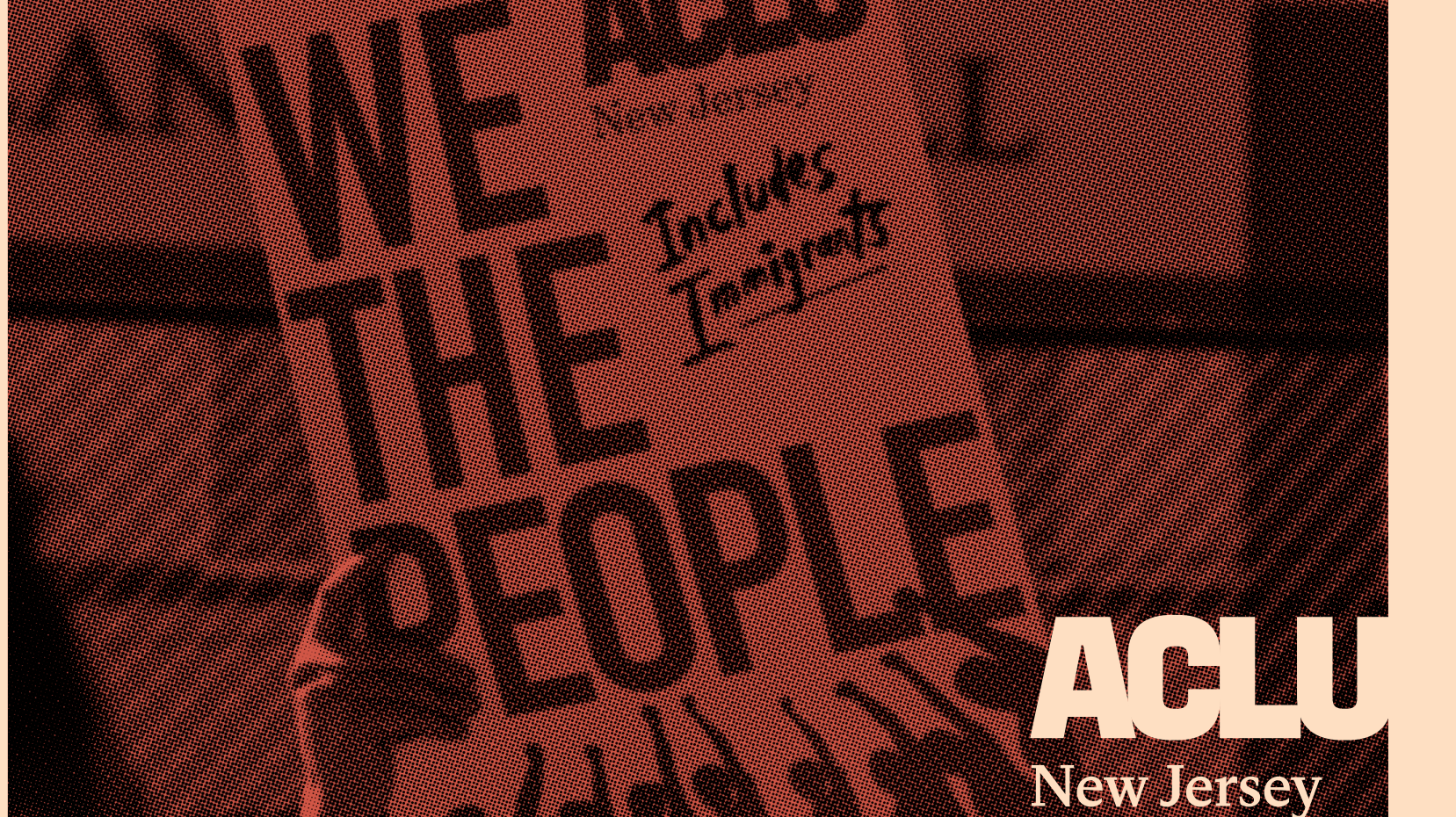


IN PURSUIT



OF JUSTICE

ACLU
New Jersey
2025 ANNUAL REPORT



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD PRESIDENT

IN PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

Over the past year, we've seen the federal government abuse its power with impunity.

The second Trump administration is not just picking up where it left off – it has weaponized the full force of the federal government with more aggression and fewer constraints.

It has militarized our cities. It has targeted judges, persecuted so-called political enemies, and arrested those who dare to disagree. It has terrorized immigrant communities. It has targeted trans kids. It has punished universities, law firms, nonprofits, media, corporations, and every institution that has something to say about justice, equality, and the rule of law.

Amid this onslaught, we have seen communities across the country rise in the face of power. Protesters have taken to the streets in record numbers to demand accountability. Voters have made their voices heard by turning out for local elections. Advocates have built grassroots movements from the ground up to fight for a fairer future.

We, the people, hold the power.

But achieving the change we hope to see requires all of us. It requires people to act while families are being torn apart, while protesters are being criminalized and killed in the streets, and while people are being disappeared.

At the ACLU of New Jersey, we've taken this mission to heart in our pursuit of justice.

AT THE ACLU, WE SUPPORT ANYONE WHO DARES TO PROTEST. THIS ISN'T ABOUT PARTISANSHIP – IT'S ABOUT PATRIOTISM.

When Mahmoud Khalil, a lawful permanent resident, was detained in the dark of night in direct retaliation for his constitutionally protected speech, we joined the legal team that represented him in court.

From the start, it was clear Mr. Khalil's arrest was a flagrant violation of the free speech protections afforded to everyone in the United States, regardless of viewpoint, and regardless of immigration status. We will continue to fight for his free speech rights and his right to stay in the United States.

When the Department of Justice targeted sanctuary cities in New Jersey, we filed a brief representing 29 partner organizations and defending community trust policies in Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, and Hoboken.

We will continue to fight for the right of communities to protect the safety, health, and welfare of all residents, regardless of immigration status.

When the Trump administration brought politically-motivated charges against Newark Mayor Ras Baraka and Rep. LaMonica McIver after a congressional oversight visit of Delaney Hall – a federal immigration detention facility in Newark – we immediately demanded the charges be dropped.

If the Trump administration can target elected officials who oppose its extreme agenda, then they can target anyone. We will continue to fight for the rule of law and against authoritarianism.

When millions of people took to the streets to make it clear there's no place for kings in America, we joined them. Together, we co-hosted 2,600 protests across the country in the largest day of action since President Trump's first term. Over 50 rallies took place in New Jersey alone.

At the ACLU, we support anyone who dares to protest. This isn't about partisanship – it's about patriotism. We will continue to speak out against abuses of power.

At this unprecedented time, New Jersey has shown that it can be a national leader on civil rights. Our victories from the past year that you'll read about in this report are a testament to that truth.

The progress we've achieved would be impossible without your support. We're grateful to have you by our side, fighting for the pursuit of justice.

Onward,



Amol Sinha
Executive Director



Marc Beebe
President, Board of Trustees

IN PURSUIT OF



After 104 days of being unjustly detained for his advocacy for Palestinian rights, Mahmoud Khalil arrives home.

Scout Turfajian/ACLU

THE FIRST AMENDMENT PROTECTS OUR RIGHTS TO EXPRESS OURSELVES, TO GATHER WITH OTHERS, AND TO PROTEST OUR GOVERNMENT – FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS OUR DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON.

Dissent is not grounds for detention or deportation.

In March, the ACLU-NJ joined the legal team of Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian student at Columbia University and lawful permanent resident. He was detained by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in New York in retaliation for his advocacy in support of Palestinian rights, and shortly after, DHS transferred him 1,300 miles away to a Louisiana detention facility, ripping him away from his family, community, and legal counsel. It is clear that the federal government targeted him solely for his constitutionally protected speech.

After being unlawfully detained for three months, a federal judge in New Jersey ruled that Mr. Khalil's detention and attempted removal was likely unconstitutional, and he returned home to his family and son, who was born while Mr. Khalil was detained. Unfortunately, in January 2026, the decision was overturned, but the case

remains ongoing as we continue to fight for Mr. Khalil's rights.

Mr. Khalil's unconstitutional detention for exercising his First Amendment rights is just one example of the Trump administration's broader efforts to stifle dissent, censor speech, and punish anyone who disagrees with its political views. In addition to targeting immigrants, the government has targeted teachers, journalists, media companies, and law enforcement personnel who express contrary views to the Trump administration, attempting to intimidate them into silence.

The right to free expression is fundamental to democracy, and no one should fear punishment or retaliation – like detention or deportation – for sharing their values and beliefs. The ACLU-NJ will continue to challenge the Trump administration's cruel anti-immigration agenda and advocate for First Amendment protections, so everyone has the freedom to share their voice.

“I WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT, THROUGH EVERY LEGAL AVENUE AND WITH EVERY OUNCE OF DETERMINATION, UNTIL MY RIGHTS, AND THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS LIKE ME, ARE FULLY PROTECTED.”

MAHMOUD KHALIL



Advocates rally outside of Delaney Hall in Newark on March 11, 2025.



IN PURSUIT OF IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

ALL PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF STATUS, SHOULD FEEL SAFE TO LEARN AND LIVE IN NEW JERSEY.

When the government attempts to deny legal rights and due process to one group of people, everyone's rights are at risk. The Trump administration has been unlawfully targeting international students across the country in a concerted effort to chill academic freedom and terrorize immigrant communities.

In April, as part of our broader work to protect immigrants' rights, we filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of six international students at Rutgers University who had their student status effectively terminated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Our lawsuit argued that the Trump administration's abrupt termination of the students' immigration records, and effectively their F-1 student status, violates their fundamental right to due process provided under the Fifth Amendment.

The following month, a federal judge granted a preliminary injunction on behalf of the students. The order required the

government to restore the students' records retroactive to the original termination date and ensured the students would be afforded notice and an opportunity for a judge to review before the government made a new attempt to terminate their records.

Shortly afterward, we asked the court to convert the case into a class action for all affected students in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. The amended complaint added a claim challenging a new ICE policy that unlawfully expands its authority to terminate students' records and called out the terminations for what they were: discriminatory targeting of international students.

As this case continues, we're calling on state leaders to do more to build a fairer future for all New Jerseyans – regardless of immigration status. At the ACLU-NJ, we will continue to fight back against the Trump administration's unconstitutional attacks on students and immigrant communities.

IN PURSUIT OF YOUTH JUSTICE



James Comer celebrates his release with friends, family, and the ACLU-NJ on October 17, 2025.

ADDRESSING INJUSTICE IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM MEANS CONSIDERING YOUTH AND LIVED EXPERIENCE DURING SENTENCING.

In 2003, James Comer received a sentence of 75 years in prison with more than 68 years without parole for his role in four robberies and a felony murder when he was 17 years old. After landmark appeals that ultimately eliminated de facto life sentences for children, Mr. Comer was released in October.

The court opinions in Mr. Comer's cases, in which he was represented by the ACLU-NJ and our partners, created opportunities for young people to petition for early release and have already provided a second chance for nearly 100 young people in New Jersey who had been sentenced to extreme prison terms.

The ACLU-NJ and our partners first filed a motion to correct Mr. Comer's illegal sentence in 2014.

Without this legal intervention, Mr. Comer would not have been eligible for parole until 2069 at 86 years old. Instead, he is free at age 42.

The human cost of mass incarceration – and its toll on individuals, families, and communities – is immeasurable, and the burden falls disproportionately on people of color. New Jersey has a higher rate of racial disparities in its prison population than any other state in the country, meaning every decarcerative policy change in the Garden

State advances racial justice. The ACLU-NJ will keep pushing for change that combats injustice in the criminal legal system and builds a fairer, more equitable future for all.

“IT MEANS THE WORLD TO ME TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO REJOIN MY LOVED ONES. I AM FOREVER GRATEFUL FOR THIS SECOND CHANCE AND RELIEVED THAT NO CHILD WILL FACE THE HOPELESSNESS THAT I ENDURED WHEN I WAS EFFECTIVELY SENTENCED TO DIE IN PRISON.”

JAMES COMER

IN PURSUIT OF DECARCERATION

CLEMENCY CHANGES LIVES FOR THE BETTER BY TURNING REDEMPTION INTO REALITY.

The ACLU-NJ launched The Clemency Project in 2024 as an integral part of a larger decarcerative vision that centers racial and social justice – and reimagines the criminal legal system as we know it.

Working alongside partners, we have been able to make historic strides for decarceration. The Clemency Project represented 90 people petitioning to have their sentences commuted, including survivors of domestic violence and those facing extreme trial penalties. Gov. Murphy granted 37 of our clients commutations, and 455 total people received clemency – that’s more than all New Jersey governors since 1994 combined.

We have witnessed clemency change people’s lives for the better, proving second chances should be the standard in New Jersey.

Through advocacy, client meetings, authored petitions, and deep belief in the power of rehabilitation, The Clemency Project has saved 202,767 days – or 555 ½ years – of incarceration for people serving extreme sentences.

Clemency is not simply forgiveness. It is recognizing the dignity of those trapped in the criminal legal system, while acknowledging that change is necessary. At the ACLU-NJ, we will always fight for second chances.

“I HOPE THAT MY STORY CAN AID AT-RISK YOUTH IN THEIR JOURNEYS TO CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES BY SHOWING IF I CAN DO IT, THEY CAN TOO.”

KENNETH BACON-VAUGHTERS RECEIVED CLEMENCY IN NOVEMBER. MR. BACON-VAUGHTERS WAS ARRESTED AT 18 YEARS OLD FOR A FELONY MURDER ROBBERY CHARGE AND WAS SENTENCED TO 40 YEARS.



ACLU-NJ greeted Clemency Project clients released from East Jersey State Prison on January 30, 2026.



“I LOOK FORWARD TO RE-ENTERING SOCIETY AS A PRODUCTIVE CITIZEN AND AM GRATEFUL TO BE GRANTED THIS SECOND CHANCE.”

KARLA FREEMAN WAS GRANTED CLEMENCY IN NOVEMBER. MS. FREEMAN, A SURVIVOR OF ABUSE FROM THE AGE OF SIX, WAS SENTENCED TO 30 YEARS FOR FELONY MURDER AND SECOND-DEGREE ROBBERY.

IN PURSUIT OF AN INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY

THE WORK TO PROTECT AND EXPAND THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES AFFORDED TO ALL NEW JERSEYANS BEGINS AT THE BALLOT BOX.

In recent years, the U.S. Supreme Court has eroded long-standing voting rights protections provided under the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965. These actions – coupled with a Trump administration intent on undermining access to the ballot at every turn – have enabled states to pass widespread voting restrictions.

Despite the racial gerrymandering, voter suppression, and election interference taking place across the country, we know voting remains a cornerstone of our democracy and the fundamental right upon which all civil liberties rest.

In September, we launched our Vote Your Values initiative, a new portfolio of work to increase civic engagement and voter participation in state elections by connecting with communities on the issues that impact their lives.

Through a combination of direct voter contact – text, mail, and door-to-door canvassing – the ACLU-NJ reached over 530,000 voters, playing a significant role in engaging communities across the state.

In addition to our ongoing legal work to protect voter access at the polls, we also advocated for the passage of bills that would protect and strengthen voting rights. The John R. Lewis New Jersey Voter Empowerment Act will restore and modernize the protections of the federal Voting Rights Act, which have been steadily attacked and weakened in recent decades.

New Jersey must continue protecting the right to vote and combatting rampant voter suppression, especially barriers to voting that disproportionately harm our most vulnerable communities. Voting is power, and that power belongs to the people.



IN PURSUIT OF

LEGISLATIVE ACTION



Advocates rally outside of the New Jersey State House in support of the People's Agenda on December 8, 2025.

Fabienne Calkins



CALLING FOR PROTECTIONS AND EXPANSIONS OF FUNDAMENTAL CIVIL RIGHTS TO BUILD A FAIRER NEW JERSEY FOR ALL.

Following the election of Gov. Sherrill in November, we delivered the People's Agenda, a collective advocacy effort to pass key racial and social justice bills during the New Jersey Legislature's lame duck session.



The ACLU-NJ organized the collective, which comprised over 35 New Jersey advocacy organizations, facilitated the collaboration and prioritization of bills, and planned several days of action in support of the People's Agenda, including a statewide in-district lobby day and day of action at the State House.

As a result of this work, we celebrated the passage of multiple bills that will advance civil rights in New Jersey, including pieces of legislation that will strengthen protections against police use of force and advance immigrants' rights through the development of model policies for schools, hospitals, shelters, food pantries, and other essential services.



Advocates participate in an in-district lobby day in support of the People's Agenda on December 2, 2025.

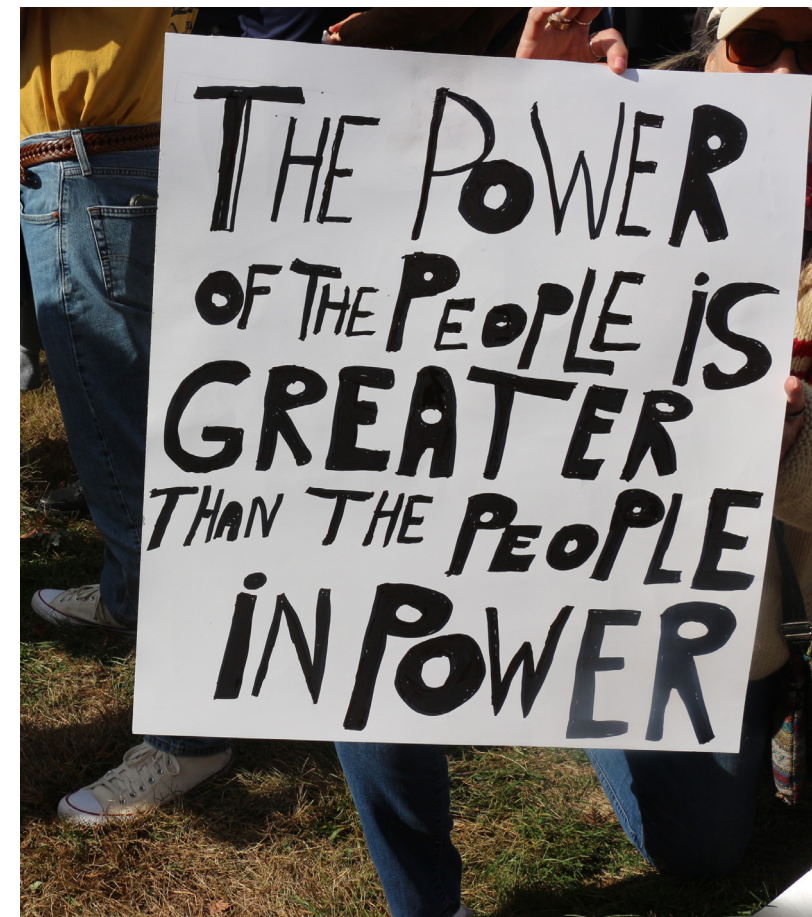
Fabienne Calkins

Though our state made important strides during this lame duck session, there is much more to be done. The people of New Jersey deserve elected officials who will rise to meet this moment when our communities are facing renewed attacks by a Trump administration that is set on abusing its power. State lawmakers have a responsibility to keep New Jerseyans healthy and safe. If there was ever a time for action, it is now.

We know our communities are energized, passionate, and committed to the fight to protect liberty and justice for all. We have seen them in action, and we are ready to keep fighting alongside them to achieve even more change in 2026.



The ACLU-NJ participated in No Kings rallies across the state on October 18, 2025.



IN PURSUIT OF PEOPLE POWER

THE PEOPLE WILL NOT BE SILENT AS THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ABUSES ITS POWER, UNDERMINES DEMOCRACY, AND ATTACKS OUR COMMUNITIES.

Throughout 2025, the ACLU-NJ supported and joined community members in demonstrations to reject authoritarianism and show what true democracy looks like.

Since the start of his second administration, President Trump has continually attempted to silence opposition, disenfranchise marginalized communities, and erode the rule of law. Communities immediately mobilized to take action, voice their dissent, and fight against the administration's abuses of power.

To meet the public's needs and equip people with the necessary information to protect themselves and their communities, the ACLU-NJ hosted dozens of Know Your Rights trainings for hundreds of people. With the expertise of our team and the collaboration of community partners, we worked to empower and educate people on their constitutional rights while protesting, encountering ICE agents, and living their everyday lives.

As a result of this collective momentum, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in April for Hands Off! protests, and the ACLU-NJ was right there with them. Over 20 rallies took place here in New Jersey with thousands of people showing up in support of democracy, constitutional protections, and justice for all.

A couple months later, we joined another mass mobilization: No Kings. Millions participated in thousands of demonstrations in the largest display of collective resistance since Trump's inauguration. The movement is growing, and each time there is a mass mobilization, more people show up and speak out.

We the people could not be clearer: our country has no place for kings. As long as the Trump administration continues to unlawfully target anyone who is unwilling to do its bidding, the ACLU-NJ will keep showing up to defend our communities, our rights, and our democracy.

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 Cassie Vega, Civic Engagement Organizer
 Liza Weisberg, Supervising Attorney

The following staff left the ACLU-NJ in the past year; we thank them for their efforts in creating a more just and equitable New Jersey: Sal Amico, Eric McKinley, and Hannah Seewald.

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FINANCIALS

INCOME AND EXPENSES FISCAL YEAR 2025

| SUPPORT & REVENUE | TOTAL |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| CONTRIBUTIONS | \$2,992,105* |
| GRANTS | \$1,748,444 |
| MEMBERSHIP | \$1,441,748 |
| INTEREST & DIVIDENDS | \$234,413 |
| BEQUESTS | \$108,582 |
| HONORARIUMS | \$4,025 |
| OTHER INCOME | \$1,638 |
| TOTAL | \$6,530,955 |

*INCLUDES SPECIAL EVENTS INCOME

| EXPENSES | TOTAL |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| PROGRAM | \$3,911,431 |
| MANAGEMENT & GENERAL | \$992,096 |
| FUNDRAISING | \$642,089 |
| TOTAL | \$5,545,616 |

| | |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| UNREALIZED GAIN ON INVESTMENT SECURITIES | \$342,862 |
| NET | \$1,328,201 |

FOR THE ACLU OF NEW JERSEY AND THE ACLU OF NEW JERSEY FOUNDATION FROM APRIL 1, 2024, TO MARCH 31, 2025.



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