



Carrying On: Re-Introducing the ACLU

Like many of you, staff at the ACLU of North Carolina filled October with election-related mail, texts, and calls. Leading up to the election, we worked hard to ensure that voters were able to access the ballot box. We developed and shared resources with critical information for voters to ensure they could make informed decisions and were energized as they headed to the polls. We stated and honored our commitment to

safeguarding the election from the first vote cast through inauguration. As we write this, we know other changes might be coming down the pike on the other side of the election, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to defend your civil rights and liberties.

The goal of realizing the promise of the U.S. Constitution for all has been the battle cry of the ACLU

since its inception. This struggle is nonpartisan and requires us to all hold our government and its representatives accountable for their stated commitments to our collective future. We are driven by the fact that the ideals of democracy, justice, and equity are worth defending. We approach this work with hope and determination while also balancing discipline and rest as we seek long-term sustainability and change.

For those of you who may be newer supporters of our work or who have joined us through our electoral efforts, please allow us to re-introduce ourselves:

continued on page 7

IN THIS ISSUE

Message from the Executive Director Page 2

Reflecting on this Election Season Page 3

Immigrant Justice Page 4

Community Engagement at the ACLU-NC Page 5

Hurricane Helene Page 5

The Future Echoes Page 6

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From the Executive Director



Looking Back to Forge Forward

With this newsletter, our hope is to both reintroduce ourselves in the wake of an earth-shattering election and recap our efforts to protect democracy in North Carolina. A difficult truth I've learned while doing this work is that a cornerstone of American democracy is the struggle for its achievement and protection. All of us are called to be active participants in demanding, striving for, and creating a North Carolina that upholds rights for all.

The intensity of challenges we live through during election years can feel insurmountable—it often brings out the worst of polarization, misinformation, suspicion, and fatigue. Especially this year, with Hurricane Helene's devastation of western North Carolina as a part of the backdrop, it's understandable to feel overwhelmed and uncertain about the path forward.

But we have found consequential reasons to hope amidst the exhaustion, rage, frustration, and destruction. We have seen robust community engagement, especially from our youth at events like CarolinaDaze, which you will read more about in this issue. We united with the community on efforts to enhance voter engagement through canvassing and text banking efforts. We have seen an outpouring of support and have benefitted from communal wisdom and generosity in attending to those who were most impacted by Helene's destruction.

It's easy to see how fraught periods can bring out the worst, but they also bring out the best—determined movements for change, care of one another, and organized efforts to ensure that the needs of neighbors in crisis are met.

As we look forward to 2025, I'm taking that with me and I hope you will too. In partnership with you, we will continue to advocate for state and local policies that protect North Carolinians from government overreach and prevent the erosion of civil liberties. The causes we fight for together with every ounce of conviction—to protect reproductive freedom; defend immigrants' rights; seek criminal legal reform; fight for LGBTQ equality; protect voting rights; and center racial justice—are righteous. Our work echoes forward.

Chantal Stevens
Executive Director
ACLU of North Carolina



Reflecting on this Election Season

During election years, we are keenly aware that fair, accessible, and informed voting is the cornerstone of democracy – yet, and this year was no exception, the right to vote is under constant threat. Most of our team's work during the second half of the year has been devoted to preparing for the election season. Through our integrated advocacy approach, each department has contributed to educating voters about their rights and informing them of the issues at stake. On our “Down the Ballot” site, we break down some of the elected offices people may see on their ballots to encourage understanding of how these officials can wield power to protect (or undermine) civil liberties and civil rights. Beyond elections season, this site will help community members consistently keep a finger on the pulse of who is making decisions that impact our lives, from leaders on school boards to Senators and Court Justices. We developed a legislative scorecard to track how representatives have voted on key civil rights issues, including reproductive freedom, trans rights, and encouraging informed votes. During October, we directed more people to these resources and many others in a series of “Get Out the Vote” events, where our volunteers engaged in text banking, phone calls, and canvassing to ensure voters

knew how to access the ballot box. Our Legal team has taken on several projects related to election protection, including centering canvasser rights advocacy by developing materials to educate canvassers, police, and property managers about the First Amendment right to door-knock. The team drafted and sent “shape up” letters to two police departments and a property manager to ensure they are protecting these rights. Legal and Policy staff also dedicated dozens of hours to responding to questions and concerns on the statewide election protection hotline and monitoring the county canvasses required for certification of election results. We have spent the days and weeks after the election assessing the efficacy of our outreach work and are already thinking ahead to future elections. We maintain our commitment to defending and expanding voting rights in coalition with partner organizations across the state. You can look at our “Down the Ballot” resource site and Legislative Scorecard using the QR codes to the right. ■



Down the ballot



Legislative scorecard

Immigrant Justice: Defending All North Carolinians



Widespread misinformation relying on racist stereotypes has especially targeted Latine immigrants, limiting their access to resources and making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Our political terrain is marked by narratives that call for harsher policies, more law enforcement and border control, and increased incarceration of people who were not born in the United States. Widespread misinformation relying on racist stereotypes has especially criminalized Latine immigrants, limiting to their access to resources, and made them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Unfortunately, these efforts extend to North Carolina, where we have recently witnessed a successful effort to amend the state’s constitution to state that only citizens may vote in elections—which was already the law in North Carolina—and to specifically remove language stating that naturalized citizens may vote. This amendment is entirely unnecessary and does not change the law but does have the potential to confuse naturalized citizens about their rights to vote. It contributes to a culture of fearmongering and stigmatization. Another effort to make North Carolina less safe and welcoming for immigrants is HB10—readers of past newsletters may remember that this legislation will require all 100 sheriffs in the state to notify ICE if they are unable to determine the legal status of a person charged (not convicted) with certain offenses. HB10 would compel sheriffs to honor ICE requests to detain individuals suspected of being in the country illegally for up to 48 hours.

Despite the local and national anti-immigrant push, a recent survey conducted by the ACLU revealed that in battleground states, voters want comprehensive solutions that address the root causes of issues surrounding immigration and are not making more calls for punishment. Overall, voters want policies that open pathways to citizenship and offer help to keep families together rather than investing their resources in service of scare tactics. We at the ACLU of NC know that representing the diverse experiences of immigrants honestly and compassionately will help buttress efforts to advocate for justice for all communities. In this vein, we have captured the Faces of North Carolina, which highlights the stories of immigrants and their families living in our state (please check out this powerful series on our YouTube Channel). In the face of anti-immigrant political rhetoric, we recognize that immigrants play a crucial role in the vitality of our community. ■

Community Engagement at the ACLU-NC

The second half of the year was marked by diverse and successful efforts to connect with community members. On July 24th, the ACLU of NC hosted a sold-out screening of *Sing Sing* at Alamo Drafthouse in Raleigh. The film is based on a real-life theater program inside New York’s *Sing Sing* Correctional Facility and features an ensemble cast of professional actors and formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in the actual program. About 65 people attended and engaged in conversation about how the film touches on several pressing concerns surrounding our criminal legal and carceral systems. We were also proud to be a co-sponsor at NC Common Cause’s music and arts festival, CarolinaDaze, an electrifying event powered by young North Carolinians in

support of voter education and empowerment. It was held at Raleigh’s Redhat Amphitheater on Saturday, September 14th. As an extension of our strategic focus to connect with young people across North Carolina, we were excited to provide resources that educated and informed voters on their rights and opportunities for engagement. We also had the privilege of being part of our national ACLU’s “Know Your Rights” Bus Tour. The Bus Tour was produced by the ACLU with the goal to empower voters in knowing their rights. We were alongside our national colleagues as they presented a Know! Your! Rights! Trivia game with drag performer Kornbread Jeté during the festival. The evening was full of inspirational messages from community partners and activists about the importance of voting and concluded with

continued on page 6

Hurricane Helene Resource Guide

The past two months have been very tough for North Carolina. Since Hurricane Helene wreaked havoc and destruction across our state, our hearts and minds have been with those most impacted. Western North Carolina is reeling from the devastating impacts of this storm. As we know from other disasters, once media attention wanes, so do intervention efforts to rebuild and accommodate the long-term needs of those who lost family members and friends and/or were displaced by the storm. Anticipating the need for long-term support, our Director of Organizing spearheaded the development of a publicly accessible resource guide that tracks ways to both give and receive support. While the guide is no longer being updated with immediate resources for those affected as recovery efforts

move into the long term, you can still access the guide by scanning the QR code to find places to donate. In addition to mobilizing resources, we have been monitoring the affected region for potential civil rights

violations and worked hard to ensure that impacted people can vote. ■



Community Engagement

continued from page 5



an unforgettable dance party featuring local musicians and nationally acclaimed artists Janelle Monáe, Moses Sumney, and Lute. In addition to the stop in Raleigh, NC, the Bus Tour visited Savannah, GA, Athens, GA and Philadelphia, PA to highlight the importance of voting for offices across the ballot from local to national races.

In another example of fun community engagement, we tabled at La Fiesta del Pueblo, the largest and most diverse celebration of Latin American culture in the Research Triangle. There was live music, dance performances, vendors, food trucks (best tacos ever), and all kinds of activities for everyone to enjoy. In celebration of the festival's 30th year, we were proud to join community partners to table and share the importance of voting with bilingual Know Your Rights and voter information materials.

As important as in-person engagement, we've invested resources in digital

ad campaigns to expand our reach. This year, we collaborated with GPS Impact, our national ACLU colleagues, and North Carolina Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (NCCADP) to produce a digital ad campaign informing constituents about the mechanisms behind and the stakes of capital punishment. We enlisted influencers and developed digital ads to ensure that the content produced can reach and speak to target audiences, especially younger constituents.

We are excited to welcome a new organizing team to our affiliate to advance our work in grassroots mobilization and lead community engagement efforts across our issue areas. Be sure to follow us on social media and visit our website for more opportunities to engage with the ACLU team and support our goals! ■



Re-Introducing the ACLU

continued from page 1

The ACLU of North Carolina draws on all tools and resources at its disposal to protect your civil liberties and pave the way for a more perfect North Carolina. We bring together litigation, legislative advocacy, communications, and organizing strategies to empower communities and achieve our objective of preserving and expanding civil liberties across the state. Whether it's to fight for full equality for LGBTQIA+ people, demand racial justice and reproductive freedom, reform our criminal legal system, or defend freedoms of speech, religion, protest, and voting, you will find the ACLU team, its members, and volunteers on the streets, in the Courts, and in the General Assembly.

As we draft this newsletter for circulation, we are focused on preparing advocacy, legal, and communications strategies to tackle the most pressing issues impacting

North Carolinians. For example, we are building new and bolstering existing organizational partnerships to fight anticipated attempts to further restrict abortion access even more than the monster abortion ban implemented by Senate Bill 20 in 2023. We are using storytelling to educate and fight back against harmful propaganda and policies targeting the rights of our immigrant neighbors and of young people, including trans youth. The passage of anti-trans laws such as Senate Bill 49 (the "Don't Say Gay" bill) attempt to stifle acknowledgment that LGBTQ+ people exist by restricting the curriculum teachers are permitted to cover in the classroom. This legislation endangers the health and safety of students by forcing teachers and administrators to "out" them to their parents.

We are also preparing to fight back against regressive and harmful laws that aim to increase the criminalization of young people, like House Bill 834, which the General Assembly passed earlier this year over the governor's veto, and which is effective as of December 1, 2024. The law requires

that 16- and 17-year-olds charged with A-E class felonies go straight to adult criminal court, instead of starting in juvenile court. Juvenile courts require far more accountability, counseling, education, and family involvement than the adult system, and they have far better outcomes for youth, including much lower rates of recidivism. In court, we continue our legal challenge to defend the rights of pre-trial detainees with serious mental health conditions to receive timely evaluations and to be free from unreasonably lengthy and unconstitutional detention in county jails.

We won't stop making progress across these intersecting issue areas because we are not in this alone. The struggle for a better democracy is affected by who is in office, but not determined by who is in office. We need your voice and power, not "more than ever," but as we have always needed it. We encourage you to follow us on social media and look out for ways to engage as we scale volunteer initiatives to increase civic education and engagement to fulfill our ongoing work.

We're so glad you're with us. ■

The Future Echoes

This year, we launched an engagement project that centers zine-making and curation as a key strategy for youth participation. Zines, named as a shortened version of magazines, are short form, usually independently made and distributed, deep explorations into a particular cultural phenomenon. Our Senior

Communications Strategist, Genna Marshall, identified zines as a powerful way for youth to document their thoughts and attitudes about current US political, social, economic, ecological, and cultural issues through this medium popular in art activism. Zines were popular during the 1960s and 1990s and have made a resurgence! The goals of

The Future Echoes: A Zine Anthology are two-fold: 1) to learn directly from young folks about their thoughts and perspectives on the civil rights and civil liberties issues that impact their lives, and 2) to engage more young people in the work of the ACLU-NC and in creative advocacy generally. We also plan to publish a selection



of submissions with page contributors included as authors. Please visit www.acluofzines.org to learn more. ■



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BUILDING THE WORLD WE WANT TO SEE

The ACLU of North Carolina uses an integrated advocacy approach to defend and advance civil rights and civil liberties in our state. Our team of litigation, lobbying, organizing, communications, and administrative professionals work across teams and with community partners to earn victories on some of today's most vital issues.

Learn more and support our work at acluofnc.org/donate.

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