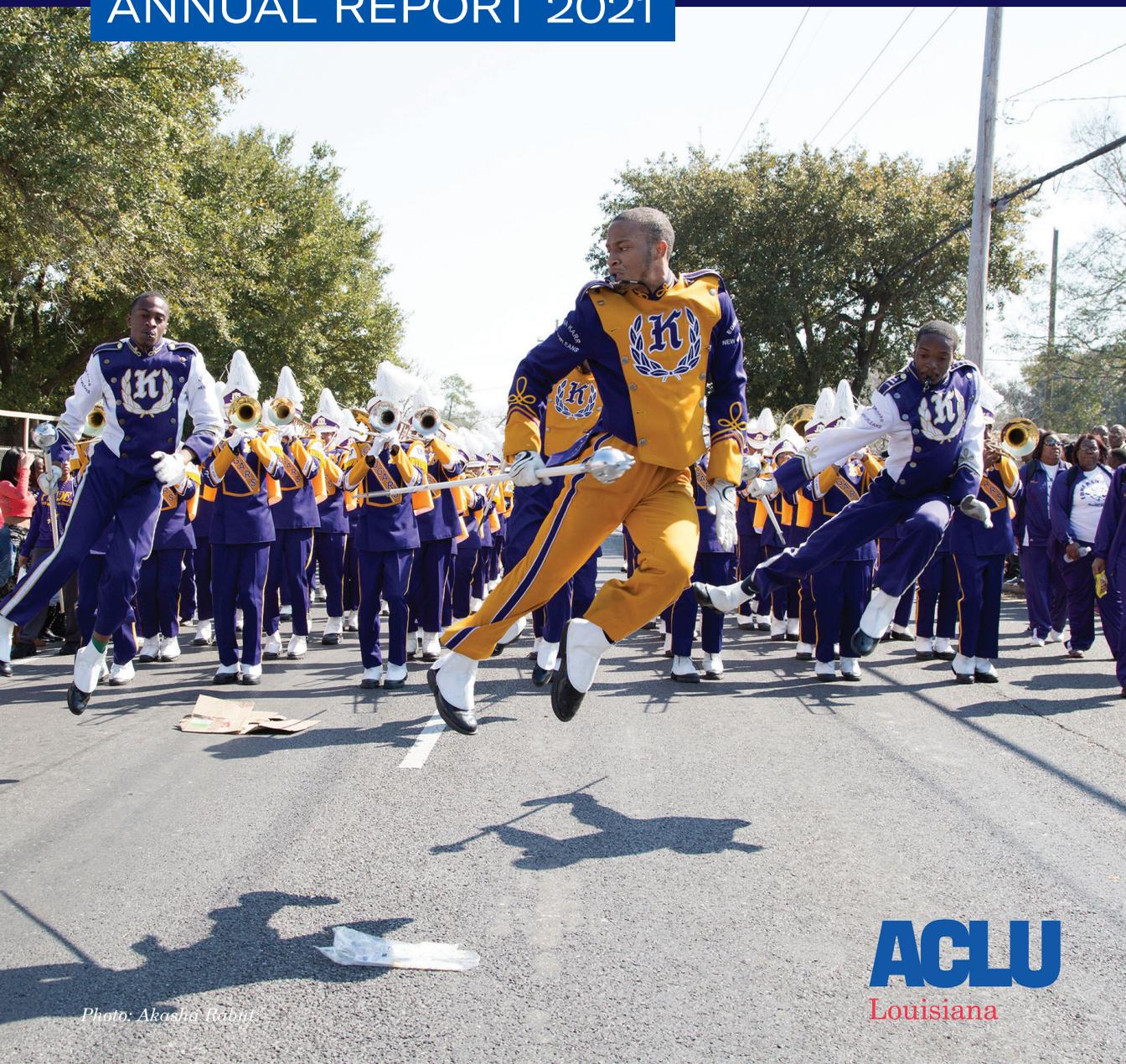


# IN DEFENSE OF FREEDOM

ACLU OF LOUISIANA

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



*Photo: Akasha Rabbit*

**ACLU**  
Louisiana

**WE THE PEOPLE**



ACLU OF LOUISIANA  
ANNUAL REPORT

**2021**

*Photo: Akasha Rabut*

Dear Friends,

We are deeply grateful for your ongoing support of the ACLU of Louisiana. Your commitment to our efforts during a second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, and through Hurricane Ida, is humbling and inspiring. Hurricane Ida's devastation, occurring almost exactly 16 years after Hurricane Katrina, exposed inequalities that existed long before the storm. In many ways, the people of Louisiana have been repairing damage to physical structures, as well as social and political systems for the last 16 years. This year has made one thing clear: our fight for equity and freedom must continue.

This year, we welcomed many new volunteers and supporters to the ACLU of Louisiana family. Your collective generosity in time, talent, and treasure has empowered the affiliate to grow, and sustains our hopefulness and determination as we look to the future.

The affiliate has experienced tremendous success in the courts, at the Capitol, and in our community. Through our Justice Lab: Putting Racist Policing on Trial initiative, we've collected more than 400 complaints of police misconduct statewide, filed 30 cases against police in nine months, and have documented countless stories from survivors and family members impacted by police violence through our community narrative program. This summer, in a letter addressed to Attorney General Merrick Garland and the U.S. Department of Justice, ACLU of Louisiana demanded a pattern or practice investigation into misconduct by the Louisiana State Police. And later in the year, we called upon the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana to scrutinize Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office long-standing racist policies, practices, and customs that have etched deep wounds in communities of color.

During the spring legislative session, we fought against reactionary racial resentment, attacks on transgender youth, and battled for police accountability and pretrial incarceration reform. We passed our signature bill, which reduced the amount of time a person can sit in jail without trial or conviction. Perhaps most importantly, we saw the community come together fiercely, to hold our state accountable through both in-person and virtual events, as well as direct outreach to lawmakers. Today, the ACLU of Louisiana is laser-focused on voting rights and our once-in-a-decade opportunity to redraw our district maps to ensure fair representation for all. We hope all of you will join us in this fight. To get involved, please visit [laaclu.org/redistricting](https://laaclu.org/redistricting).

We at the ACLU of Louisiana are committed to defending freedom, and in partnership with you, we will advance our collective liberation. No matter what lies ahead, I take heart in knowing that you are with us in this critical fight.

In solidarity,



Alanah Odoms  
Executive Director

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# A WIN FOR PRETRIAL REFORM AND THE ROAD AHEAD

In his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King Jr. echoed the legal maxim: “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” Nowhere is that more true than in Louisiana jails, where people can be held for extraordinary lengths of time – without ever being charged with a crime.

On any given day in Louisiana, nearly 15,000 people languish behind bars, most without charge or conviction, simply because they can’t pay bail. The ACLU of Louisiana’s *Justice Can’t Wait* report compiled thousands of jail records over a two-year period and exposed a skyrocketing pretrial incarceration rate; an average length of stay of 5.5 months; and the fact that almost 60% of people jailed pretrial were arrested for non-violent offenses, like minor drug possession and unpaid citations. Since publishing the report, COVID-19 has exacerbated these issues. The racial disparities in this system are staggering, with Black people 2.3 times more likely than white people to be jailed following arrest.



*ACLU of Louisiana’s Advocacy Team Chris Kaiser, A’Niya Robinson, and Stephanie Willis*



*ACLU of Louisiana Policy Strategist Stephanie Willis at the Louisiana State Capitol*

In spring 2021, the ACLU of Louisiana’s priority bill, House Bill 46 by State Representative Ted James, sought to reduce the length of time the state can jail a person without criminal charge from 120 days to 5 days in most cases. Through our research and advocacy, we spoke to many Louisianans whose lives had been forever altered by unjust and long stays in jail without a conviction. They had lost homes, cars, and businesses, but the most valuable thing they lost was time: Forty-five days, 30 days, or even 15 days is far too long for any parent to be needlessly separated from their children.

With the help of an outpouring of support from the community and ACLU of Louisiana supporters, House Bill 46 became law. Unfortunately, before the law passed, legislators bowed to pressure from district attorneys and amended the Bill. Under the new law, people arrested for misdemeanors may only be held in jail for 30 days without charge, versus 45 days under previous law.



*State Representative Ted James*

We are clear-eyed about the incremental step this represents. People in this state can still be held in jail for weeks or months without being charged with a crime. Nevertheless, many legislators now understand and agree that the status quo is unjust and an affront to due process. Moving forward, we will continue sounding the alarm about the injustice of pretrial incarceration and press lawmakers to address this crisis once and for all.

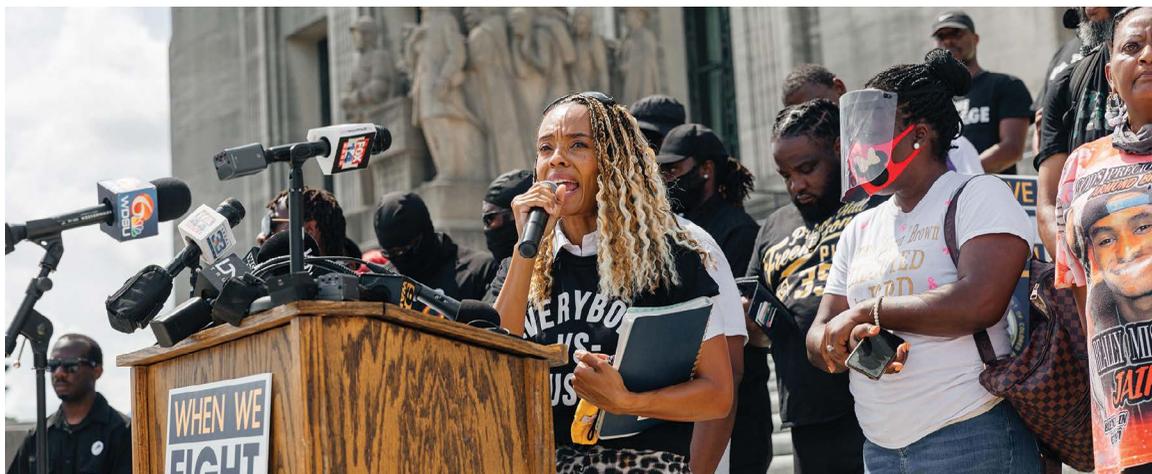
# LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY BY THE NUMBERS

During the 2021 legislative session, ACLU of Louisiana's Advocacy team **ANALYZED 201 BILLS AFFECTING CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES:**

- **94** CRIMINAL LAW AND PROCEDURE BILLS
- **30** VOTING RIGHTS AND ELECTIONS BILLS
- **16** GENDER EQUALITY BILLS
- **12** POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY BILLS
- **10** WORKPLACE AND LABOR RIGHTS BILLS
- **10** FREE SPEECH BILLS
- **8** COURTS AND JUDICIARY BILLS
- **7** EQUALITY IN EDUCATION BILLS
- **5** PRIVACY AND TECHNOLOGY BILLS
- **5** LGBTQI RIGHTS BILLS
- **3** GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY BILLS
- **1** DISABILITY RIGHTS BILL

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At the end of session, our team **HELPED PASS 28 PRO-CIVIL RIGHTS BILLS** and **HELPED DEFEAT 28 ANTI-CIVIL RIGHTS BILLS.**



*ACLU of Louisiana Executive Director Alanah Odoms calling for justice for Ronald Greene*

# 30 LAWSUITS AND AN EMPOWERED COMMUNITY: JUSTICE LAB PUTS RACIST POLICING ON TRIAL

On April 6, 2020, Ms. Deanna Thomas, a 54-year-old Black mother experiencing homelessness, was camping on a levee in Kenner, Louisiana when an officer approached and told her to leave. As she tried to gather her belongings, including her cell phone, the officer handcuffed and knocked her to the ground, where she fell face-first. Her glasses broke and lacerated her face. The officer then knelt with his full body weight on her back, twisting her arms behind her, and eventually pulled her up by the handcuffs and shoved her into the police car, while another officer watched silently nearby.

On May 5, 2020, Ms. Teliah C. Perkins, a 37-year-old Black home health care aide who spent much of her time caring for her bed-ridden cousin, was approached in her driveway in Slidell, Louisiana by two white officers as her 14-year-old son watched. A neighbor called the police to report someone riding a motorcycle without a helmet, and Ms. Perkins was falsely identified. The officers forced Ms. Perkins' face to the pavement, as they pressed their knees and elbows into her back, legs, and neck. She sustained injuries that later forced her to leave her job. Her son recorded the incident, even as one of the officers stepped in front of the camera and pointed a Taser directly at him. The young man said, "You can't tase a child," and the officer replied, "Watch me."

These are two powerful examples, among hundreds, of the harm that has been inflicted upon communities of color by police. In Louisiana, where discriminatory policing and mass incarceration devastate families, the ACLU of Louisiana created Justice Lab: Putting Racist Policing on Trial – a litigation, community narrative, and advocacy effort to combat oppressive policing. With the support of nearly 50 law firms, 20 law school legal clinics, and 150 in-house counsel volunteers, Justice Lab offers a model for police reform that is replicable and scalable across the region, nation, and internationally. Since launching our plaintiff call in August 2020, we have received more than 400 complaints documenting racially motivated police misconduct in Louisiana, empowering us to achieve the following:

- File 30 cases challenging unconstitutional policing, including two representing Ms. Thomas and Ms. Perkins. We expect to file hundreds of lawsuits by the completion of our program.

- Launch a community narrative program featuring the stories of people whom we cannot legally represent due to a technicality, including Louisiana’s one-year statute of limitations on Section 1983 cases. Our narrative effort is aimed at supporting community members' healing from trauma and shifting the public narrative about policing from “bad apples” to systemic injustice.
- Identify a pattern or practice of abuse in various jurisdictions and advocate directly to the Department of Justice for a federal investigation and intervention.
- Host family members who have lost their loved ones to police violence at virtual town halls that reach hundreds of community members. Most recently, we hosted Ms. Mona Hardin, whose son Ronald Greene was tortured to death by Louisiana State Police in Monroe, Louisiana. After our town hall with Ms. Hardin, the body camera footage showing her son’s violent death was released and we helped her prepare to share her story with an audience of seven million through an interview on **CBS Sunday Morning**.





The ACLU of Louisiana is committed to growing the Justice Lab program over the next decade. In the short-term, our goals are to deter pretextual police stops and the use of excessive force against people of color. In the midterm, we seek to mobilize directly impacted people to shift the narrative about police

abuse across the state and compel the legislature and Department of Justice to close loopholes that create obstacles to police accountability. Long-term, we seek to change case law on qualified immunity and to ensure equal protection under the law for Black and Brown Section 1983 plaintiffs.

# JUSTICE LAB BY THE NUMBERS

**411** Complaints received to date

**18**  
Storytellers

**30**  
Lawsuits filed

**24**  
Police departments  
sued

**15**  
Parishes involved



## CASE SPOTLIGHT : CHALLENGING LOUISIANA'S ONE-YEAR LIMIT ON LAWSUITS ALLEGING POLICE ABUSE

In the 22nd case filed as part of its Justice Lab campaign, the ACLU of Louisiana, alongside Covington & Burling LLP, sued deputies from the DeSoto Parish Sheriff's Office (DPSO) and the Louisiana State Police Department for unnecessary and excessive use of force against a Black man, Mr. Jarius Brown. On September 27, 2019, Mr. Brown was arrested for nonviolent vehicle offenses and transported to DPSO where he was brutally beaten by deputies without legal justification, warning, or provocation as he changed his clothing. Despite full compliance, two DeSoto Parish deputies hit Mr. Brown several times in his face, nose, and chest, causing him to collapse and struggle to remain conscious.

Immediately following Mr. Brown's attack, he was given a prison jumpsuit and taken to a holding cell where he remained in isolation – bloody, beaten, and struggling to remain conscious – before his condition was noticed by another deputy at the DPSO. As a result of the attack, Mr. Brown sustained multiple injuries and continues to experience mental and emotional trauma.



*Mr. Jarius Brown*

**“Mr. Brown’s attack is consistent with an extensive history of violence and police brutality committed by members of Louisiana law enforcement. That conduct has unfortunately been present for decades and has been implicitly endorsed by Louisiana State Police troopers and officials – the very force that initiated Mr. Brown’s arrest.”**

– Nora Ahmed, ACLU of Louisiana Legal Director

Louisiana is one of only three other states that gives people just one year from the date of the incident to challenge unconstitutional policing in court, which greatly contributes to the systematic lack of accountability for victims of police brutality in Louisiana – a violation of the spirit and intent of governing Supreme Court precedent. Incarcerated victims like Mr. Brown are both traumatized and entirely at the mercy of their abusers. In Mr. Brown’s case, it was not until he was transferred to another facility away from the officers who abused him, that he began to recover and could begin pursuing a case.

Mr. Brown is one of countless Black men who have been unjustly brutalized by law enforcement in Louisiana. By bringing this case, Mr. Brown seeks to hold DPSO deputies accountable for their violation of citizens’ rights under the U.S. Constitution and Louisiana state laws.



# YOUR IMPACT

The extraordinary work outlined in this report would not be possible without the generous support of donors of all levels. Your commitment to our growing organization empowers us to deepen our relationships with vulnerable community members across the state, and expand the ways in which we serve.

With COVID-19 continuing to harshly impact our state economy, and Hurricane Ida ravaging much of the coastline, our donors have faced many challenges this year. To those who have not been able to renew your support, but continue to volunteer, attend events, and call your legislators, thank you. To those who have renewed your support in

any amount, in spite of these challenges, thank you. To those of you who have not yet renewed your gift but would like to this year, thank you. Please return the enclosed envelope or visit [laaclu.org/give](https://laaclu.org/give) to make a gift. Each of you is a valued ally in our defense of freedom.



## FISCAL YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

APRIL 1, 2021 - NOV. 30, 2021

**7,900**

Member-Donors

**79,200**

Supporters

(email subscribers, volunteers, and member-donors)

**\$173,000**

in gifts less than \$250\*

**NEARLY  
\$900,000**

total in c3 and c4 funds

*\*At the ACLU of Louisiana, gifts of less than \$250 make up nearly 20% of our collective annual revenue! We could not advance civil rights and liberties in Louisiana without support at all levels. Every gift counts.*

# COMMUNITY CENTRIC FUNDRAISING

The ACLU of Louisiana is working to add a Community Centric Fundraising (CCF) lens to our development work. Our goal is to encourage ACLU affiliates nationwide, ACLU’s national office, and other nonprofits to examine structural racism in philanthropy, explore ways to reduce harm, and further social justice. CCF is a movement led by fundraisers of color who have outlined ten core principles:

1. Fundraising must be grounded in race, equity and social justice.
2. Individual organizational missions are not as important as the collective community.
3. Nonprofits are generous with, and mutually supportive of, one another.
4. All who engage in strengthening the community are equally valued, whether volunteer, staff, donor, or board member.
5. Time is valued equally to money.
6. We treat donors as partners and this means that we are transparent, and occasionally have difficult conversations.
7. We foster a sense of belonging, not othering.
8. We promote the understanding that everyone (donors, staff, funders, board members, volunteers) personally benefits from engaging in the work of social justice – it’s not just charity and compassion.
9. We see the work of social justice as holistic and transformative, not transactional.
10. We recognize that healing and liberation requires a commitment to economic justice.

Many of our fundraising practices are aligned with one or more of these principles, and we look forward to offering education for donors on the intersection of racial justice and philanthropy in the year ahead. More information on CCF can be found at **[communitycentricfundraising.org](https://communitycentricfundraising.org)**. If you have questions about the ACLU of Louisiana’s fundraising practices, budget, or your gift, please email Development Director Maggy Baccinelli at **[mbaccinelli@laaclu.org](mailto:mbaccinelli@laaclu.org)**. Again, thank you for your meaningful support!



*ACLU of Louisiana Advocacy Strategist A’Niya Robinson with Chairman of the North West Louisiana Makerspace Demetrius Norman*



*Georgia Barlow, Power Coalition; A'Niya Robinson, ACLU-LA; Chris Kaiser, ACLU-LA; Candice Battiste, Power Coalition & ACLU-LA Board Member; Jared Evans, NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund; Victoria Wenger, NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund*

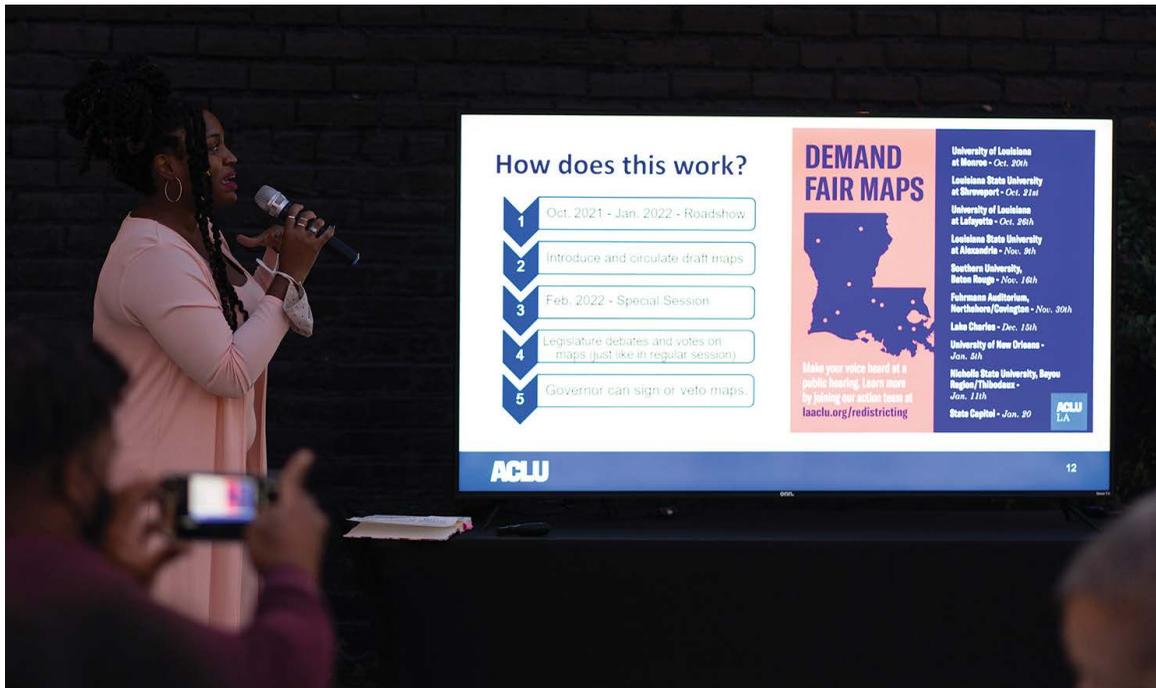
# THE ROAD TO FAIR MAPS

**Louisiana is the sixth most racially gerrymandered state in the nation,** but right now, we are in the middle of a once-in-a-decade opportunity to draw new district lines that more accurately represent us in Congress and in the legislature. Unbiased redistricting shouldn't be about partisan politics; it should be about representation for the people and the communities our leaders are responsible for serving.

The district lines that get drawn in the months ahead will determine if and how our political voice is heard in Washington and Baton Rouge for the next 10 years. New census data reveal significant population shifts in Louisiana that have important ramifications for fair representation of people of color. For example, since 2010, Louisiana's Black population has increased, while the white population has decreased. In Caddo and East Baton Rouge Parishes, Black people now make up greater

shares of the population than in 2010 and are now the plurality. And in several parishes surrounding our metro areas, the shifts are even more pronounced: Black residents' share of the population in Bossier, Ascension, and Livingston Parishes grew between two and four percentage points. In St. Bernard Parish, that figure surged by more than nine percentage points.

Louisiana's elected officials have an obligation to account for these and other population changes. And we all have a duty to hold our representatives accountable – ensuring fair representation for the people of our state is not sacrificed to partisan calculation and self-interest. Our next set of electoral maps must represent everyone, upholding the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection and complying with the requirements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



We are bringing the full strength of the ACLU’s legal, policy, and analytics arms to advocate for fair representation for all Louisianans. We are at the forefront of this fight at the legislature, and we are working in coalition with national and local organizations to inform and empower community members across the state to demand fair maps. We’ve hosted in-person community events in Shreveport, Monroe, and Baton Rouge, to inform and prepare nearly 200 residents to attend the legislature’s public hearing roadshow, as well as virtual community teach-ins where we outline the redistricting process and coach attendees on how to prepare testimony. Our last community event will be in New Orleans on January 4, 2022, before the city’s public hearing on January 5.

In February, after the public hearing roadshow, the legislature will host a special session on redistricting, during which they will pass the new maps. We will need the community’s continued support to hold lawmakers accountable in the months ahead. The drawing of district lines can dictate not only who runs for public office and who is elected, but also how financial resources are allocated for schools, hospitals, roads, and more. Louisiana’s elected representatives make decisions that significantly impact the communities they represent, in the areas of criminal law reform, voting rights, and civil rights for all.

To join us in the fight for fair maps, visit our redistricting web page at [laaclu.org/redistricting](http://laaclu.org/redistricting), and sign up to volunteer at [laaclu.org/volunteer](http://laaclu.org/volunteer).

# CASE SPOTLIGHT : LANDMARK SETTLEMENT ENDS DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S UNCONSTITUTIONAL INTIMIDATION PRACTICES

On October 5, 2021, the ACLU of Louisiana and the American Civil Liberties Union, alongside our partners Civil Rights Corps, SilenceIsViolence, and Venable LLP, reached a historic settlement with the Orleans Parish District Attorney's Office (OPDA). *Singleton et al. v. Cannizzaro*, brought an end to OPDA's years-long use of fake subpoenas and intimidation to illegally coerce and jail victims and witnesses. The fake subpoenas, which were commonly used under the supervision of former District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro, bore OPDA's official seal and threatened fines and imprisonment as penalties for noncompliance with submitting to private, out-of-court interrogations – a direct violation of Louisiana law. The settlement was reached with Orleans Parish's new District Attorney, Jason Williams.

In addition to ending the fake subpoena practices, the agreement outlines clear steps OPDA must take for internal supervision of the material witness warrant process. Prosecutors under

Cannizzaro routinely abused their power to seek the arrest of material witnesses, misrepresenting information to the courts in applications for material witness arrest warrants and using the threat of arrest to force cooperation from reluctant witnesses. As a result, people who were not accused of any crime – and in many cases were themselves the victims of crime – spent days, weeks, and even months in jail.

Now, the office will be required to conduct regular audits to ensure outstanding warrants are closed, document communications with survivors and witnesses, provide rigorous training to employees, and more. District Attorney Williams and OPDA also agreed to an independent external monitor to ensure the office complies with the agreement – a process that is rarely, if ever, agreed to by a District Attorney. Former ACLU of Louisiana Legal Director Katie Schwartzman will act as the independent monitor.

The settlement also provides significant financial compensation to the three remaining plaintiffs, Renata Singleton, Tiffany LaCroix, and Lazonia Baham, who suffered serious emotional and physical hardships as a result of OPDA's coercive tactics. All the former plaintiffs who settled earlier received financial compensation as well, including organizational plaintiff SilenceIsViolence – an Orleans-based nonprofit that advocates for, represents, and provides services to victims of violent crime in the New Orleans community.

A historic step forward in protecting the rights of the people of Orleans Parish, this settlement ensures prosecutors, the very actors tasked with protecting the public, are held accountable to the communities they serve.

Thank you to our co-counsel from Civil Rights Corps, the American Civil Liberties Union, and Venable LLP.

A black and white halftone-style photograph of the Statue of Liberty, viewed from a low angle looking up. The statue is holding a torch in her right hand and a tablet in her left. An orange banner with the word "VICTORY" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters is superimposed over the lower part of the statue's body.

**VICTORY**



Photo: Jaceff Davis

# BLACK LIVES MATTER

**Students do not lose their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse doors.** In response to a demand letter issued by the ACLU of Louisiana, the St. Tammany Parish School Board granted two students an exemption to their “dress and grooming” policy, allowing the children to wear Black Lives Matter face masks without punishment. In December 2020, Aidan and Suriah White were threatened with discipline and suspended for wearing the masks, a clear violation of their First Amendment rights.

Suriah White, a 13-year-old Black student who attends William Pitcher Junior High School, was told her mask violated the school district’s policy that notes “styles of dress and grooming should never be such that they represent a collective or individual protest.” An administration official at William Pitcher also notified staff at Pine View Middle School, where Suriah’s younger sibling Aidan was wearing the same mask. Both children were eventually pulled from class and sent to in-school suspension.



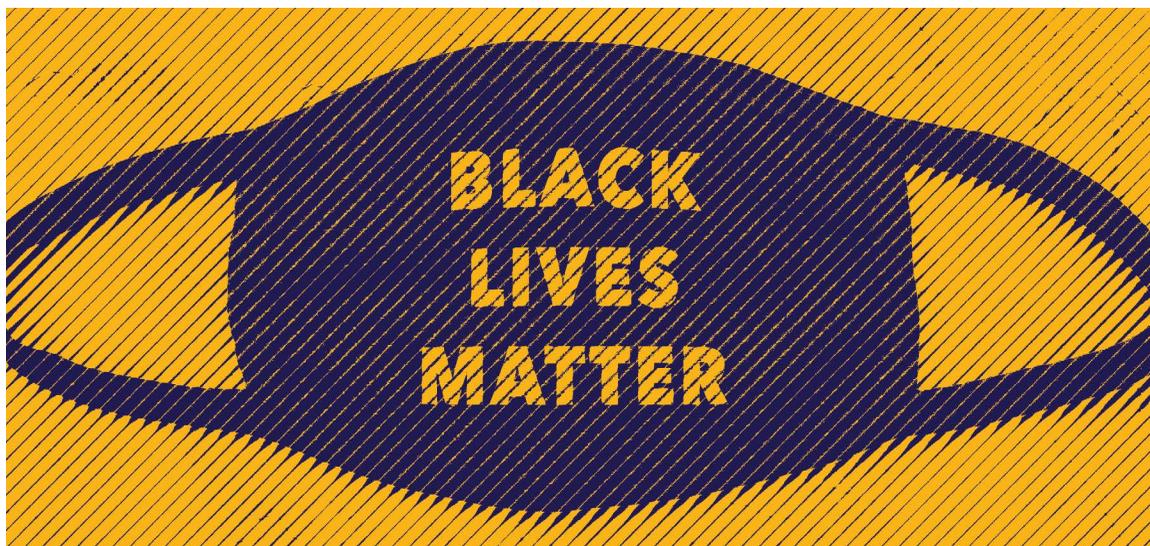
“The phrase ‘Black Lives Matter’ is itself an affirmation, a statement of the inherent value and dignity of human beings. **The refusal of the school to allow these students to wear their masks is a violation of their right to free speech.**”

- Alanah Odoms, ACLU of Louisiana Executive Director

Following the punishment, the ACLU of Louisiana quickly intervened and sent a demand letter to Superintendent Jabbia asking the St. Tammany School Board to immediately rectify the violation and confirm in writing that the children would be allowed to wear their masks without further discipline from school officials.

Under the First Amendment, Suriah and Aidan – and all other students – are allowed to peacefully protest in whatever manner they choose, so long as

it does not materially and substantially interfere with school operations. More specifically, students cannot be punished for expressing their beliefs unless the expression substantially disrupts classwork or invades the rights of others, or if the expression is lewd, vulgar, or promotes illegal drug use. Students engaging in silent, passive expression of opinion, unaccompanied by any disorder or disturbance – just as Suriah and Aidan were – have long been protected by the First Amendment.



# EXPOSING THE VESTIGES OF SLAVERY IN LOUISIANA

The American South remains the epicenter of the battle for freedom and equality in this country. One hundred and twenty five years after *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow segregation are omnipresent in Louisiana. The ACLU of Louisiana is committed to advancing racial justice across the state, raising awareness about the legacy of white supremacy across the South, and challenging racial discrimination and institutionalized segregation. Here are two highlights from our 2021 work in this space.

## BURIED TRUTHS

In January 2021, after a Black man named Darrell Semein was denied burial at Oaklin Springs Cemetery in Oberlin, Louisiana, the ACLU of Louisiana promptly issued a letter urging the cemetery’s board to revise their governing body’s bylaws and eradicate any “whites only” provision, language, or references. The cemetery reacted by removing all race-based restrictions from their burial contracts.

In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled such race-based restrictions unconstitutional because they violated the Fourteenth Amendment. But across the country, an untold number of these covenants remain in place, most notably in home deeds. Upon reading national news coverage about what happened to

Mr. Semien’s family, ACLU of Louisiana Executive Director Alanah Odoms called on all local institutions to identify and void racist policies and covenants as Oaklin Springs Cemetery had done:



It is deeply disheartening to see so many American cities remain segregated by race, which is why we’re inviting all organizations in Louisiana to take action now and join us in the ongoing fight for racial justice. We urge you to review your own founding documents and make any necessary changes as exemplified by Oaklin Springs Cemetery: void your racist contracts, hold meetings with your board members to develop a new path forward, and actively document your efforts to desegregate our nation once and for all.”

The ACLU of Louisiana will never disengage from the struggle for racial justice in America. Even the loftiest of our foundational ideals can never fully escape the unspoken truths of our nation’s history. We must constantly reexamine this brutal idea of racial hierarchy that has been woven into the fabric of our lives.

# A CLARION CALL FOR PRESIDENT BIDEN

In October 2021, the ACLU of Louisiana delivered a video statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council urging President Biden to protect the health of the mostly Black residents of Louisiana’s River Parishes. The statement was submitted in conjunction with the presentation of a report by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent to the Human Rights Council, which provides guidance on how to effectively address environmental injustice and impact of the climate crisis and environmental racism on people of African descent.

Also referred to as “Cancer Alley” due to astronomical rates of cancer, the River Parishes were once home to more than 350 plantation sites and have since been invaded by the petrochemical industry, leading to the suffocating and poisoning of residents. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has

found St. John the Baptist Parish has cancer rates that are more than 1,500 times the national average.

During her virtual statement to the United Nations, ACLU of Louisiana Executive Director Alanah Odoms called on President Biden to intervene:



This sacred land should lawfully belong to the descendants of the Black men, women, and children who labored to their deaths as enslaved people,” said Odoms. “Instead, the land has been exploited by dangerous plastic and chemical plants that have destroyed air quality, hastened climate change, and exposed descendants to unconscionable rates of disease and cancer. The Biden administration has a duty to step in.”

The report by the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent recommends the United States “deliver environmental justice in communities in America, including areas like ‘Death Alley’ and other areas that face environmental degradation, climate crises, and disaster, all of which are compounded by infrastructure deficiencies, including a lack of potable water, sanitation, plumbing, and assurances of air quality.”





# DEFENDING IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In a state where nearly fifteen thousand people – many of whom are asylum seekers – continue to languish in nine remote prison detention centers, the ACLU of Louisiana remains committed to defending the rights of immigrants.

Our class action lawsuit with the Southern Poverty Law Center, *Heredia Mons v. McAleenan*, challenges the Trump administration's Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) failure to grant "humanitarian parole" to people who are in detention, but are seeking asylum. Per ICE's policy, individuals who are in detention awaiting adjudication of an asylum claim can be released from detention to live with sponsors or family members while their claims are considered. Humanitarian parole was granted in 85% of cases before the Trump administration. During the Trump administration, however, the New Orleans ICE field office only granted parole in 1% of the cases. This has resulted in thousands of asylum seekers being indefinitely detained. Our lawsuit argues that ICE is not following its own directive to meaningfully consider parole.

Through ACLU of Louisiana's focus on policing, we've also challenged police officers' abuse and discrimination against Latinx people. In February 2021, we won a settlement on behalf of Ramon Torres, a U.S. citizen who was unlawfully jailed for three days by the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office on suspicion of being an undocumented immigrant because of his race. In October 2021, we filed a Justice Lab case on behalf of Julie Nevarez, whose husband Miguel Nevarez, an Afro-Latino man, was brutally killed by police after not getting out of his car while in his own driveway.

When the government has the power to deny legal rights and due process to one vulnerable group, everyone's rights are at risk. But at the ACLU of Louisiana, we remain dedicated to expanding and enforcing the civil liberties and civil rights of immigrants, and to combating public and private discrimination against them.



**ACLU**

Louisiana





*Photo: Akasha Rabut*

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