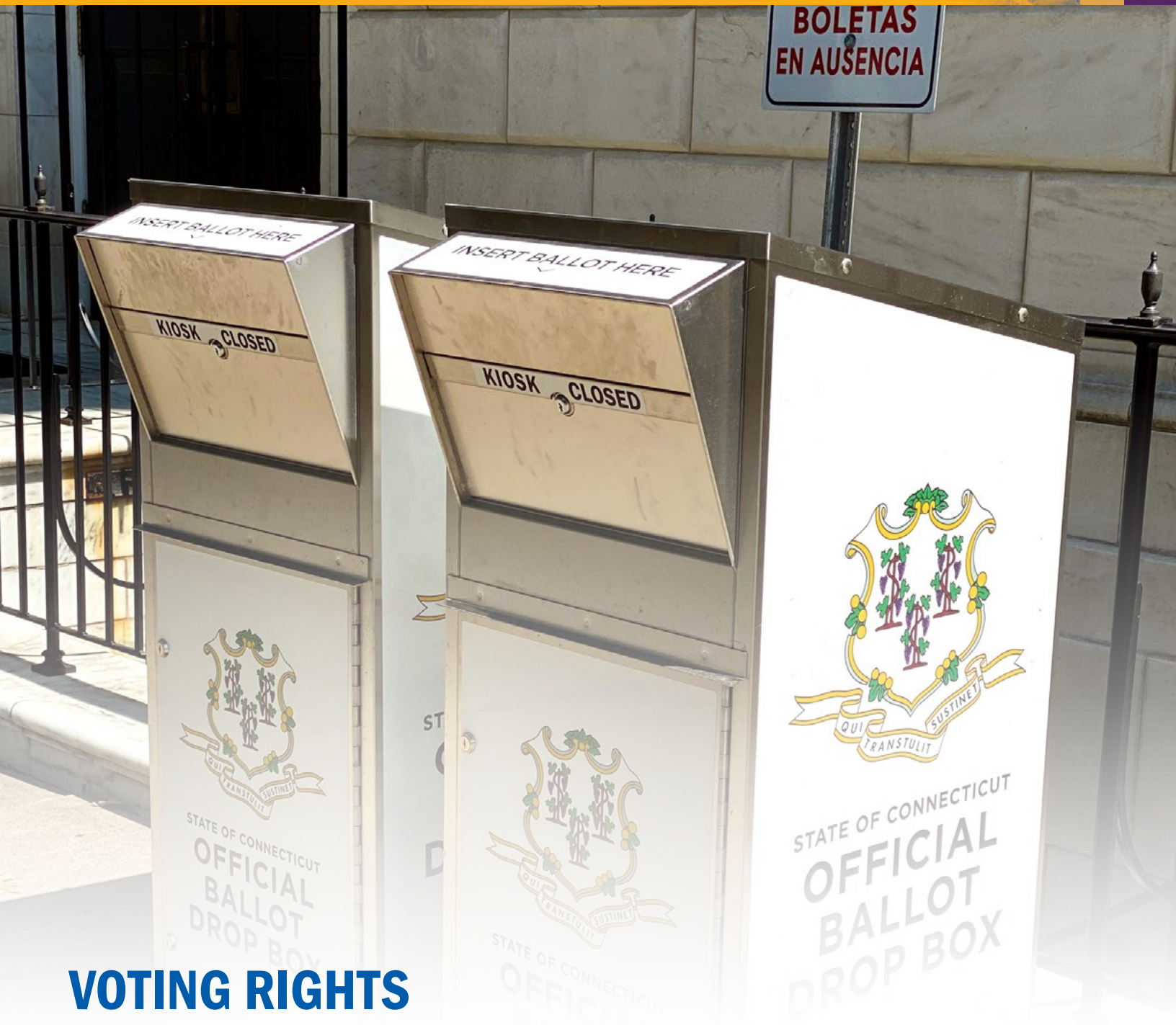


COVID-19 RESPONSE

In March, before Governor Lamont had even made an emergency declaration regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, we had already written to him demanding any government response be based in health and science, not politics, and calling for the state to specifically protect people who were incarcerated. Throughout the year, we continued that call for the Governor to protect incarcerated people from COVID-19, and we joined with more than 50 fellow advocacy organizations in calling on the Governor to protect the rights of people with disabilities, immigrants, frontline workers, low-income workers, pregnant people, uninsured people, people who are homeless or housing insecure, and many, many others. *Together with our partners, we sounded the alarm in April about the need for people to be able to vote by mail, and in May about the need for the state to cancel rent and evictions.* When Westport considered giving police drones to track people and their health symptoms without consent, we raised the [alarm](#) and put a stop to the program – thereby stopping the first of these kinds of police drone programs in the country. When contact tracing rose to the forefront, we were vigilant about letting policymakers know that they must use any such tools as opt-ins for public health only, not for surveillance overreach. And as it became clear that Connecticut’s “re”opening plan ran the risk of continuing to leave Black and Latinx people behind, we called out the inequities in Governor Lamont’s response and activated more than 700 ACLU of Connecticut supporters to tell their legislators to hold a special session for equity.

Our rights are only as strong as those of our most marginalized community members. As the state’s COVID-19 response threatened the lives and health of people who were incarcerated, we used every tool

at our disposal to call for the Governor and Department of Correction (DOC) to safely release as many people as possible to their loved ones to get them out of harm’s way, and to implement necessary public health precautions to protect anyone who remained inside. In April, our legal team filed two lawsuits – one, [CCDLA v Lamont](#), in state court, and the other, [McPherson v Lamont](#), in federal court, seeking emergency action to protect incarcerated people from COVID-19 in DOC prisons and jails. At the same time, our public policy and advocacy team, in partnership with our Smart Justice leaders, were participating in COVID-safe honkathon car protests and virtual advocacy to call for the Governor to issue a plan to release people, *while also holding bi-weekly calls for parents and other people with incarcerated loved ones to share information and support each other.* Our communications team *promoted the issue of COVID-19 in Connecticut prisons and jails into national and local press, and worked with those most harmed by the government’s response – incarcerated people and their loved ones – to elevate their voices into the public debate.* In July, our legal team reached a settlement agreement in [McPherson v Lamont](#), which set baseline health and human dignity mandates for the DOC’s approach to COVID-19 from July 20 through December 31, 2020. In October, however, we [reported](#) that the DOC has engaged in systemic patterns of non-compliance with multiple measures of the settlement agreement to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our state’s prisons. As the second wave of COVID-19 reached Connecticut’s prisons and jails in early winter, we continued calling for releases to protect people’s health and lives and successfully made the case for the state’s COVID-19 [vaccination](#) rollout to include incarcerated people in the same phase as all others in congregate situations.



VOTING RIGHTS

Connecticut has some of the most archaic voting rights laws in the country. Due to existing language in the state's constitution, ours is one of the few states in the country without some form of in-person early voting, and absentee voting is strictly limited to certain conditions. In April, as it became clear that COVID-19 would remain a factor throughout the entire election year, we joined our partners throughout the state in calling on the Governor to use his extensive authority to issue an executive order allowing all eligible voters to vote absentee in the November 3 election. Lamont issued an order allowing absentee voting for all voters for the August primary, and we continued advocating for more. In July, our legal team filed a federal lawsuit, [Connecticut NAACP v. Merrill](#), on behalf of the Connecticut Branches of the NAACP, League of Women Voters of Connecticut, and an individual Connecticut resident whose age placed her at risk of COVID-19, seeking to make absentee mail-in voting available to every eligible voter during the COVID-19 pandemic. Later that month, as the legislature convened for a special session, our public policy and advocacy team [successfully lobbied](#) for the General Assembly to pass a law allowing all Connecticut voters the option of voting absentee in the November 3, 2020 election because of COVID-19. We sprang to action to educate voters about their rights under this special law, creating a [look-up](#) tool for voters in every town to find their secure ballot drop box location, and a new ["Know Your Rights" guide](#) about [absentee voting](#). Closer to November, as the threat of white supremacy continued to particularly threaten the rights of Black voters, we advocated for town election officials to be particularly mindful of the ways in which a police presence at the polls could undermine the voting rights of people of color, and issued a new ["Know Your Rights" guide](#) about voter intimidation at the polls. *On November 3, while the United States held its breath awaiting presidential election results, Black voters in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Georgia, and across the country turned out and flexed their power for racial justice. Because of the groundwork laid by the Movement for Black Lives, nationwide, when voters cast their votes, 69% said that racism was either an important problem or the most important problem facing the United States, sending a clear mandate – in Connecticut and across the country – for elected officials to prioritize racial justice.*

POLICING

This year began as one of the deadliest for killings by police in Connecticut in recent history, with five people dying at the hands of police in our state in the first six months of 2020 alone. And then our state, like every other across the country, became part of this summer's uprising for Black lives.

Led largely by Black youth, thousands of people protested in towns across Connecticut this summer to call for an end to police violence and racism in policing and for a beginning of a world that values Black lives. The demands from Black and Latinx organizers in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Waterbury, and from other towns across the state made clear that people want an end to policing as we know it, *not one or two small things*, and that core to those demands was an expectation for budgets that prioritize community needs, not policing.

At the same time, the ACLU of Connecticut released "[Bargained Away: How Local and State Governments in Connecticut Have Bargained Away Police Accountability](#)," a report focused on how pieces of municipal and state police contracts shield police employees from meaningful discipline when they harm people, lock towns into guaranteed year-over-year investments in policing, prevent transparency and accountability for police overall, and at times conflict with state

laws. The report also recommended actions for municipal and state policymakers, including for the state legislature to end a state police contract provision that conflicted with freedom of information laws.

As the legislature came in for a special short summer session in July, the message from people across our state was clear: enough was enough. Faced with disinformation and thinly veiled aggression spread by police unions, the ACLU of Connecticut and advocates together pushed the legislature to take action for meaningful police accountability. More than 1,200 ACLU of Connecticut supporters emailed their legislators to tell them to act. As a result of this advocacy and a courageous effort from the legislature's Black and Puerto Rican caucus, the legislature passed a first step bill that includes: 1) ending stop-and-frisk, the unconstitutional practice that feeds on and perpetuates systemic racism in policing; 2) ensuring police union contracts can no longer supersede open records laws; 3) expanding and centralizing statewide collection of police use of force information; 4) creating an office of Inspector General to investigate and prosecute police who harm and kill Connecticut residents; and 5) requiring police officers to report excessive use of force used by a fellow officer.

In October, as people across the state began looking to the future, we released unprecedented public opinion [polling](#) showing strong support among voters in Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford for reallocating money from policing to instead support public education, health, and other valued public services. The research is the first polling regarding policing in Connecticut in which a majority of respondents were voters of color – the people most affected by decisions about policing itself. Revealingly, more than half of respondents stated they either personally knew someone or were themselves harassed or harmed by police.

Ending police violence will not be solved by any one law, but the law passed by the legislature this year is a first step. As the law faces misinformation, lawsuits, and political attacks from police unions in coordination with the legislature's GOP caucus, we know that the work to defend progress and to make more must continue. The ACLU of Connecticut is committed to ending police violence and racism in policing, and to building a better future where our communities are able to invest in the things that make them strong and safe instead of over-spending on policing.

INVEST IN PEOPLE. NOT POLICING.



The State Police did not respond to an FOI request for a copy of their contract. But under the most recent contract available online (2018), State **POLICE** in Connecticut are given **\$18** for every eight hours worked, which is purportedly for a meal



For that price, Connecticut could provide around **7** elementary school children with school lunch.

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INVEST IN PEOPLE. NOT POLICING.



In 2014, under Bridgeport's police contract, the minimum Bridgeport **POLICE** base salary was **\$50,791**, with an additional **\$976.75** uniform stipend.



In 2014, under Bridgeport's teacher contract, the minimum Bridgeport **TEACHERS** salary was **\$42,428**

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INVEST IN PEOPLE. NOT POLICING.



Under Hartford's police contract, the minimum base salary for a **POLICE** officer is **\$1,037 per week**.



In Hartford County, **105,050** people are food insecure, including **29,000+ CHILDREN**. For the cost of one week of minimum police base salary, Hartford could fund **302** meals for people who are food insecure.

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WHAT'S NEXT

Racial Justice: Racial justice remains a key priority for the ACLU of Connecticut going into 2021, and every public official, at every level of government, has a clear responsibility to prioritize policies that particularly value Black lives. Connecticut has a new legislature coming into session in January 2021, and many towns and cities have police union contracts and budgets up for debate this year. We will continue demanding elected officials address systemic racism in the criminal legal system: in a state that is 80% white, our prisons and jails are 70% Black and Latinx, and Northern Correctional Institution, our state's only supermax, has even greater disparities at 84.6%. While state and local governments have chronically underinvested in Black and Latinx people, they have invested billions into policing and incarceration. *We're ready to roll up our sleeves and work harder than ever.*

Fair Housing: In [Open Communities Alliance v. Carson](#), we and our partners sued the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on behalf of Open Communities Alliance to invalidate a new HUD regulation that would substantially roll back federal housing rights laws.

Disability Rights: In [Watley v. Katz](#), we asked the federal courts to recognize that if the Department of Children and Families violates a parent's rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act, those parents have a right to sue in federal court. Though federal court dismissed the case in December 2019, on January 22, 2020, we appealed the district court's decision to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

LGBTQ Rights and Gender Justice: In [Soule et al. v. Association of School et al.](#), we are defending the rights of two transgender student athletes, Andraya Yearwood and Terry Miller, to participate in school sports according to their gender identity. We were also proud to file a friend of the court brief with women's rights organizations to argue for student athletes' Title IX and First Amendment rights in [Radwan v. University of Connecticut Board of Trustees et al.](#), a case in which UConn held a women's soccer player to a harmful double standard based on stereotypes about what is "ladylike" behavior.

Smart Justice: The 2021 legislative session will include unfinished business from 2020, as well as new proposals. Smart Justice will be fighting for the strongest "Clean Slate" possible at the legislature so more people and their families have a fair chance at thriving. We will push for a prosecutorial accountability law to hold State's Attorney's to data-driven performance evaluations, reduce their term length from eight years to four, and create more independence for the agency tasked with overseeing them. And we will once again seek legislation to end employment discrimination against people who are living with a criminal record.

Voting Rights: We will be pushing for Connecticut's voting laws to join the 21st century by advocating for the legislature to pass bills that would put before voters the questions of allowing absentee voting and early voting.

Decarceration, Criminal Legal Reform & Rights of Incarcerated People: As COVID-19 remains a threat to people who are incarcerated, we will continue to advocate for the Governor to use his considerable authority to safely release people to their loved ones, and for Connecticut's vaccine rollout plan to include incarcerated people equitably and ethically. This year, as the state considers closing more prisons, we will also call for the closure of Northern Correctional Institution – Connecticut's notoriously cruel, ineffective, and expensive supermax – and for the state to invest the money it saves through that closure into programming to support the people who have been most harmed by mass incarceration. At the legislature, we will be supporting efforts to create mandatory releases and oversight of the Department of Correction during any future pandemics; to provide greater flexibility in releasing people with critical medical conditions regardless of whether there is a pandemic; to end prison gerrymandering; and to ensure any marijuana legalization efforts reinvest in communities most harmed by the War on Drugs through equity in access, financial investment in those communities, and erasing or overturning people's marijuana-related convictions.

Policing: As police unions and other policing political groups attempt to undermine Connecticut's new police accountability law, we will hold agencies and officials accountable in upholding and enforcing it and push for an additional fix to ensure that law's new special prosecutor for police violence and misconduct (the Inspector General) is truly independent from the people they are supposed to investigate. *This year, we are also dedicating resources to building power in impacted communities by moving money from policing into healthcare, local public education, jobs, infrastructure, and other valued public services.*

Remembering Ciara Rosati: Ciara Rosati, 28, was a proud mother, student, and most recently a fierce activist. She joined the Smart Justice team in January 2020 and instantly fit in, almost like she had been a part of the team from the beginning. Right before COVID-19 brought the legislative session to a halt, Ciara stepped into her leadership and testified on March 9, 2020 during the Judiciary Public Hearing about the importance of an inclusive Clean Slate Bill and the impact of receiving a second chance in life. While her moving testimony spoke to the many obstacles she faced in life, her clear and unwavering desire to do right for herself and her 18-month-old son Brycen was heard loud and clear. Ciara's bright light will be deeply missed by the Smart Justice Leaders and the ACLU CT staff.

STAFF LISTING

STAFF

Dan Barrett, Legal Director
 Elana Bildner, Staff Attorney
 Laura Brownstein, Development Director
 Anderson Curtis, Field Organizer
 Téylor Davis, Donor Relations Associate
 Claudine Fox, Campaign Manager
 Meghan Holden, Communications Director
 Gus Marks-Hamilton, Smart Justice Field Organizer
 David McGuire, Executive Director
 Melvin Medina, Public Policy and Advocacy Director
 Kelly Moore, Policy Counsel
 Rafael Rosario, Communications Associate
 Rachel Sexton, Finance and Operations Director
 Grace Sinnott, Paralegal
 Aubrie Smith, Talent and Operations Manager

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*Denotes executive committee member

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Tracie Bernardi	Curtis Hudson	Ciara Rosati
Alexandra Brown	Eric Mejia	Manuel Sandoval
Timothy Coble	Marquita Reale	Tyran Sampson
Luis Delgado	Terri Ricks	Sean Sellars
Ramón Garcia	Donald Rivers	Brian Sullivan
Shelby Henderson	Will Roberts	

INTERNS

Devon Fray
 Madison Mandell
 Sarah Nathan
 Dacia Walcott

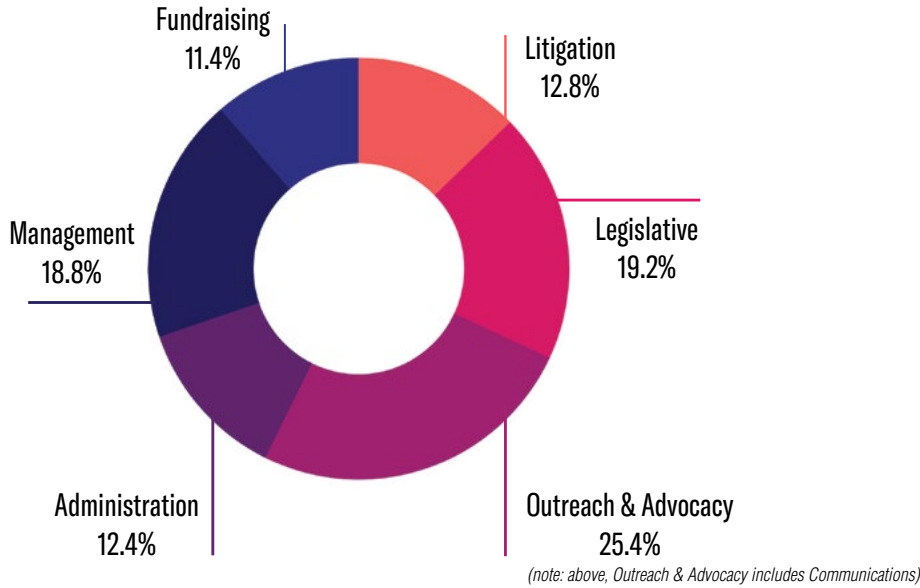
COOPERATING ATTORNEYS

Hope Metcalf
 Marisol Orihuela
 Miriam Gohara
 David Rosen
 JR Sastre



Financial Information: April 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020

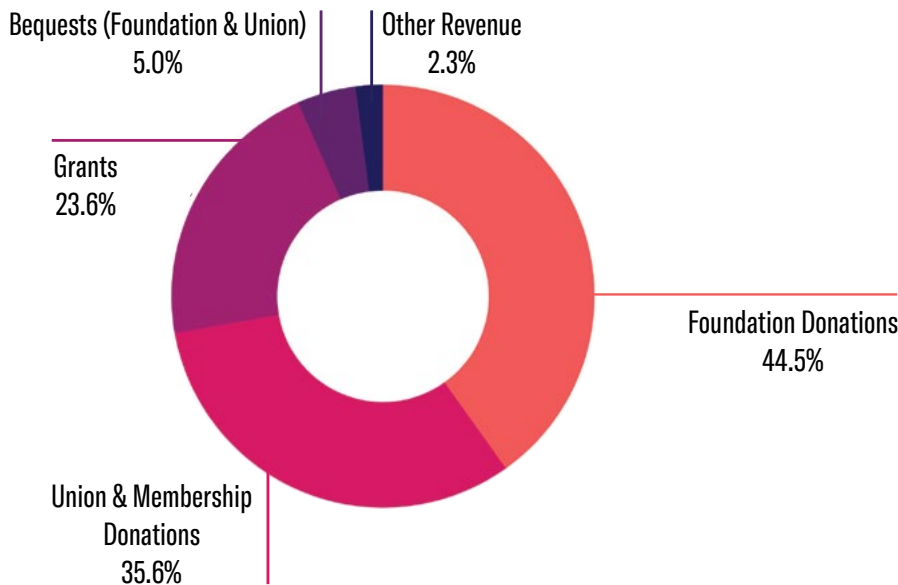
The ACLU-CT is comprised of two entities: the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut and the ACLU Foundation of Connecticut. Contributions to the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut support advocacy and lobbying on civil liberties issues and are not tax deductible. Contributions to the ACLU Foundation of Connecticut support our litigation, outreach work, and other non-lobbying efforts; donations to the Foundation are tax-deductible.



Expenses (Foundation & Union)

Litigation: \$218,689
 Legislative: \$328,873
 Outreach & Advocacy: \$434,903
 Administration: \$213,375
 Management: \$323,060
 Fundraising: \$195,203

Total Expenses: \$1,714,103



Support and Revenue (Foundation & Union)

Foundation Donations: \$1,066,431
 Union & Membership Donations: \$852,38
 Grants: \$564,200
 Bequests (Foundation & Union): \$119,219
 Other Revenue: \$55,314
 Investment Loss: -\$263,432

Total Support : \$2,394,113



FEBRUARY

- Smart Justice advocates for [Clean Slate](#) at the legislature.
- ACLU-CT joined legal team to defend trans student athletes' rights in [Soule v CIAC](#).



APRIL

- In state court, ACLU-CT files emergency lawsuit seeking releases & protections from COVID for incarcerated people, [CCDLA v Lamont](#).
- In federal court, ACLU-CT files emergency lawsuit seeking releases & protections from COVID for incarcerated people, [McPherson v Lamont](#).
- After ACLU-CT advocacy, the Westport police department backs down from its plan to use an invasive drone monitoring program to track people's health symptoms without consent.

JUNE

- ACLU-CT activates supporters to call for a [special legislative session for Black and Latinx lives](#).
- After more than one year of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, the ACLU-CT released a statewide study of police union contracts, "[Bargained Away: How Local and State Governments in Connecticut Have Bargained Away Police Accountability](#)."



SEPTEMBER

- ACLU-CT pays tribute to [U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#) in a vigil at the CT Supreme Court.
- Smart Justice testifies at the Criminal Justice Commission to tell prosecutors to hold [police accountable](#) and to prioritize decarceration.

NOVEMBER

- Connecticut voters turned out in record numbers, and the ACLU-CT reminded elected officials that [they must follow the will of the people by demanding racial justice](#).
- From [August to November](#), the ACLU-CT launched a comprehensive public education push to help people know their rights when voting in Connecticut.



JANUARY

- Smart Justice survey puts Chief State's Attorney candidates on the record about their views on [decarceration & racial justice](#).
- Smart Justice hosted "[March for Liberation](#)" to the capitol.



MARCH

- March 8: first two confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the state.
- March 11: ACLU-CT sends its first letter to Governor Lamont raising concerns about COVID-19 threat to incarcerated people.

MAY

- Led by Black youth, thousands of CT residents join protests calling for CT to [value Black lives](#), end police violence, and reallocate money from policing.
- Led by mutual aid and other community groups, the ACLU-CT joins a letter calling for Gov. Lamont to cancel rent and evictions during the pandemic.



JULY

- Smart Justice held rallies outside of the capitol to [remind legislators to remember incarcerated people during the special session](#).
- Together, the ACLU-CT and ACLU Voting Rights Project filed a federal lawsuit against the state on behalf of our clients, the CT NAACP, League of Women Voters CT, and an individual CT resident seeking to allow absentee voting as an option for all voters during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [Police accountability bill passes](#) after advocacy from ACLU-CT and many others.
- Settlement reached in the federal lawsuit [McPherson v Lamont](#).
- After advocacy from ACLU-CT and others, [the legislature passes bill allowing absentee voting for all during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

OCTOBER

- ACLU-CT raises the alarm to the court regarding Department of Correction violations of the settlement in [McPherson v Lamont](#).
- Together with the national ACLU and our partners, we sued the Trump Administration's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) over its attempt to gut fair housing protections under the [Fair Housing Act](#).
- ACLU-CT released a poll, the first on policing issues in CT in which a majority of respondents were Black or Latinx, showing [CT voters in three key cities support reallocating money from policing into other public services](#).



DECEMBER

- While still calling for releases of incarcerated people to protect them from COVID-19, the ACLU of CT advocated for Gov. Lamont to include incarcerated people in the [same vaccine phase as all others in congregate living situations](#).
- Filed a friend of the court brief siding with [UConn player fighting sex discrimination](#).
- Went to federal court to appeal a lower court's decision in [Watley v Katz](#), fighting for two CT parents' rights to sue in federal court if their rights are violated under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

2020 IN REVIEW