

## Couples Celebrate As State Supreme Court Recognizes Same-Sex Marriages

In a landmark decision, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled October 10th that barring same-sex couples from marriage violates that state's constitution. The ACLU-CT, who served as co-counsel on the case, believes the decision helps fulfill our state's promise to treat all of its citizens equally under the law.

The ACLU-CT had the opportunity to speak with Barbara and Robin Levine-Ritterman one of the eight plaintiff couples in the case.

**ACLU:** Can you give us a little background on your lives together before the case?

**Barbara:** 17 years ago we had what we call a commitment ceremony officiated by a rabbi, where we pronounced our intention to stay together for the rest of our lives. It was a [recognized] legal wedding in the eyes of the Jewish faith, but we didn't feel like we could use the word married.

**Robin:** It was surprising to us that once we did that, it changed how our families related to us. They accepted us as a family. A couple years after that we had our two kids.

**Barbara:** Except that we had to create lots of separate legal documents to protect each other and establish legal connections, including co-guardianship and second parent adoption when that became legal.

**ACLU:** While this case was going on, civil unions became legal in CT; did you get one?

**Barbara:** Something that affected us a lot in 2004 was when I was diagnosed with cancer. I was suddenly confronted with the possibility that maybe I wasn't going to grow up with the kids; maybe I wouldn't be able to provide for the family. We had already agreed to be plaintiffs in the case when I found out, but when civil unions came along we decided it would offer some protections, especially in the health care arena, so we got one.

After we got the civil union, I had to go back to the hospital. They wanted to update my information and asked me my marital status. I thought, 'This is great, civil unions have been a law for 18 months now,' so I said, "Civil union".

The woman at the hospital responded, "Oh I don't have a place for that in my computer; I'll put you down as single." I understood then that if a major hospital hadn't made the changes to their computers or trained their staff, then in reality, it was not an equal status to marriage.

**ACLU:** What has the Supreme Court's decision meant to your family?

**Barbara:** For our children it's a way their parents can have what everyone else's parents have, the love can be recognized. For me it's also about all of those kids who are trying to figure out if they are gay or straight, some of



Barbara and Robin Levine-Ritterman

whose parents have come to us and said this means so much.

**Robin:** And that they feel so different about their place in the world. There's something that's really wonderful about feeling equal to the rest of the world.

**Barbara:** We feel quite blessed to live in Connecticut.

**Robin:** Yes, and thank you to the ACLU of Connecticut, this was really a team effort. I never would have thought 10 years ago that this day would come, so I am really hopeful its going to change nationally, but I'm thrilled especially for our children.

To listen to a podcast of the interview visit: [www.acluct.org/aboutus/pressroom/celebrating-thefirstdayofsa](http://www.acluct.org/aboutus/pressroom/celebrating-thefirstdayofsa).



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## The Road Ahead

DON NOEL, Chair



Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend: *The people, recovering their true sight, restore their government to its true principles....we shall have an opportunity of winning back the principles we have lost.*

It's worth remembering that the installation of a new president is an opportunity. Barack Obama obviously shares many of the concerns of ACLU members; yet we cannot become complacent. Every political leader is tempted to compromise to win wider legislative support. Through lobbying, litigation and public education, we are working for change around the country and here in Connecticut.

Throughout this newsletter you will read some of the challenges we are mounting and we hope you will also find a way to get involved.

In 2009, we will commemorate the 60th year of the Connecticut affiliate of the ACLU. We have also moved offices, providing a modest boost to our bottom line. It is a proud heritage that we inherit. Even in a tough year economically – especially in a tough year – we need your continued and, we hope, expanded support.

I am reminded of another quotation attributed to Jefferson: *The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.*

### Civil Liberties Beacon Winter 2009

Membership in the ACLU of Connecticut includes a subscription to **Civil Liberties Beacon**. For Membership information, visit our website at [www.acluct.org](http://www.acluct.org) or contact us at 860-523-9146 ext. 214.

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## Legal Briefs

### ACLU Asks Court to Block Health Care Denial Rule

A rule pushed through by the Bush Administration on its way out that allows health care workers and facilities to refuse to provide services, information, and counseling even in emergency situations is being challenged by the ACLU in federal court. The ACLU is representing the National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association (NFPRA), a family planning provider membership organization, and one of its Connecticut members - the Fair Haven Community Health Clinic, Inc. The health care denial rule upsets the careful

balance already in place under federal law between individual religious liberty and access to reproductive health care and undermines the ability of millions of women and men in the United States to access essential family planning and reproductive health care services. "Connecticut understands the importance of reproductive health care in our lives. That's why we've passed laws requiring insurance coverage of contraception and ensuring access to emergency contraception for sexual assault survivors," said Andrew Schneider, Executive Director of the ACLU of Connecticut. "We're concerned that the Bush rule severely curtails our efforts to protect the health and well-being of people in our state and hope the court blocks its enforcement."

### UN Torture Authority Urged to Investigate Force-feeding of Connecticut Inmate

In October, the American Civil Liberties Union submitted an Urgent Appeal to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture to review the state's treatment of William Coleman. The letter urges the U.N. to advise the government to stop force-feeding him and immediately allow an independent health professional to monitor Coleman's medical condition. Coleman has been on a hunger strike for over 16 months as a means of political protest.

Force-feeding is a process universally considered to be a form of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment and, in some circumstances, could even

amount to torture, in violation of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which the U.S. ratified in



William Coleman

1994. It is also considered unethical by the World Medical Association of which the American Medical Association is a member.

The ACLU's lawsuit against the Connecticut Department of Correction, which argues that force-feeding Coleman violates his right to refuse medical treatment and his First Amendment right to political protest, goes to trial on January 29th in Hartford Superior Court.

**"Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must undergo the fatigue of supporting it."**

— Thomas Paine

Your tax-deductible contribution directly funds litigation, public education, and outreach in this state to keep all in Connecticut safe and free.

Here is my tax-deductible gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ toward the work of the ACLU Foundation of Connecticut.

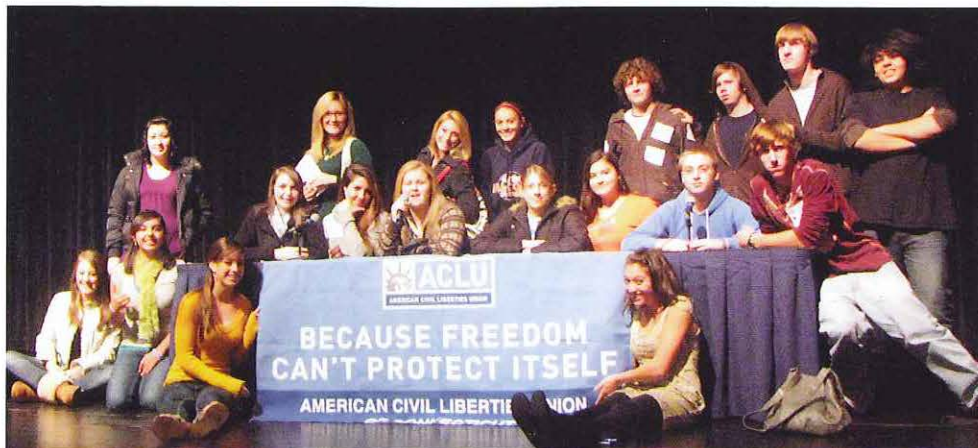
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Students from Avon High School (above) were among the many students from around the state who participated in the 11th annual First Amendment High School Conference.

## First Amendment High School Conference

Most people know the ACLU is working to protect freedom in the courtroom, but the ACLU-CT is also expanding our outreach to educators to help students understand their basic civil liberties.

This fall the ACLU-CT organized the 11th Annual First Amendment High School Conference, which focused on students' freedom of association inside and outside of school. Students had an opportunity to discuss First

Amendment issues with their peers from other schools, learn from expert panelists, and analyze how these issues touch their lives.

The Center for First Amendment Rights established and sponsored this annual conference for ten years until CFAR and the ACLU-CT merged last summer. CFAR co-Founder Ethel Sorokin said, "I was excited to see the ACLU carrying on the banner of engaging young people and helping them understand our democracy. It was very pleasing to simply sit back and enjoy a fabulous program and I look forward to seeing how the ACLU continues to carry out the legacy of the Center for First Amendment Rights."

To continue CFAR's work, the ACLU-CT will sponsor an essay contest on First Amendment Rights for high school students. The writer of the winning essay will be awarded \$1,000. Official submission forms and criteria will be available on-line by Feb 2, with essays due to the ACLU of Connecticut by April 1, 2009.

To receive e-mail updates on ACLU-CT education resources and events e-mail [pdoyle@acluct.org](mailto:pdoyle@acluct.org).

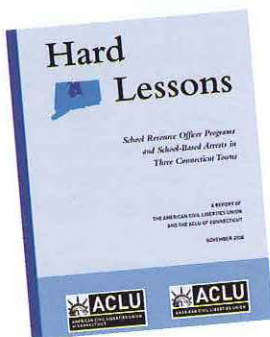
## ACLU Report Reveals Arrests at Hartford Area Schools on Rise

On November 17th, the ACLU released a report entitled "Hard Lessons: School Resource Officer Programs and School-Based Arrests in Three Connecticut Towns," which showed that police arrests of students at Hartford area schools are on the rise. The report also shows how the use by school districts of school resource officers who are not adequately trained and whose objectives are not clearly defined, lead to criminalizing students rather than educating them.

Students in Hartford, East Hartford and West Hartford are being arrested at school at very young ages. During the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years, 86 primary grade students were arrested at school in Hartford. A majority of those arrested were seventh or eighth graders, but 25 were in grades four through six and 13 were in grade three or below.

"Research shows that the earlier children are exposed to the criminal justice system, the more likely they are to commit crimes later in life," said Jamie Dycus, Staff Attorney with the ACLU Racial Justice Program.

"Relying primarily on arrests rather than other forms of behavioral intervention cements an unfortunate cycle of criminalization which, in the end, doesn't benefit our kids and doesn't benefit our communities."



The ACLU released a second report entitled "Dignity Denied: The Effect of 'Zero Tolerance' Policies on Students' Human Rights" which analyzes the impact on the human rights of students in the New Haven Unified School District of involving the criminal justice system in school discipline policies.

Zero-tolerance policies, which are the focus of this report, take reasonable discretion away from teachers and administrators.

The ACLU-CT is using the reports to work with school boards and administrators to develop programs and policies that are effective in keeping students safe while upholding their rights.

To view a copy of the reports visit: [www.acluct.org/aboutus/pressroom/aclu-reportrevealsarrestsat.htm](http://www.acluct.org/aboutus/pressroom/aclu-reportrevealsarrestsat.htm).

## Volunteer Opportunities

With the recent growth of our staff, and the corresponding expansion of our programs, there are now more opportunities than ever to volunteer. Here's just a couple of ways you can use your skills to defend civil liberties.

> Help us with outreach by joining our staff and chapter members in tabling at local community events. Expand our outreach by identifying additional events for us to table at in your community or elsewhere in the state.

> Assist in the planning, coordination and logistics of the ACLU-CT 60th Anniversary Benefit Gala and CFAR First Amendment Symposium (both held in May) and at other events throughout the year.

> Track radio/television/print stories and commentary on the ACLU and civil liberties issues. Assist in other media relations activities with staff.

> Become an in-person or e-advocate to help defend civil liberties.

If you are interested in volunteering with the ACLU-CT, e-mail [info@acluct.org](mailto:info@acluct.org).

## Snapshots of Banned Books Week 2008



**David Hajdu**, author of "The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How It Changed America" kicked off the ACLU-CT's and the Connecticut Library Association's co-sponsored Banned Books Week 2008 with a talk about the nationwide censorship and burning of comic books in the 1940s and 1950s.



**The Teague McDonald Band** help the ACLU to mark Banned Books Week by performing music that has been censored over the last 50 years, including hits by Jefferson Airplane, the Beatles, Bob Dylan and more, to an enthusiastic crowd at Black Eyed Sally's in Hartford.

## ACLU-CT Developing Statewide Grassroots Network Through Creation of Local Chapters

The ACLU currently has 7 chapters across Connecticut, an important part of our growing grassroots network. We welcome new chapters in New Haven County, University of Connecticut at Storrs, and Manchester Community College. Chapters meet regularly to discuss pressing civil liberties issues, hold events to foster awareness of civil liberties and raise the profile of our organization in their area, and participate in legislative advocacy. Chapters sponsor speakers, forums, debates, film screenings, and help with ACLU-CT programs.

Here is a listing of chapters. If you are interested in forming a chapter or would like information about activities e-mail [lfernand@acluct.org](mailto:lfernand@acluct.org).

### ACLU-CT Chapters

#### New Haven Chapter

#### Fairfield Chapter

Sun, Feb 22, 3p.m.  
Wilton Public Library

#### Northeast Chapter

**Northwest Chapter**  
Feb 26, 7p.m. Swift House, Kent  
Inaugural Meeting!

### ACLU-CT Student Chapters

#### Yale Chapter

#### UCONN Chapter

#### Manchester Community College

## ACLU Pleased Voters Said No to Calling a Constitutional Convention

The American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut joined a coalition of over 60 organizations throughout the state in a successful effort to persuade voters to reject a constitutional convention on the November ballot. A constitutional convention would have become a vehicle for a variety of anti-civil liberties proposals. The ACLU believes the Constitution should only be amended in extraordinary circumstances and not tinkered with unnecessarily and that's why we favor the alternative, more cumbersome yet deliberative process to amend the



**Andrew Schneider** discusses the Constitutional Convention ballot measure on WNPR's *Where We Live*

Constitution in which a proposed amendment either has to win a three-fourths majority of the legislature or win a simple majority in two successive legislatures before going to the statewide electorate for approval.

**Including the ACLU in your will is worth more than words can convey.  
In fact, today it's worth up to \$10,000.**



Thanks to the generosity of the Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust, naming the ACLU Foundation in your will or trust qualifies us to receive up to a \$10,000 matching donation today. It's that simple. So if you're concerned about defending our liberties now and in the future, if you have the will, we have the way.

To learn more, visit [www.aclu.org/legacychallenge](http://www.aclu.org/legacychallenge) or call toll-free 877-422-5888.