

## ACLU of Virginia Intakes

### How do we choose cases?

The ACLU of Virginia generally brings cases that affect the civil liberties or civil rights of multiple Virginians, or cases that advance systemic, structural, or legal changes rather than cases seeking to resolve a dispute for a single individual.

The basic questions we ask when reviewing a request for assistance are:

1. Is this a significant civil liberties or civil rights issue?
2. What effect will this case have beyond helping our individual client?

### What are civil liberties and civil rights?

The civil liberties and civil rights we seek to protect include:

1. *Freedom of expression and association*: This includes freedom of speech and the press, the right to assemble for protests and rallies, and the right to associate with whom you choose.
2. *Freedom of religion*: This includes both the right of individuals to practice the religion of their choice and freedom from religious coercion by the government.
3. *Equality under the law*: This includes the right to equal treatment regardless of race, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, or other such classification. These rights apply to places including the voting booth, the classroom, the workplace, and the courts.
4. *Due process of law*: This is the right to be treated fairly when facing criminal charges or other serious accusations that can result in a loss of freedom, loss of employment, exclusion from school, denial of housing, or cut off of public benefits.
5. *Right to Privacy*: This is the right to a guaranteed zone of personal privacy and autonomy which cannot be violated by the government or by other institutions, like employers, with substantial influence over an individual's rights.
6. *Reproductive Freedom*: This is the right to decide whether or not to have a child, including the right to contraception and abortion care without interference from the government.
7. *Other civil liberties*: Other civil liberties include the right to vote, the right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures, and the right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment.

## **What cases affect others?**

Lawsuits can affect a large number of people in two primary ways. First, a government policy or practice may be challenged which has a direct impact on multiple people. Or second, a lawsuit brought on behalf of one person can have a larger impact on others in the long run when it establishes or expands legal protections for a class of people.

## **What types of cases does the ACLU of Virginia generally *NOT* accept?**

There are some kinds of cases the ACLU of Virginia generally does not bring, although we may make an exception when an important constitutional right is at stake. If your complaint falls into one of the categories listed below, please utilize our [Resource Contact List](#).

We generally do not accept the following types of cases:

1. You were fired from your job without a good reason.
2. You are involved in a domestic dispute, such as a divorce or custody issue.
3. You were denied benefits such as unemployment or workers' compensation.
4. You have a complaint about your attorney.
5. You were charged with a criminal violation.

## **Why does the ACLU of Virginia turn down cases that fall within our guidelines?**

There are many incidents of unfairness or injustice which the ACLU of Virginia is simply unable to handle. With a small staff and thousands of requests for assistance each year, we simply cannot accept many of the cases that fall within the guidelines articulated above. We must select those cases which we believe will have the greatest impact on protecting civil liberties and civil rights or otherwise advance our strategic goals. This does not mean your case is without merit. You should contact another attorney to discuss your rights as soon as possible.

## **Can the ACLU of Virginia advise me about my case?**

If we do not accept your case, the ACLU of Virginia staff cannot offer you legal advice or provide other types of legal assistance, such as reviewing your records or conducting legal research on your behalf. This policy allows us to direct the necessary resources to those cases we do accept.

## **How do I request assistance from the ACLU of Virginia?**

If you believe your issue fits the above criteria, you may request assistance by emailing us at [intake@acluva.org](mailto:intake@acluva.org). Please include as much information as possible about your situation. Please do not send us original documents or records. Please also understand that you are unlikely to receive a response from us at this time.

## **Important note about deadlines**

All legal claims have time deadlines. The deadlines may be different depending on who violated your rights and what rights were violated. For some kinds of violations, you may need to “exhaust administrative remedies” or file a complaint with a government agency before you can sue (such as an employment discrimination complaint with the EEOC or a grievance with VDOC). These agencies usually have their own time deadlines. The ACLU of Virginia cannot give you advice about the deadlines that may apply to your case. To protect your rights, please consult with an attorney promptly to find out what deadlines apply to your situation.