

KNOXVILLE

Press Conference Fighting for Reproductive Justice in Knoxville



Left to Right: Rev. Laura Bogel, Briana Perry, Claire Gardner, Rep. Aftyn Behn, Prof. Wendy Bach, Colleen Conboy

Since the Dobbs decision in the summer of 2022, **we have been mobilizing alongside our partners to regain the fundamental right to abortion in Tennessee.** In February, ACLU-TN joined forces with the **Knoxville Abortion Justice Alliance** and state Representative Aftyn Behn to host a press conference in support of reproductive justice in Knoxville. Speakers at this pivotal event declared the necessity of the **Fundamental Right to Reproductive Health Care Act** (HB 1626/SB 1590), sponsored by Behn and state Senator London Lamar, which would have repealed Tennessee's abortion ban and restrictions on clinics, and protected the freedom to make personal decisions about reproductive health, including the use of contraception.

While the bill ultimately did not pass, the closed press conference brought together voices from across the state to address the urgent need to reform Tennessee's harmful reproductive health policies.

In addition to Behn, the event featured ACLU-TN Community Engagement Director Claire Gardner, Briana Perry of Healthy and Free Tennessee, Professor Wendy Bach of the University of Tennessee School of Law, Colleen Conboy of the Knoxville Abortion Justice Alliance, and the Reverend Laura Bogel.

As we reflect on this gathering, we reaffirm our commitment to defending reproductive rights and ensuring access to comprehensive reproductive health care for all Tennesseans.

MEMPHIS

Advocacy Training Advocating for Bodily Autonomy in Memphis

Throughout the 113th legislative session, we witnessed lawmakers introduce bill after bill undermining our ability to make decisions about our bodies and our lives. They refused to protect our ability to access contraception and in vitro fertilization (IVF), targeted and discriminated against transgender and non-binary Tennesseans, imposed criminal penalties for helping young people travel to access abortion care without their parents' permission, and so much more.

In March, we teamed up with OUTMemphis, the Tennessee Equality Project and CHOICES to hold a legislative advocacy training in Memphis. This event fostered intentional conversation about how Memphians can use their democratic power to defend our rights amidst the ongoing attacks on LGBTQ+ equality and reproductive justice at the Tennessee General Assembly.

Together we can show politicians that we will not ignore their attacks, and that we are working together to build power and defend Tennesseans' bodily autonomy.

Back row: Lucas Cameron-Vaughn (ACLU-TN), Jen Pepper (CHOICES), Shahin Samiei (Tennessee Equality Project), Claire Gardner (ACLU-TN)
Front row: DeMarcus Jones (Planned Parenthood of TN and North MS), Molly Quinn (OUTMemphis), Anu Iyer (OUTMemphis)





BEHIND THE SCENES

ACLU-TN POLICY DIRECTOR UNPACKS THE 2024 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BRYAN DAVIDSON (he/him)

The second year of the 113th Tennessee General Assembly began on Tuesday, January 9, 2024 and ended on Thursday, April 25, 2024.



Throughout this legislative session, we witnessed Tennessee legislators introduce discriminatory and unconstitutional bills that target immigrants, low-income families, the LGBTQ+ community, Black and Brown people, and other marginalized communities to fuel divisions for their own political gain.

Despite the many challenges faced during this legislative session, we're proud to celebrate several wins. Bryan Davidson, ACLU-TN policy director, reflects on the 2024 legislative session and how we can use policy and legislation to advance and protect civil rights and civil liberties in Tennessee.

Why is it important that Tennesseans pay attention to what happens at the legislature?

The Tennessee General Assembly is the body that passes the laws that dictate how Tennesseans are able to live their lives.

Just this year we saw a variety of bills that addressed the legality of fertility treatment, access to contraception, the constitutionally protected right to bail, free speech rights in school, access to books in libraries, and so much more.

Staying engaged and watching how your elected officials vote and paying attention to the stances they take on issues is tremendously important for determining how you would like to vote in local and state elections, which is vital to restoring and preserving our democracy.

How did you prepare for this year's legislative session?

This was my first year working full time as the ACLU-TN policy director, so I spent most of the fall prepping for the legislative session by travelling across the state to meet with lawmakers in their hometowns. Legislators are typically willing to engage more substantively in the off-season, as they're not dealing with the scheduling constraints and day-to-day grind of the legislative session. This gave me an opportunity to introduce myself and develop a personal connection with lawmakers, which made those hard conversations during the legislative session a little easier and allowed me to build positive momentum on several key legislative goals for the upcoming session.

Once the legislative session began, what were your initial priorities?

Given the onslaught of discriminatory legislation that has passed in recent years, and my experience working with the legislature in my last role in state government, I had a clear understanding that we would be playing defense a lot. As a result, I was working to identify what harmful and discriminatory legislation was going to be introduced and prioritizing my focus and resources on what we thought we could stop from passing.

One of the easiest ways to make your voice heard at the general assembly is to simply pick up the phone and call your legislator's office!

During the legislative session you are often meeting with legislators.

What do those meetings look like?

Legislator meetings during the session are very brief. **Legislators typically schedule meetings in 15-minute increments, and on any given day at the Capitol, a legislator might meet with 20 or 30 different groups.**

As a result, **a lot of times you feel like you're on an assembly line with folks cycling in and out of their office.**

Realizing that I'm just one of many people that a lawmaker will meet with in a day helped me keep my arguments short and easily digestible, and I always left behind a document in the legislator's office with the information we discussed for them to refer back to later.

How do you approach speaking to legislators with whom you may not agree?

I am a born and raised Tennessean and have been fortunate enough to live and spend time in each region of the state, so I try to start every conversation by establishing my personal connection with the legislator's district. I've found that personal connection oftentimes opens the door to having more civil disagreements on policy issue areas where we're not always in alignment. This is a big reason why I spent so much time in the off-season traveling across the state and meeting with legislators in their districts. It's so much easier to have a productive, civil conversation about a policy disagreement when you've already established a personal rapport.

I work hard to put a face to the organization and show legislators that we agree on more than they may have realized. ACLU supporters pay taxes, love our constitutional freedoms, and want the state to prosper too!

Beyond that, I tailor each conversation to my audience, looking for arguments that will resonate with legislators across the political spectrum while also furthering our organization's goals.

What was one of ACLU-TN's biggest wins at the legislature this year?

I think we had a lot of big wins. **Certainly, one of the biggest wins was watching the Pride flag ban bill fail on the Senate floor during the last week of session.** This bill would have banned the display of most flags in public schools, but the bill's sponsor was very public about his intent to target the Pride flag specifically.

LGBTQ+ rights is an issue that's very close to my heart and to the ACLU as an organization, so we worked very hard all session to demonstrate the bill's discriminatory intent and how it violated Tennesseans' free speech rights.

So it was a very satisfying moment to see that bill outright fail on the Senate floor. **Hearing the Lieutenant Governor explain that his decision to vote against the bill was because he was "tired of giving money to the ACLU" via our lawsuits challenging unconstitutional laws really solidified for me the importance of our advocacy work and the influence we have at the legislature.**

2024 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BY THE NUMBERS

3,163 messages sent by ACLU-TN supporters to legislators

95,489 social media impressions

7 legislative testimonies supported by ACLU-TN

3 proactive bills written by ACLU-TN

575 bills monitored



2024 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEHIND THE SCENES

CONT'D

What was one disappointment you faced during this year's legislative session?

A big disappointment for me this year was that we were unable to pass legislation addressing the crisis of felony voter registration in Tennessee.

Tennessee leads the nation in disenfranchising people with felony convictions. That's over 475,000 Tennesseans and 1 in 5 adult Black men in Tennessee who have served their time but have lost the ability to vote due to our extreme state policy around felony disenfranchisement.

This is an issue that we've been working on for several years alongside many other incredible voting rights advocacy partner organizations. We are dedicated to working to try to make the very complex, discriminatory voting rights restoration process simpler.

This session we did find significant bipartisan support for legislation that would help simplify the restoration process, but unfortunately, we came up just a few votes short in key committee hearings.

On the bright side, I think this year proved that we have real, bipartisan momentum on this issue, and it's definitely something that we plan to pursue further in the off-season and again next year.

While the legislative session has ended, your work doesn't stop there.

What will you be working on after the session to prepare for next year?

I will be working with our incredible coalition partner organizations to draft legislation and strategize for next session. Felony voting rights restoration will be a major focus and I'll be meeting with key lawmakers and stakeholders in the off-season to build upon our momentum from this session. Trans justice is another big off-season opportunity, and there's a need for education and conversation with legislators who are less familiar with the issues trans Tennesseans face.

What have you learned this legislative session?

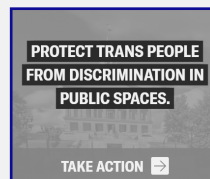
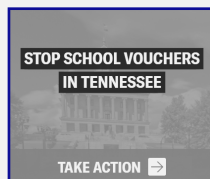
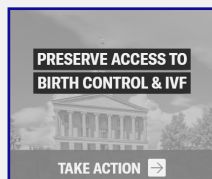
It was a pleasant surprise to see how responsive legislators can be to constituent outreach.

Many legislators come from sparsely populated rural districts far away from Nashville, and I witnessed that legislators want to hear from folks back home in their district. A few key voices can really influence a legislator's opinion on the issue. One of the easiest ways to make your voice heard at the general assembly is to simply pick up the phone and call your legislator's office!



Bryan Davidson

Pronouns: he, him, his



VIEW SOME OF THE SPECIFIC BILLS THAT WE WATCHED DURING THE 2024 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BY VISITING

[HTTPS://WWW.ACLU-TN.ORG/EN/LEGISLATION/2024-LEGISLATIVE-WATCHLIST](https://www.aclu-tn.org/en/legislation/2024-legislative-watchlist) OR SCANNING THE QR CODE.

LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

BoroPride Victory!

We are thrilled to share a victory in our ongoing efforts to protect the free speech and expression of the LGBTQ+ community and drag performers.

In February, we settled our lawsuit filed against the City of Murfreesboro over its anti-LGBTQ+ ordinance and its local policy denying all special event permit requests from the Tennessee Equality Project (TEP), founder and host of the annual BoroPride Festival.

This victory follows a yearlong battle against Murfreesboro officials, who engaged in a concerted anti-LGBTQ+ campaign to suppress free speech and expression, led by City Manager Craig Tindall and Mayor Shane McFarland. The campaign culminated in the city establishing an official policy prohibiting the issuance of permits to TEP; discriminatorily and unconstitutionally denying TEP's request for a permit for 2023 BoroPride; and implementing a sweeping and vague ordinance designed to censor any LGBTQ+ speech or conduct within the Murfreesboro community and from TEP. The ordinance was also cited as an attempt to justify banning multiple LGBTQ+ books from Murfreesboro public libraries.

As part of the settlement, the city agreed to pay \$500,000 to compensate for harm caused and to reimburse attorneys' fees, repeal the anti-LGBTQ+ ordinance, and accept and process any future event permit applications from TEP. City Manager Craig Tindall, who issued the ban on TEP permits last year, is also prohibited under the terms of the settlement from reviewing any future TEP permit requests.

In light of the settlement, the parties agreed to dismiss the case, bringing the lawsuit to a close and ensuring that the rights and dignity of Murfreesboro's LGBTQ+ community are protected.



Fighting for Accurate Driver's Licenses for Trans Tennesseans

In April, we filed a lawsuit on behalf of a transgender woman to challenge the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security's (TDSHS) enforcement of a new rule that bans all transgender people from changing the sex designation on their driver's licenses. The lawsuit was filed in partnership with Holland & Associates PC.

The plaintiff, "Jane Doe," whose identity is being withheld out of concern for her safety, requested that TDSHS update her driver's license to reflect her correct gender and appearance. As a result of TDSHS' enforcement of its new rule, which never passed through lawful procedures, Ms. Doe was denied an accurate license solely based on the fact that she is transgender.

Soon after we filed the lawsuit, Chrissy Miller, a transgender woman living in rural Tennessee, reached out to inform us that three months after obtaining a driver's license that matched her gender identity, she received a letter from the assistant commissioner of the driver services division stating that she must surrender her license, or she would lose her driving privileges. As Chrissy began to think about surrendering her driver's license, she began to fear physical and violent altercations when carrying out simple daily tasks where she would be forced to use an incorrect license.

All of us, including transgender people, need accurate and consistent identity documents that reflect who we are, as these documents allow us to travel, rent a car, start new jobs, check into a hotel, open bank accounts and more.

Days after meeting with Chrissy, we filed an amendment to our original complaint to add Chrissy Miller as a co-plaintiff. In addition, we filed a motion for a temporary restraining order to stop TDSHS from forcing Chrissy to surrender her license or suspend her driving privileges.

On June 6, the court granted a temporary injunction allowing Chrissy to keep her driver's license. The lawsuit is still pending.

ACLU

Tennessee

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From tabling to storytelling, attending rallies and mobilizing voters, we need volunteers who want to gain advocacy skills, create community and help us build power to push for change at the ballot box, in our communities and at the state legislature.

Our volunteers embody the spirit of civic engagement, dedicating their time, energy and talents to ensure that the voices of the marginalized are heard and their rights protected. Whether it's defending reproductive rights, opposing censorship, advocating for criminal justice reform or fighting against discrimination in all its forms, our volunteers are on the front lines, championing causes that resonate with the core values of our democracy.

We are relaunching our volunteer program, so if you are interested in joining our volunteer team, please visit <https://action.aclu.org/volunteer/volunteer-aclu-tennessee> OR scan the QR code.

VOLUNTEER WITH ACLU-TN