

ACLU of Virginia's **STRATEGIC PLAN** 2023-2026



Introduction

The ACLU of Virginia is a multi-issue, nonpartisan organization committed to protecting the civil rights and liberties of all Virginians.

The 2023 - 2026 Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for our efforts. It reflects input from staff, the board of directors, donors, and community partners.

Our plan is a living document that will change as the work changes and new issues arise. We have important work ahead of us and we hope our plan gives you a glimpse into our work to create a Commonwealth that is fair for all Virginians.

IN OUR COMMONWEALTH
BLACK LIVES MATTER
LET PEOPLE VOTE
TRANS PEOPLE BELONG
LOVE IS LOVE
PEOPLE. NOT PRISONS.
ABORTION IS A RIGHT
WE THE PEOPLE MEANS EVERYONE.

We're Meeting the Moment

Through our work and our attention to community needs, we must meet the current moment: a political climate that is lighting and fanning the flames of intensified and dangerous attacks across all of our strategic priorities.

These attacks are not just theoretical; they are creating material threats to the civil rights, civil liberties, lives and livelihoods of the people and communities most directly impacted by the laws and systems we seek to shape and change. And they are also creating direct threats to our democracy: evading due process rights, upending systems of checks and balances, and suppressing civic engagement and access to justice, most especially for marginalized people and communities.

As such, our work is guided by these acknowledgements and commitments:

- We approach all of our work through a racial justice lens. Protecting civil rights and civil liberties by working to redress racial discrimination and disparities in Virginia sits at the core of our mission and vision and is woven directly into the fabric of our strategies.
- We work to protect and advance civil rights and liberties in Virginia not only for those who live in the state, but also to establish a safe haven for people throughout the South. ACLU of Virginia is a proud member of the ACLU Southern Collective, a group of 13 state affiliates that represent a geography that remains the epicenter in the battle for freedom and equality in this country and the heart of our pro-civil rights struggle and resistance movements. As an affiliate in a politically moderate Southern state, it is our duty to break ground across our strategic priorities with our entire Collective of partners in mind, and on behalf of the many people and communities in the deeper South who struggle under harsher and more intransigent political climates than ours. We envision a Virginia that is a model for the South in protecting the civil rights and civil liberties of all people.

We're Meeting the Moment

- Our work is not necessarily siloed by strategic priority area. Some of our efforts sit at the intersection of two or more of our priorities, and our work is strengthened by viewing our strategies and goals in one area through the filter of another.
- Our work to protect Virginians' privacy rights, oppose invasive governmental surveillance, and strengthen Fourth Amendment protections—does not fit solely into one particular strategic area, but rather connects within and across them all, and we will seek opportunities to address these issues where they intersect with each of our priorities.
- We must make room to be flexible and responsive to emerging and evolving issues while still being closely guided by our strategic plan. We acknowledge that in responding to rapidly changing needs, we may have to scale our ongoing or planned work accordingly.
- We are always working across all of our priorities to use storytelling and other communication tools to fight against dehumanization of, and move public opinion toward, respect for people who are most directly impacted by the laws and policies we seek to shape.
- We are always working to deepen relationships with our powerful networks of partners, prioritizing our efforts in a way that complements the broader advocacy picture and leverages our strengths to maximize our collective power.



Who We Are

Vision

The ACLU of Virginia works alongside fellow Virginians to make liberty, justice, equity, inclusion, and dignity a reality for all people.

Mission

The ACLU of Virginia is a nonpartisan organization that defends and promotes the civil liberties and civil rights of all Virginians, particularly for those who are still fighting to secure the full exercise of those rights. With an unwavering commitment, we fight with and for Virginians for systemic change in our communities, in the legislature, and in the courts to ensure fairness, liberty, and justice and to realize the promise of the U.S. Constitution.

FIGHTING FOR
ALL OF US.

Our values

Acknowledging that white supremacy is deeply ingrained in Virginia's history, laws, and current policies and practices, our commitment to racial justice is a core value that runs throughout our work. We work in partnership with impacted communities and individuals to eradicate those inequities.

The ACLU of Virginia believes and acts upon these values:

Justice

We tenaciously strive for a world where all people are treated fairly, with dignity, and have equality under the law and in practice.

Centering People

Recognizing the value in every person, we affirm everyone's right to dignity and collectively strive to promote a culture of care and justice, marked by mutual respect. We build shared power with communities to foster a just and transformed world

Accountability

We hold government actors to the highest levels of public accountability and hold ourselves accountable to our mission, to our clients and the communities we serve, to our members, and to one another.

Equity

We seek to build and sustain an equitable and inclusive culture internally and externally – one where people feel valued and respected for who they are.

Courage

We remain true to our principles even when doing so is controversial or unpopular. We are willing to risk failure in pursuit of meaningful systemic change, and we persevere in the face of adversity.

We will live these values with a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusivity, and belonging inside and outside of our affiliate.

How we do our work

Systemic change requires the use of varied approaches.

We employ an integrated advocacy approach to employ a variety of skills, tactics, and relationships to achieve our outcomes.

POLICY

We advocate at both the local & state level for policies that will protect and expand civil rights and liberties for all Virginians. Through our work, we seek to correct historical wrongs and ensure equity for marginalized communities.



LITIGATION & LEGAL SUPPORT

We litigate to challenge unconstitutional policies and practices. We advance and defend civil liberties and civil rights and make government more accountable for its actions.



COMMUNICATIONS

We make connections, increase visibility, and inspire action through storytelling that lifts and amplifies diverse, compassionate, and thoughtful stories while countering harmful narratives.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

We seek to build relationships with communities across the state, realizing that real change occurs when you're led by the people who are most impacted by that change.



Strategic Priorities

PROTECTING FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS

First Amendment rights—the right to speak, assemble, organize, protest, and practice one’s faith (or not to practice any faith)—are fundamental building blocks of a democratic society.

As the premier guardian of civil liberties and civil rights in Virginia, the affiliate bears a special responsibility to protect these rights.

Goal: To prevent government suppression of First Amendment rights in the Commonwealth.

To achieve that, we will:

- Defend Virginians’ First Amendment rights to speak and participate fully in the democratic process.
- Protect the right to protest and organize.
- Ensure that students in Virginia’s public schools are able to receive an honest and complete teaching of history.
- Oppose governmental efforts to censor ideas by book banning or other unlawful tactics.



DEFEND OUR STUDENTS' RIGHT TO LEARN.

Strategic Priorities



PEOPLE. NOT PRISONS.

The U.S. systems of mass criminalization, incarceration and detention have insidious, historical roots in slavery and continue to be fueled by racial and economic discrimination, fearmongering against marginalized communities, and a social and political culture that values punishment over restoration and rehabilitation. Within this framework, Virginia has an incarceration rate higher than the national average. The Commonwealth incarcerates people for far too long and disproportionately incarcerates Black and Brown Virginians.

People incarcerated in the Commonwealth's jails, prisons, and detention centers experience dehumanizing conditions, haphazard programming, poor mental and physical healthcare, isolation from family and community, and few incentives to rehabilitate. And because Virginia's constitution permanently strips every formerly incarcerated person of their right to vote, serve on a jury, and hold public office, mass incarceration in Virginia erodes the fabric of our democracy, impacting far more people than those who are incarcerated and their loved ones.

Goal: To reduce Virginia's carceral and custodial population by 50 percent over the next ten years while mitigating the most egregious conditions of confinement in Virginia prisons.

To meet our goal, we will:

- Advocate for the expansion of release opportunities and the full and proper implementation of such policies and programs, most especially for those serving long sentences and those convicted of crimes Virginia has since repealed.
- Oppose laws and policies that prolong people's incarceration and inhibit their ability to fully reenter society, and support positive, meaningful policy and legislative reforms that reduce the number of people incarcerated in Virginia and the harm they experience within jail and prison systems.
- Advocate for eliminating solitary confinement and other abusive and inhumane conditions in Virginia's prisons.
- Advocate for effective, transparent, and meaningful independent oversight of Virginia's prisons;
- Work to reduce pretrial incarceration.

Strategic Priorities



IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Immigrant Virginians have been vital, essential community members across the Commonwealth for centuries. Attacks that seek to frighten, harm, exclude or arrest and detain Virginians based on their actual or perceived immigration status are attacks on us all, and when government itself commits these attacks, the harm is both to immigrant people and the very foundation of our democracy.

While local, state and federal governmental actors have long targeted immigrants and sought to stoke political fearmongering, their abusive and covert enforcement practices have intensified and expanded in recent years. So have governmental attempts to not only shroud the enforcement process in secrecy and flout due process rights and protections, but also to weaponize the immigration system for political gain and as a tool of retribution for speech and protest the government opposes. As the core defenders of First Amendment rights in Virginia, this cannot stand.

Goal: Advance immigrants' rights by challenging government overreach and abusive immigration enforcement practices by local, state, and federal actors in Virginia.

To meet our goal, we will:

- Work to eliminate Virginia law enforcement entanglements with ICE, which stigmatize, surveil, and criminalize immigrant people and communities.
- Advocate against systemic abuses, including unlawful and inhumane conditions experienced by people in the immigration detention system and unlawful and abusive enforcement practices by ICE and local law enforcement.
- Defend immigrants' rights to safely live and thrive in Virginia by providing resources, advocacy and community education on rights, risks, and legal protections around immigration enforcement practices, including at critical locations such as schools, hospitals, places of employment, places of worship, and courts.
- Expand public and policymaker support for immigrants' rights by exposing injustices perpetrated against immigrants in Virginia—which are often concealed from the public because of ICE's complex enforcement practices and opaque collaborations with state, local, and federal partners.

Strategic Priorities

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

Virginia has made significant strides in recent years in expanding access to the ballot box.

That progress has been met with fierce backlash against which we continue to fight.

Goal: To increase the ability of historically marginalized Virginians to participate in the political process.

To do that, we will:

- Build widespread support for a constitutional amendment to guarantee the right to vote to all Virginians, particularly those convicted of felonies, without a petition requirement.
- Defend progress made on access to the ballot box and threats to our voting system.
- Work to expand Virginians' access to political participation.
- Advocate for the reform of Virginia's FOIA laws to ensure full transparency in government.



Strategic Priorities



FIGHTING FOR LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

The ACLU of Virginia envisions a world where people of all sexual orientations and gender identities can participate fully and openly in public life, without fear or discrimination.

Yet in our current political moment and at every level of political power, we face a renewed and monstrous surge of discrimination, harassment, and violence toward the LGBTQ+ community and especially transgender and nonbinary people. These pervasive, targeted attacks across our strategic priorities materially threaten LGBTQ+ people's health care, privacy, speech and assembly, religious practice, employment, education, and safety.

Goal: We will advocate for LGBTQ+ civil rights and liberties to combat attacks, build and strengthen rights and protections, and move public opinion in a way that centers, supports, and accurately represents LGBTQ+ communities and their goals.

We will:

- As federal protections erode, work to strengthen state nondiscrimination law and policy to combat attacks and shore up state-level tools to leverage in litigation, legislation, administrative rulemaking, voter education, and local advocacy.
- Prioritize responding to specific attacks against transgender and nonbinary people, and particularly young people, and locate our work in the spaces where those attacks are most pervasive, including but not limited to: schools, health care settings, carceral systems, and employment.
- Partner in the campaign to remove the prohibition of same-sex marriage from Virginia's Constitution, understanding this work is part of the necessary firewall against a hostile administration in the fight for LGBTQ+ equality.

Strategic Priorities

PROTECTING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

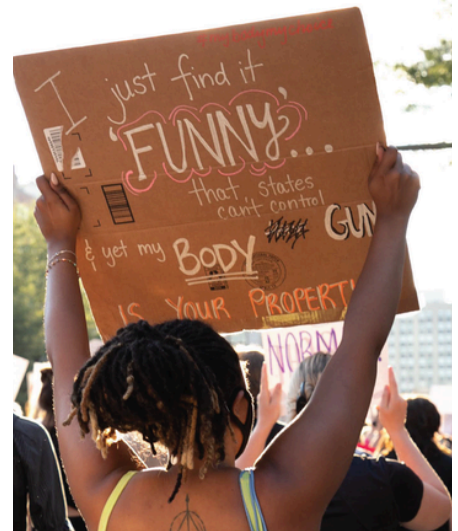
The ACLU of Virginia believes that all people have an inherent right to bodily autonomy.

The right to decide whether and when to become a parent is fundamental to every person in a free society

Goal: To ensure that abortion and contraceptives are accessible to whoever wants them.

To achieve that, we will:

- Craft a robust communications plan to inform people in Virginia and beyond of the continued legality of abortion in Virginia;
- Advocate for the codification in the Virginia Constitution of reproductive rights of all people in the state;
- Protect Virginia's continued status as a safe haven to which individuals can travel to access abortion care; and
- Build a volunteer network that can mobilize support across the state of Virginia and assist in Virginia's serving as a safe haven state for abortion care.



How You Can Help

WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU.

The success of our work depends on our members, donors, and supporters. You can help:

Visit our website www.acluva.org to:

1. Become an ACLU of Virginia member or donor.
2. Subscribe to our newsletter
3. Visit our action and issue hubs to let your lawmakers know your point of view.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at [@acluva](https://www.instagram.com/acluva).

Working together we can ensure that all people thrive in our Commonwealth.



