



Choice is a HUMAN RIGHT.



ACLU Tennessee
THE **FALL 2024**
VIGIL



PHOTO BY NOAH STEWART

DEMOCRACY & VOTING 2024 ELECTION SEASON



Over the past couple of months, our community engagement team has been hard at work building civic engagement in communities throughout Memphis, specifically in House District 97 (HD97). This led to the formation of the “Our Vote Our Future” campaign, **where our community engagement team reached 12,000 voters across Memphis, increasing voter engagement throughout the city.**

In addition to our work in Memphis, **our communications team put together public education social media content and digital ad campaigns reaching over 170,000** Tennesseans ahead of election season to ensure that voters across the state were encouraged and ready to vote.

While election season is over, our work is not.

“The election is now behind us, and with what lies ahead, it will be more important than ever to be in community with those who are committed to fiercely holding the line for freedom in Tennessee,” said **Claire Gardner, ACLU-TN Community Engagement Director.** “We are ready to stand arm-in-arm with our coalition partners, our passionate network of volunteers, and the thousands of ACLU supporters across the state to hold our elected officials accountable at the legislature.”

Donald Trump and John Gillepsie may have been democratically reelected, but we know that a second Trump Administration and continued Tennessee GOP supermajority represents a clear and present danger to our democratic norms, processes, and institutions.

The fact is: we’re familiar with fighting a Trump White House and Tennessee’s GOP supermajority, and we’re ready to do it again.

We know the next 4 years will be challenging, but we’ll be ready on day one — you can count on it.

LEGAL ADVOCACY

VOTER INTIMIDATION LETTERS

We know that our democracy works best when all voters can participate in election season, and we also know that the way our government treats immigrants should reflect our core values of equality, fair treatment, freedom from discrimination and opportunity. However, through the course of this year, we have witnessed the Tennessee government repeatedly attempt to disenfranchise immigrant communities—whether during the legislative session, or during election season. On June 13, Tennessee Coordinator of Elections Mark Goins sent 14,375 letters to registered voters threatening criminal prosecution for illegal voting and demanding that they verify their U.S. citizenship.

In response, we along with the ACLU and numerous advocacy organizations sent a demand letter to Goins stating that his letters were unconstitutional and violated federal law, specifically the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) and the Voting Rights Act. We also demanded that the Coordinator of Elections:

- Stop all actions that perpetuate voter intimidation and violate the U.S Constitution and federal law,
- Issue a public statement declaring that no person will be removed from Tennessee’s voter rolls in relation to the June 13th letters,
- Distribute letters to June 13th letter recipients stating that their voter registration will not be purged and that they have the right to vote as normal, and
- Release all records related to the development and implementation of the unconstitutional voter list maintenance program.

What we do know is that this is about all of us. Standing up for what is right is about more than the fair treatment of immigrants — it’s about the kind of community we want in this state.

FREE SPEECH & CENSORSHIP

RUTHERFORD COUNTY BOOK BANS

Over the course of this year, **over 40 books have been banned from Rutherford County Schools' (RCS) libraries.** On September 19, the RCS board banned an additional 6 books banned, which included highly acclaimed novels like *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky.

Prior to that board meeting, we sent a letter on behalf of concerned Rutherford County parents and students urging the Board to respect the First Amendment right of their students to freely access information in their school libraries. Nevertheless, they banned the books, and they won't stop here. **Libraries are revered, protected places where students should be able to encounter a marketplace of ideas.**

If school boards in Rutherford County, and across the state, continue banning books at this pace, Tennessee students will be shopping in marketplaces with nothing but empty shelves.

To learn how to fight censorship in your community visit: <https://www.aclu.org/rtl-resources>

LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

CAN'T HIDE OUR PRIDE

Since 1936, the ACLU and their affiliates have been fighting for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community throughout the nation, and we are proud to continue the fight in Tennessee. In August, our team hit the road to provide legal support and legal observers at the "Can't Hide Our Pride" rally, organized by Blount Pride, to bring awareness and visibility to LGBTQ+ folks in Blount County.



When asked about one of her favorite moments at the rally, **Lauren Davis, our People and Operations Coordinator**, said "I was really impressed with how supportive and open St. Andrews Episcopal Church Maryville TN was to the rally — they opened up their church so people could cool off and offered access to their bathrooms. They were very welcoming!"

Photos by Elijah Lightfoot (@elijahlightfootphotography)

UPDATES FROM THE COURTS



CRIMINAL LEGAL REFORM BAIL REFORM IN TENNESSEE

During the 2024 legislative session, Tennessee passed a new law rolling back successful Shelby County bail reforms. The new law made **Tennessee the first state in the nation to prohibit judges from considering whether people appearing before them will be able to pay for release.** Barring judges from considering an arrestee's ability to pay almost guarantees that people who are not a flight or safety risk will be detained pretrial simply because they cannot afford to pay their cash bail. We want to ensure a fair system for everyone that isn't based on wealth.

That's why in July, we, along with the **ACLU Criminal Law Reform Project and Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, filed a lawsuit on**

behalf of Just City Memphis to challenge the constitutionality of this bail law. According to the lawsuit, the unprecedented law violates the Fourteenth Amendment by mandating unfair bail hearing procedures and discriminatory wealth-based detention.

We are currently awaiting a response to our request for a preliminary injunction that would prohibit the Shelby County Sheriff from continuing to enforce this law. **A wealth-based bail system is ineffective at assessing and addressing an individual's risk of flight or danger to the community,** and we will continue to push for a state where our justice system is fair for all.

TRANS JUSTICE ACLU-TN HEADED TO THE SUPREME COURT

We all want what's best for our children, and families with transgender youth are no different. No parent should be denied the freedom to do what's best for their family, and that includes helping their transgender youth access the care that is right for them.

"Tennessee, along with many other states in the South, has become a testing ground for targeted assaults on the constitutional rights of trans Tennesseans, said Lucas Cameron-Vaughn, ACLU-TN staff attorney. "Every day this law remains in place, it inflicts further pain, injustice, and discrimination on trans youth and their families."

Despite the state's attempts to limit the healthcare and expression of transgender

youth statewide, we know that **the Supreme Court can stop states like Tennessee from depriving trans youth of the medical care that they, their parents, and their doctors all recognize as vital to their health and well-being.**

In this upcoming landmark Supreme Court case (U.S. v. Skrmetti), transgender adolescents, their families, and a medical provider from Tennessee urge the Supreme Court to block the Tennessee state law banning hormone therapies for trans youth as the ban is a violation of the U.S. Constitution's Equal Protection Clause.

Oral arguments in U.S. v. Skrmetti are on December 4, 2024, with a ruling expected in 2025 — to stay up to date with this case, visit our website and follow our social media.

WELCOME NEW STAFF

At the ACLU of Tennessee we have **15** passionate staff members working to advance and defend civil rights and liberties daily — fighting for reproductive justice, safeguarding free speech, protecting the rights that empower our communities, and so much more.



ARRIELLE KITENGE (she/her)
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIST

Arrielle Kitenge joined the ACLU-TN in May of 2024 as the **Community Engagement Strategist** with the dedication to advance and protect civil liberties and civil rights in Tennessee. By using a mix of strategies that center around building political, electoral, and community power, Arrielle focuses on voter mobilization, volunteer engagement, and community organizing.

Arrielle attended The University of Tennessee, Knoxville majoring in Sociology with dual concentrations in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies and Environmental Issues. As a believer in the power of collective action and work, she looks forward to building bridges across communities and advocating for policies and initiatives that promote equity, justice, and dignity for all. Arrielle is committed to not just advocating for change, but also empowering others to take action and become agents of transformation within their own communities.



MALLIKA VOHRA (they/she)
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIST

In September of 2024, Mallika Vohra joined the ACLU-TN staff as our **Communications Strategist**. As a 2nd-generation immigrant growing up in West Virginia and Tennessee, Mallika learned quickly that maintaining a strong and creative online presence was key to advocating for themself and their community.

After graduating in 2020 from the University of Tennessee with a Bachelor's in Anthropology and Hispanic Studies with a concentration in Human Rights, Mallika completed an AmeriCorps term at the Centro Hispano de East TN creating central communications structures for the organization. This work followed them to the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) and TIRRC Votes, where Mallika worked for 2 years creating vital email, press, and social media strategies and processes to boost digital engagement (from the URL to the IRL, as they say) amongst 1st and 2nd generation immigrants and refugees in Tennessee.

They take pride in being able to expand their work into a broader sphere of social justice communications, so that as many Tennesseans as possible are informed about the ACLU-TN's work, and realize the importance of our mission.



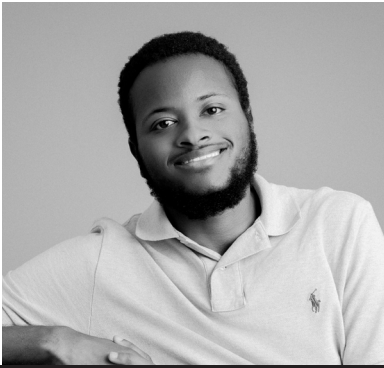
ROSHAN NATARAJAN (he/him)
POLICY STRATEGIST

Roshan Natarajan joined ACLU-TN as a **Policy Strategist** in 2024 to support the organization's policy advocacy efforts across Tennessee. He grew up in Memphis and moved to Nashville to attend Vanderbilt University, where he studied political science and chemistry.

After graduating from Vanderbilt in 2021, Roshan moved to the west coast to attend Stanford Law School, where his studies focused on constitutional law, international law, and human rights law. Outside of the classroom, Roshan helped lead the Stanford International Refugees Project and spent plenty of time surfing at the many beaches in the Bay Area.

His favorite part of law school was working in the Stanford International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic. His clinic work involved writing an amicus brief in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on a case concerning homophobic

and transphobic mob violence in Jamaica. Because of his experiences in clinic, Roshan chose to pursue a career in civil rights policy with the ACLU of Tennessee.



KAB BROWLEY (he/him)
OPERATIONS ASSOCIATE

Kab Browley is the **Operations Associate** at ACLU-TN, bringing a deep-rooted passion for music and the arts from his hometown of Memphis. With a Bachelor’s Degree in Music Business, Kab has a rich background in working on concerts and events, dedicated to showcasing art and advocating for significant causes. His commitment to advocacy spans from music and arts to human rights, reflecting a lifelong dedication to promoting justice and equity.

At the ACLU-TN, he leverages his skills to support the organization’s mission of challenging intolerance, holding the government accountable, and achieving collective justice. His enthusiasm for contributing to a team dedicated to defending constitutional rights and fostering an inclusive society drives his work. He is excited about his role in advancing the ACLU’s goals and making a meaningful impact in the community.



KEOSHA STEWART (she/her)
OPERATIONS ASSOCIATE

Keosha Stewart joined the ACLU-TN in September 2024 as the **Operations Associate**. She is responsible for creating, maintaining, and managing the organization’s core workflows and providing administrative support to operational and programmatic leadership activities.

A native of Memphis, TN, Keosha’s experiences growing up in an underserved community fueled her passion for creating equitable environments. She graduated from Barnard College of Columbia University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. While in college, she focused on educational equity, advocating for inclusive policies and working on initiatives to address disparities in access to quality education, particularly for underserved communities.

Before joining ACLU-TN, Keosha was an education manager. In this role, she oversaw developing and implementing transformative programs that foster creativity, critical thinking, and personal growth. Collaborating with educators, community partners, and musicians, she created innovative learning experiences that empowered students to reach their full potential.

She is passionate about social justice and community building and looks forward to helping streamline operations so the ACLU can serve more Tennesseans.

Staff Headshots by Joana Zuniga (@bemarigoldstudio)



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<https://action.aclu.org/signup/tn-email-updates>

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We have an urgent role to play in this time of crisis – and so do you. To fund our crucial work to litigate, legislate, and advocate for all our rights in the coming days. We're ready for whatever comes our way, but we need your support to fuel our efforts.

Make a donation today to show your support by scanning the QR code – every dollar goes towards protecting the civil liberties and civil rights of all Tennesseans.



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