

ACLU Montana

WINTER 2026



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ACLU of Montana participates in the October, 2025 No Kings Rally in Helena, Montana. Photo Credit: Rebecca Stumpf

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Here we stand, less than a year into a second Trump presidency, facing the harsh realities that have come with this administration: one that is bolder in its assaults on our rights and liberties, marked by threats, cruelty, intimidation, coercion, and lack of basic respect for human dignity.

The Trump administration has made clear its intention to continue to consolidate power through unconstitutional federal overreach, at the cost of our most fundamental rights and freedoms, with the most vulnerable among us feeling the brunt of its agenda. This administration is restricting the rights of transgender individuals, censoring and silencing artists, entertainers and the press, stifling free speech on college campuses across the U.S., detaining and deporting immigrants without due process (and with extensive racial profiling), threatening American cities with military deployments, and more; the list is ever evolving.

Daunting as this all is, at this critical moment in our shared history, I am more **grateful** than ever to be part of the ACLU: a multi-issue, multi-faceted, nationwide organization that has stood strong and remained steadfast in fighting for our rights and liberties for over a century.



I am equally **grateful** to the diverse communities across Montana, our partner organizations, as well as the millions of voices across the Nation who have joined in standing up and fighting against President Trump's escalating abuses of power. Make no mistake, the fight ahead will require **ALL OF US**, joined together, putting aside our differences to fight for a shared future where we all enjoy the same rights and freedoms. And I am grateful that **WE THE PEOPLE** aren't going anywhere and will continue to fight for our rights. Here at ACLU of Montana, we are leaning into our gratitude as a source of inspiration and energy to fuel us as we continue our work to protect and expand civil rights and liberties for all Montanans.

We are **grateful** that here in Montana we have a nonpartisan judicial election system that **keeps politics out of our courts**. In the coming pages, you can learn more about our work with a nonpartisan coalition, consisting of a broad array of partners old and new, to ensure that Montana courts remain independent from political influence.

We are **grateful** that Montana also has a strong constitution, providing greater protections for individual rights than its federal counterpart. These constitutional protections have provided a **bastion of safety for our fellow Montanans** from some of the cruelest efforts of the Trump administration. Read on to learn more about the clients, teams, and reliance on Montana constitutional rights that make up our legal work here.

We are **grateful** that across the Nation, both sister affiliates and National ACLU have filed **hundreds of legal actions**, with many squarely challenging Trump's Executive Orders, including the misuse of the Alien Enemies Act to deport thousands of our neighbors without due process.

And we remain **grateful** to have supporters like you who have remained steadfast in joining us in our efforts to resist an authoritarian regime, through donating your time, money, and other resources to let both local lawmakers and the Trump administration know that power belongs to the people and the people will hold the power to account. In this newsletter, you will read about the many ways **we have come together in communities across Montana** and the Nation, hitting the streets in protest condemning President Trump's escalating abuses of power and showing up in solidarity for the communities who have been unfairly targeted.

We are **grateful** that despite the challenging time we find ourselves in, the ACLU's community of activists, lawyers and supporters continue to show up, speak out, and resist, as we have for over a century. **We will continue to not only hold the line, but hold each other up**, creating a sustainable and durable movement, as we continue marching towards a more perfect future, holding true to our commitment to protecting and expanding civil rights and liberties **for ALL**.

In gratitude, solidarity, and care,



Akilah Maya Deernose
Executive Director

LEGAL ROUNDUP

As we watch democratic norms and institutions stretch to the breaking point, it is more important than ever to recognize and appreciate the individuals, organizations and principles that stand between us and government overreach. Thankfully, here in Montana we have an abundance of champions to celebrate.

Let's start with our **clients**. Behind every case, behind every legal victory, is a real human being whose civil rights

Daily **Montanan**

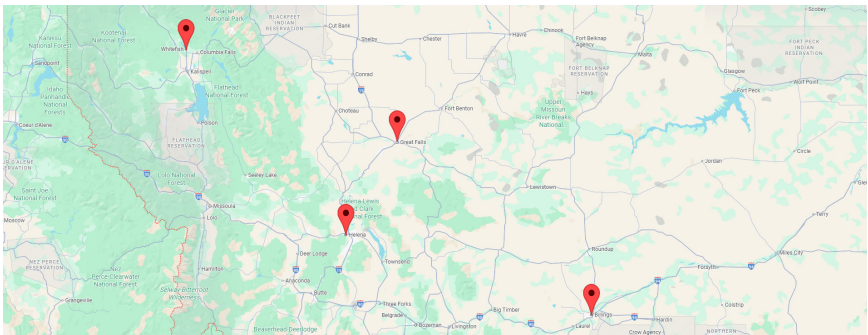
District Court strikes down ban on gender-affirming care for trans youth

A Missoula District Court judge permanently enjoined SB 99, a 2023 law.

BY: JORDAN HANSEN - MAY 14, 2025 12:44 PM

and civil liberties are on the line. Take **Phoebe Cross**, for example. A senior in high school, Phoebe is an avid member of his high school speech and debate team. He has been receiving life-saving gender affirming care since 2022. When the 2023 Montana Legislature passed a ban on gender-affirming care for transgender youth, Phoebe fearlessly signed on as our client challenging the law. Two years, later, a Montana court struck down the ban as unconstitutional, permitting Phoebe and other transgender minors to continue receiving this medically necessary care.

When Montana started enacting draconian restrictions on abortion, **Helen Weems** likewise felt compelled to stand up for the right to choose. Helen is a family nurse practitioner who operates All Families Healthcare in Whitefish, Montana. As one of the only abortion providers in Northwest Montana, Helen and her clinic provide critical reproductive healthcare to a geographically dispersed and historically underserved population. We have been proud to represent Helen in multiple successful lawsuits challenging abortion restrictions.



There are only a handful of abortion providers in Montana. Without All Families Healthcare in Whitefish, Montana, many in Northwest Montana would be unable to access abortion services.

And it's not just individuals that we are proud to represent. We are grateful to the **twelve Tribal Nations** in Montana, who repeatedly stand up for the voting rights of Indigenous peoples across the State. In face of relentless attempts to disenfranchise Indigenous voters – and indeed a history of discrimination against Native Americans – many of these Tribal Nations stood with us to challenge harsh new voting restrictions enacted by the Montana Legislature. In a landmark opinion, last year the Montana Supreme Court recognized that history of disenfranchisement and struck down multiple laws threatening Indigenous Peoples' right to vote under the Montana Constitution.

We are deeply grateful for all of our clients, and humbled by their courage in standing up for the rights of all Montanans.



**NATIVE AMERICAN
RIGHTS FUND**



Some of our trusted partner organizations

"bathroom bill," we collaborated with Legal Voice to immediately challenge the law before it went into effect. That law is currently paused from going into effect, thanks to a preliminary injunction issued by a Montana Court.

We also regularly work with our friends and allies at **ACLU National**, from the **LGBT&HIV Project** to the **Voting Rights Project** and from the **Racial Justice Project** to the **State Supreme Court Initiative**. The ACLU employs the best, brightest and most committed attorneys in the country, and very few of our legal successes would be possible without their partnership.

We couldn't do this legal work without our **allies and partners**. With a very small legal team on staff (currently two attorneys and our paralegal), we regularly rely on attorneys in our national office, other nonprofits, and cooperating firms to prosecute our cases. **The Native American Rights Fund (NARF)** is a great example: Dedicated to protecting Native American rights, NARF employs multiple brilliant attorneys we always look forward to working with. Whether it is defending the right to vote or promoting Indigenous education in public schools across the State, NARF has been a critical ally and partner over the years.

Likewise **Legal Voice**, a nonprofit dedicated to fighting gender discrimination, is a trusted partner. When the 2025 Montana Legislature passed an anti-transgender

Finally, we are eternally grateful for the **Montana Constitution**, a foundational document that grants far more rights than its federal counterpart. Our modern State Constitution was adopted in 1972, and serves as a model for the protection of individual rights in our country. Take, for example, the **Right to Individual Dignity**, which recognizes the intrinsic worth of each and every individual in Montana. Or the Constitutional right to **Indian Education**, which requires that



ACLU-MT's newest addition to the legal team is staff attorney Ashlee Rossler.

every public school in the State adopt culturally relevant curricula. The **Right to Privacy** has been interpreted to ensure that access to abortion remains safe and legal. And the **Right to Vote** means that everyone is guaranteed equal access to the ballot box. We are so fortunate to live in a State where these constitutional rights are explicit, and where Courts have faithfully interpreted those rights to protect against governmental overreach.

In this moment we are not naïve to the threats to democracy that surround all of us. We know that we are at an inflection point for Montana and indeed the entire country. But we are confident that with our courageous **clients**, our brilliant **allies and partners**, our modern **Constitution**, and **your support**, we can meet the moment, rise to the occasion, and ensure that justice and fairness prevail.



*Alex Rate, legal director for the ACLU of Montana, arguing in front of Missoula district court judge Shane Vanatta.
Photo Credit: Zach Volheim*

UPDATES FROM THE ADVOCACY, POLICY AND ORGANIZING DEPARTMENT

These days, it's more important than ever to find moments of gratitude to help us stay grounded and present.



ACLU of Montana staff and supporters at a No Kings rally, October 18, 2025 Photo Credit: Rebecca Stumpf

In our work of building a **Montana that is fair, equitable, and free**, the ACLU of Montana is eternally grateful for the many individuals who continue to show up and speak out against injustice. We especially commend those who take steps to ensure that the most marginalized members of our communities are protected and safe. While there are countless examples of community members standing up for justice, we want to highlight some events from the past year where we truly felt and saw the magic of community in action.

Twice this year—on June 14 and again on October 18—the ACLU co-hosted No Kings rallies across the country to support communities in protesting the unconstitutional actions of the Trump administration. In June, more than five million people attended more than 2,100 No Kings rallies across the United States, and in October, almost seven million people attended an additional 2,600 rallies, **one of the largest single nationwide protests in U.S. history**. The growth of these No Kings events from June to October—with hundreds of new locations and millions of additional protesters—proves that more and more people are showing up to protect our democracy. In Montana, nearly thirty protests were held across the state, spanning from Montana's largest cities like Billings, to smaller communities like Hot Springs.



Trans Day of Visibility rally in Helena, Montana, March 31, 2025 Photo Credit: Chasers of the Light

Thousands of Montanans gathered across the state to voice their demands to stop democratic backsliding. These protests were a much-needed reminder that despite constant attacks seeking to strip us of our civil liberties, we can still lean into community and stand in opposition to injustice.

Another powerful demonstration of community power occurred on Trans Day of Visibility, March 31st, when ACLU of Montana, partner organizations, and allies from across Montana gathered at the capitol steps in Helena to show their support and love for the trans community. During a legislative session where numerous bills were proposed attacking 2S-LGBTQIA+ Montanans, protestors unveiled a massive transgender flag with a simple message: trans people belong in Montana. We are so **grateful** to the many community members and allies who showed up, despite the cold temperatures, to let Montana legislators know that **trans people cannot be erased** and that we will continue to fight to protect and expand trans rights. This rally was more than a protest against egregious legislation, it was a celebration of trans joy, resilience, and community.



ACLU of Montana tabling at a 2025 2S-LGBTQIA+ Pride event. Photo Credit: Ri Mason

These events show what it truly means to be a Montanan, **taking care of one another** and reminding us all that we are better when we work together. Across Montana and across the country, similar rallies, protests, and marches remind us that **power lies in the hands of the people**, and that — when we show up together — we are a force to be reckoned with.

We have also seen community love in action through our local municipality work, reminding us that **impact matters at all levels**. Since the end of the legislative session, Montanans have continued to demonstrate their commitment to 2S-LGBTQIA+ neighbors by urging their city councils to adopt the Pride flag as an official symbol. This was in response to protest House Bill 819, a ban on governments flying the Pride flag that passed during the 2025 legislative session. Advocates in Missoula, Butte, and Bozeman asked their municipalities to **stand against the state's discrimination** by adopting rainbow flags as official city flags in respect and recognition of queer and trans people. Because these local governments adopted the Pride flag as an official government symbol, cities and towns across the state are now free to raise the Pride flag without fear.

Additionally, community members across the state have consistently shown up to protest the inhumane detention of immigrant community members.

In Helena, for example, after an ICE action led to the detention of a community member, the local community swiftly mobilized and spent hours protesting, showing up to city commission meetings, and contacting elected officials in support of protecting immigrants. Since then, the city of **Helena recognized the importance of its immigrant community members**, through a proclamation honoring the work of a local immigrant aid organization and honoring the value immigrants bring to Helena.

“The Helena City Commission... affirms its support for immigrants in our community and celebrates their contributions to our city.”

— CITY OF HELENA PROCLAMATION, AUGUST 4, 2025

The ACLU of Montana is grateful for our **resilient communities** across the state. Being in community reminds us that **we are stronger together** and can lean on each other to make it through frightening times.



ACLU of Montana Executive Director Akilah Deernose (middle) at a 2025 panel discussing 2S-LGBTQIA+ rights and state constitutions.

DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The nights are long; the air is crisp; our mugs of tea are full. In a nod to this wintery season of reflection, our staff is tuning in to our senses of gratitude—not with an inability to see how hard things are, but as a touchstone to keep us grounded. Potawatomi botanist author and environmental advocate Robin Wall Kimmerer writes beautifully: **“Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.”**

That reminder feels especially important as our nation faces chaos and uncertainty. As hostility and government overreach continue to threaten individuals' rights, safety and dignity, the weight of that reality is heavy. Nonetheless, **we find hope when we look to our community of supporters** and partners who continue to hold us and and who make ACLU of Montana's work possible. We are filled with immense gratitude for this opportunity to affirm our shared humanity.

We're grateful for our staff, who bring so much humor and brilliance to the fight for a more just and liberated world; for our board, who keep us moving forward with big hearts and attentive minds; for our partners and allies, who carry this work forward with us so effectively. **And we're deeply grateful for you, our donors and supporters, whose generosity fuels this work. We simply cannot do this alone. Thank you for always being at our side.**



No Kings rally in Helena, Montana, on October 18, 2025 Photo Credit: Rebecca Stumpf



MONTANANS FOR NONPARTISAN COURTS

Join Us in Protecting Our Nonpartisan Courts

Judges should be elected based on their record and qualifications, not their political party. That's why the ACLU of Montana is proud to have worked alongside our allies and partners for years to protect our courts from partisan control. Montanans have been electing judges in non-partisan elections since 1935, and now more than ever we need you to join us in protecting that tradition.

In advance of the 2026 election, the ACLU of Montana joined Montanans for Nonpartisan Courts in spearheading a ballot measure to protect Montana's long-standing tradition of selecting judges based on the person, not the party.

Politicians in Helena are actively trying to take control of Montana's court system by passing laws that inject party politics into our judicial system. During the 2025 legislative session we successfully defeated numerous attempts to politicize our courts. In 2026 we will permanently protect our courts from the threat of political control and ensure that judges remain nonpartisan by passing a constitutional initiative.

Expect to hear more about this ballot initiative throughout 2026. In the meantime, learn more and get involved at MontanansForNonpartisanCourts.com



Photo credit: Chasers of the Light

SUPPORT OUR WORK

Make a tax-deductible contribution to the ACLU of Montana Foundation today and protect the civil liberties of people across Montana and the nation.



Donate Online

If you'd like to make an online one-time tax-deductible donation by credit card (Visa, Mastercard, American Express, and Discover), please go to:

 aclumontana.org/donate

If you wish to donate and do not have an email address or do not wish to provide it, please donate by mail.



Donate By Mail

You can send checks via U.S. Mail to:

ACLU of Montana
PO Box 1968
Missoula, MT 59806

Please make checks payable to: ACLU of Montana Foundation



Donor Advised Funds

The ACLU of Montana Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization, and, therefore, eligible to receive distributions from most Donor Advised Funds.

Our tax identification number is 81-0445339.

Our mailing address is:

ACLU of Montana
PO Box 1968
Missoula, MT 59806



Donations of Stock

Because electronic transfers are made without identifying the donor, please alert us in advance about the stock and the number of shares you plan to give or instruct your broker to do so. You may do so by emailing Cari Kimball, Director of Philanthropy, at kimballc@aclumontana.org with the subject line “Stock Donation” or calling (406) 203-3376. If you would like to make a gift of securities, instruct your broker to transfer stock to the ACLU Foundation of Montana through our broker, DA Davidson:

DTC Number: 0361

Account Name: ACLU Foundation of Montana

Account Number: 11249080

Firm Name: DA Davidson



IRA Charitable Rollover

The IRA Charitable Rollover was made permanent for 2015 and beyond through a provision of the “Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act of 2015”. This allows people age 70½ or older to make direct transfers up to \$100,000 per year to charitable organizations from their Individual Retirement Accounts, without the withdrawal being treated as taxable income.

- **From which accounts can I make transfers?:** Transfers must come from your Individual Retirement Account(s) directly to the ACLU of Montana Foundation. The Charitable Rollover does not apply to 401(k), 403(b), or other retirement plans.
- **To which organizations can I make gifts?:** You may make gifts to tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organizations, including the ACLU of Montana Foundation.
- **How do I make an IRA Charitable Rollover?:** Contact the financial institution that holds your IRA about how to instruct them to make a direct charitable transfer. You may instruct them to make a distribution to ACLU of Montana Foundation, PO Box 1968, Missoula, MT 59806, Tax ID 81-0445339. Please notify us if you would like a sample letter of instruction to send to your financial institution.
- **Benefit of Giving from Your IRA:** Giving directly from your IRA to the ACLU of Montana Foundation is not considered a taxable withdrawal. These gifts will be tax-free.

Please note: This information is not intended as tax or legal advice. We recommend that you consult with your legal and financial advisors to learn how a gift would work in your circumstances. Laws and regulations governing all gifts and availability of certain life income gifts vary by state.



Legacy Gift | Planned Giving

Providing a future gift to the ACLU of Montana can be an opportunity to advance the values most important to you in your life. You can continue the fight for justice, equality, and fairness for future generations. The ACLU offers numerous opportunities for planned giving.

If you'd like to learn more about your options, please contact our Director of Philanthropy, Cari Kimball, at 406-541-0297 or kimballc@aclumontana.org.

Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:



CARI KIMBALL

Director of Philanthropy

kimballc@aclumontana.org

406-541-0297

MEET OUR STAFF

WE ASKED OUR STAFF WHAT BROUGHT THEM TO THE ACLU OF MONTANA.

HERE'S WHAT THEY SAID:



Akilah

I came to the ACLU -MT because I am deeply committed to creating a more just and equitable society for all. I believe that we all have a moral imperative to care for each other and ensure everyone has equal access to participate in civil society and ACLU-MT provides a path to realizing this vision.



Alex

The rise of authoritarianism in 2017 and the attacks on marginalized communities left me feeling like I had no choice but to use my privilege to fight back.



Ashlee

My personal and professional commitments include actively participating in the protection of our democracy against authoritarianism, showing up authentically in all spaces, and resting with intention. ACLU of Montana creates a space where I get to do all of that and more.



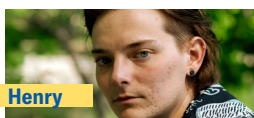
Cari

I came to the ACLU of Montana because standing up for our rights and freedoms feels particularly urgent in the face of inequity and creeping authoritarianism. Additionally, the Big Sky State and our uniquely strong Montana Constitution have a special place in my heart.



Chase

I was drawn to the ACLU of Montana because it gives me the chance to live out my values in my work. I've always believed that justice and equity aren't just abstract ideals but responsibilities that impact real people and real lives, and being part of this team allows me to turn that belief into action.



Henry

A history of advocacy with the ACLU in Tennessee combined with a deep love for the Rocky Mountain region made the ACLU of Montana a perfect fit.



Khadija

As a lifelong Montanan, I came to the ACLU to help steward a better future for the state. When democracy and the rights of the most marginalized are prioritized, everyone wins.



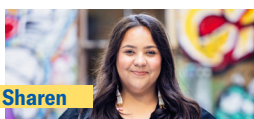
Makaya

I came to the ACLU of Montana to help create a better, more equitable Montana for all. Protecting our democracy, especially against rising authoritarianism, is work I am incredibly proud to participate in.



Michelle

Both the power of weak ties and a social media post brought me to the ACLU of Montana. Of course, my lived experience as a child at risk with an incarcerated parent, and later learning the incredible importance of systematic change, were also influential.



Sharen

After spending over a decade out of Montana, I was unsure how I would align my values, professional interests and passions, desire to advocate for Indigenous communities, and find a job doing so in Montana. And then I saw ACLU Montana's Indigenous Justice program and never looked back! I'll always love ACLU Montana for bringing me home!

STAY UP-TO-DATE

Sign up for our emails at aclumontana.org

Connect with us on ACLU of Montana's social media pages:



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@aclu-mt.bsky.social



ACLU staff and board members on the steps of the Montana State Capitol. Photo Credit: Rebecca Stumpf

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