

# FLORIDA FRONTLINE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2025





# MESSAGE FROM THE FRONTLINE

## September Edition

September was a sobering reminder of both the dangers we face as well as the strength we carry together. Across our nation, we have seen families shattered by political violence, students silenced by the epidemic of school shootings, and immigrants continually confined to inhumane treatment in Florida's detention centers. We have also seen teachers threatened with investigations and removal for speaking honestly about the news of the day.

These are not isolated incidents. They are part of a larger pattern of cruelty, censorship, and retaliation designed to intimidate communities into silence. Political leaders are testing how far they can go in stripping away constitutional rights and in punishing those who dare to speak against them. The intention is not only to control today's headlines but to shape tomorrow's future by teaching people that fear is safer than truth, and silence is safer than resistance. We must refuse to accept this as normal. We must name it for what it is: an attack on democracy itself, carried out in classrooms, detention centers, courtrooms, and even in the digital spaces where people share their views.

And yet, Florida has never been a place where silence prevails. The courage of our communities is a constant reminder that holding power through fear is a losing strategy. We see professors who refuse to abandon academic freedom, even when threatened with retribution. We see families of schoolchildren demanding more than condolences and instead calling for policies that value their children's lives. We see immigrant communities standing together with advocates to expose the cruelty of Florida's detention facilities and insist on dignity for every human being. Each act of resistance, whether it happens in a courtroom, a classroom, a congregation, or a kitchen table, is part of a larger mosaic of courage that reminds us that power ultimately rests with the people.

Our movement is not only about pushing back against cruelty. It is about building something more just and more humane in its place. It is about classrooms where students are free to learn the truth, workplaces where people can speak without fear of retaliation, and neighborhoods where people's needs are met and their voices matter. It is about creating a Florida where civil liberties are not carved away piece by piece, but are fully protected and expanded for all who call this state home. And it is about instilling the belief that freedom is not a privilege granted by politicians but an inalienable right we claim together, through vigilance, persistence, and solidarity.

The ACLU of Florida stands with every community that chooses peace over violence, dialogue over division, and justice over oppression. We know the path forward is long and often difficult, but history shows us that progress has always come from people who dared to resist and dared to dream of something better. The torch of that resistance is now in our hands.

Together, we are those people. Together, we are writing the next chapter of Florida's story — one rooted in dignity, safety, and freedom for all. And together, we will ensure that out of this moment of division and fear rises a future of resilience, unity, and truth.

We inherit this charge from those who came before us, and we are proud to carry it forward with courage.

Because we are the frontline of resistance.

In solidarity and struggle,



**Bacardi L. Jackson**

Executive Director, ACLU of Florida

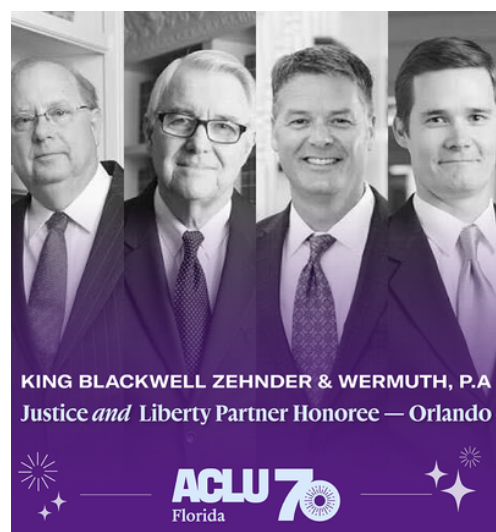






On September 19, we kicked off our 70th Anniversary Celebration in Orlando — honoring seven decades of courage, community, and resistance. Together, we remembered the battles fought, recognized people who made them possible, and renewed our commitment to the struggles ahead. We are deeply grateful to our **Orlando City Sponsor Morgan & Morgan**, our **Orlando Courage Sponsor King, Blackwell, Zehnder & Wermuth**, our **Liberty Sponsor Nate & Lynda Balint** — and to every single person who invested in our mission, showed up, stood with us, and helped make this kickoff such a powerful success.

We also proudly recognized **Orlando's honorees** who embody both courage and sacrifice:



**Justice & Liberty Partner Recipients**  
**King, Blackwell, Zehnder & Wermuth**

For decades, this firm has been at the forefront of Florida's democracy battles, from *Fair Districts* and *Black Voters Matter* to today's gerrymandering fights.



**Defender of Democracy Recipients**  
**Brooke Girley and Jerry Girley**

In defending their own First Amendment rights, they have defended ours, embodying the power of courage in the face of retaliation.



**Courage in Action Recipient**  
**State Attorney Monique Worrell**

Monique Worrell has stood tall in the face of an unconstitutional removal, refusing to let politics erase the will of the people.



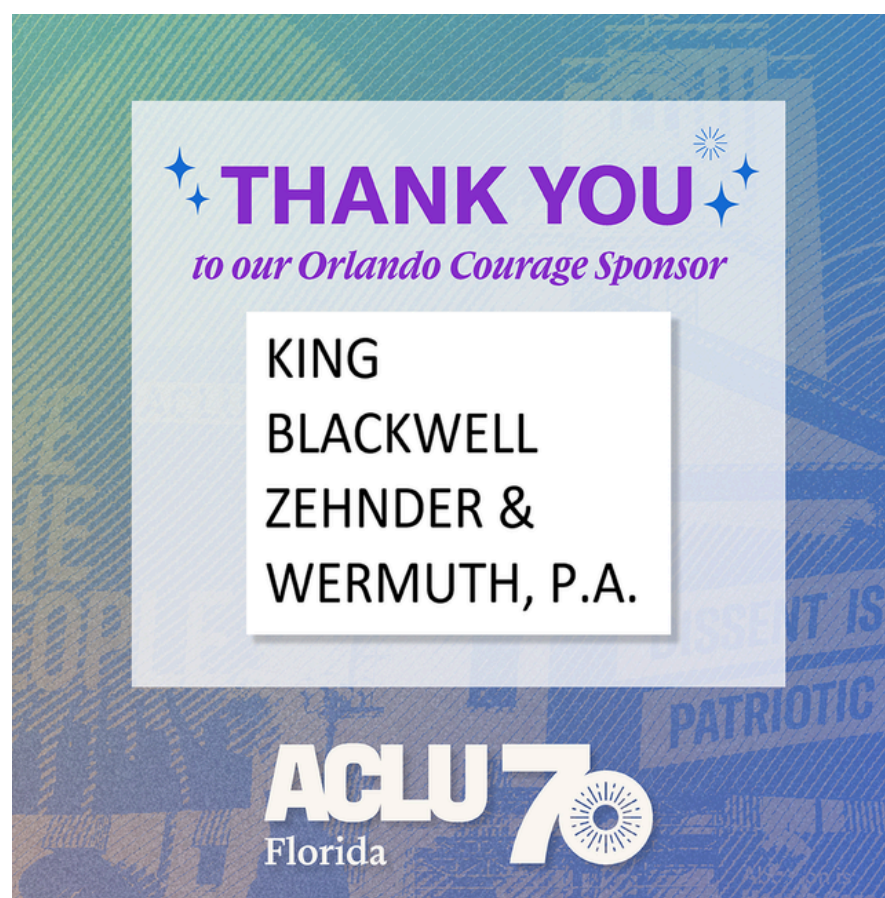
**Special Recognition**  
**Eric Smaw, Outgoing Board President**

Eric Smaw's leadership has been steady and deeply rooted in the values of civil liberties. His legacy will guide the work of defending freedom for years to come.



# SEVENTY YEARS STRONG

## A Call to Courage: Celebrating 70 Years of Resistance in Florida



## The celebration continues across Florida. Join us as we bring this historic milestone to Jacksonville, Florida, on Friday, October 10.

The fight for freedom has always had deep roots in Northeast Florida. From challenging racially gerrymandered maps to defending immigrant rights, Jacksonville has been a frontline of resistance. This event will highlight those battles and honor the local heroes who have helped to preserve our democracy.

Your presence and support remind us that this movement is strongest when we stand together. Together, we will ensure the next 70 years of the ACLU of Florida are defined not by repression, but by resistance and courage.

**Tickets: \$75 General | \$25 Student**

If ticket cost is a barrier, email [development@aclufl.org](mailto:development@aclufl.org) — sponsor-funded tickets are available.

[Answer the Call to Courage](#). Reserve your spot in a city near you today.

[Become a Statewide Sponsor](#) | [Jacksonville](#) | [Tampa](#) | [Miami](#)





*Power Belongs With The People,*  
**NOT WITH POLITICIANS  
SEEKING TO SILENCE THEM.**





# LEGAL UPDATE: WHERE JUSTICE MEETS RESISTANCE

THE COURTS ARE A FRONTLINE AND WE'RE MEETING THE MOMENT WITH TRUTH AND COURAGE

## New Day, New Abuses

Abuse of government power in Florida is not new, and it is not theoretical — it is the lived reality for countless immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, students, and advocates across our state. In the immigration context, officials have invented state-level “crimes” for people accused of improper entry, ensnaring both foreign nationals and even U.S. citizens in the process. Detention centers — not just the inhumane cages hastily erected in the [Everglades](#) but older institutions like those in [Baker County](#) — have compounded this cruelty by [cutting off access to attorneys](#) and subjecting people to [horrific abuses](#). The ACLU of Florida has fought back in the courts by winning injunctions, securing settlements, forcing transparency, and holding officials accountable. Every case reminds us that unchecked state power turns neighbors into suspects and communities into targets, and that only vigilance and resistance prevent Florida from becoming a state where constitutional protections are just nice words on a piece of paper.

In recent weeks, we've seen concerning [new abuses of state power](#) in the realm of free expression. Attacks on speech, too, are not new. From censorship of classroom teaching under the “Stop W.O.K.E. Act” to bans on drag performances and restrictions on what books children can read, state leaders have wielded government authority to silence voices they dislike and punish communities who resist for quite some time. But it is getting worse.

In our [latest lawsuit](#) challenging the retaliatory firing of a state employee for exercising her First Amendment rights on social media, we underscore a simple principle: encountering speech that you may find offensive is not a flaw of democracy, but a feature of it. That is the nature of a true democracy — one where free speech is protected. But, increasingly, our state government simply does not accept speech that those in power disagree with. And these new attacks are not isolated — they are part of a campaign to condition Floridians to accept fear over truth. Our litigation and advocacy are the counterweight: defending professors, parents, artists, lawyers, and now state employees against retaliation for speaking out, and keeping alive the principle that freedom of expression is not the government's to grant or to take away. In the courts, in classrooms, and in detention centers, we continue to affirm the simple truth: power belongs with the people, not with politicians seeking to silence them.

## More Legal Highlights:

- ***Lippe v. DeSantis*** - We are suing Gov. DeSantis to force him to call a special election for Florida Senate District 14, which has been vacant for over six weeks—leaving nearly 500,000 Floridians without representation. Past governors acted within a week of resignations, but DeSantis often delays for weeks or months. His repeated refusal to act promptly isn't just troubling—it's unlawful.
- ***Naples Pride v. City of Naples*** - In addition to the City of Naples hiring high-powered lawyers to oppose our client's Pride festival, the anti-LGBTQ group Liberty Counsel filed a motion to intervene, claiming the City's arguments weren't anti-LGBTQ enough. We opposed their intervention as a full party, suggesting they submit an amicus brief instead, and we also responded to the City's new motion to dismiss the case.
- ***Keohane v. Dixon*** - In our class-action case challenging the denial of medically necessary gender-affirming care in Florida's prisons, several of our clients testified movingly in their depositions about how the state's cruel and senseless policies cause devastating impact in their day-to-day lives.
- ***Doe v. Rhoden*** - We filed an amended complaint on behalf of Ana Doe, our client who is a human-trafficking survivor and who was subjected to grotesque and unconstitutional abuse while in ICE custody at the Baker County Detention Center.
- ***Tray v. Florida State Board of Education*** - In our book-ban case challenging the viewpoint-discriminatory process inhibiting challenges to *removing* books while favoring parents who want to challenge district decisions to *keep* books, our reply brief was filed in the Eleventh Circuit. This means that our appeal is fully briefed, and we await either a decision from the court or the setting of oral argument.
- ***Cubanos Pa'lante v. Florida House of Representatives*** - In our redistricting case challenging one congressional district and seven State House districts in South Florida as racially gerrymandered, we have completed summary-judgment briefing and await a ruling from the three-judge district court on whether our case will go to trial.

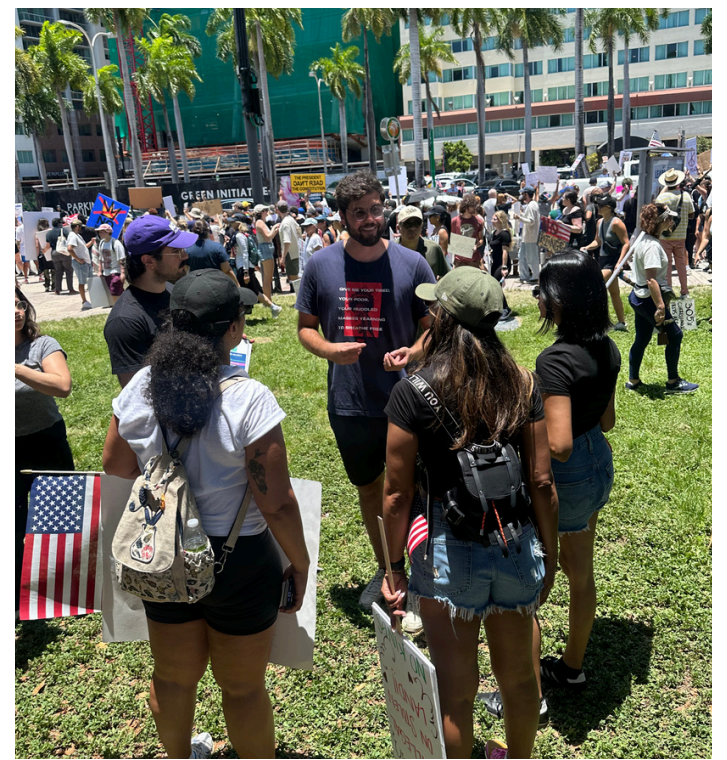


# WHERE THE PEOPLE MOVE

## GRASSROOTS POWER IN ACTION

In a time where the right to free speech continues to be challenged, our field team is at work– on the ground and online. In August, from Key West to the panhandle, we celebrated our educators, faculty, students, and parents. We dove deep into our “Back to School Series,” where our volunteers led a session on the history of student movements and academic freedom. It was a great reminder of the struggle that led to the rights we have today, and what it means to continue to fight for them in the future. As fall gets fully underway, join us for our next virtual volunteer-led series, focused on a constitution in crisis and the rampant abuses taking place in detention facilities across Florida.

Another installment in this series, taking place on November 15 in Broward, November 16 in Miami, and November 22 in Tallahassee, is our “Power and Purpose Trainings.” These training sessions are high-impact experiences designed to give you the tools to organize, mobilize, and lead in this critical time. Our communities need bold action, and we need you in the fight. You’ll learn how to organize effectively, have persuasive conversations that mobilize, and build lasting connections – for free. Space is limited, so sign up today.



### Take Action – Volunteer with Us

- Stand up for immigrant rights, reproductive freedom, voting access, and free speech.
- Sign up to [volunteer](#) and become part of the movement to defend civil liberties across Florida.

If you are a registered voter in the City of Miami, print and [sign our petition today](#) and mail it back to us ASAP! And, please share. By December, we need to collect over 20,000 signed petitions from Miami registered voters to get on the ballot.

### Protests + Rallies:

This No Kings Day, join our partners at a protest near you. We’ll be on the ground in select locations - [October 18](#) and welcome volunteers to serve with us as Legal Observers.

If you are planning on protesting, we encourage you to attend our Know Your Rights While Protesting training. If you are looking to volunteer, we are also actively training legal observers for this protest and future ones. Sign up for the next legal observer training to learn more.

### Delegation Meetings:

Our volunteers are mobilizing in Broward, Miami-Dade, Orange, and Leon counties. Sign up to join us and learn about the process for delegation meetings. If you are not in one of the 4 areas above, you can find your delegation meeting below.

- *Orange County* - [October 21](#)
- *Leon County* - [October 27](#)
- *Miami-Dade* - TBA
- *Find your delegation meeting* [here](#)



# WHERE THE PEOPLE MOVE

## GRASSROOTS POWER IN ACTION

### Join an Upcoming Training or Event

Take part in our powerful in-person and virtual actions this month:

#### Issue-Based Campaign Events

- *Constitution In Crisis: Inside Florida's Immigrant Detention Facility Virtual Series:*
  - *Abuse & Mistreatment (Content Warning)* - [October 15](#)
  - *Stand up, fight back! Community Reaction and Mobilizations* - [October 29](#)
- *Banned Book Club* - [October 7](#)

#### Campaign Team Meetings

Learn more and get involved in one of our core campaigns:

- *Floridians for Immigrant Justice Campaign Meeting* - [October 6](#)
- *Haitian Creole Translators Team (virtual)* - [October 7](#)
- *Free Speech Team Meeting (virtual)* - [October 8](#)
- *Floridians for Immigrant Justice Know Your Rights Team* - [October 14](#)

#### Know Your Rights Trainings + Other Trainings

Empower yourself and your community:

- *Stronger Miami Petition Collection Training (virtual)* - [October 9](#)
- *Know Your Rights While Protesting (virtual)* - [October 15](#)
- *Stronger Miami Petition Collection Training (virtual)* - [October 16](#)
- *Know Your Rights for Immigrants (virtual)* - [October 21](#)
- *LeadershipBIO: How to Be An Ally Training (virtual)* - [October 22](#)
- *Stronger Miami Petition Collection Training (virtual)* - [October 23](#)
- *Power and Purpose Training Broward (in-person)* - [November 15](#)
- *Power and Purpose Training Miami (in-person)* - [November 16](#)
- *Power and Purpose Training Tallahassee (in-person)* - [November 22](#)

#### Campaign Team Meetings

Learn more and get involved in one of our core campaigns:

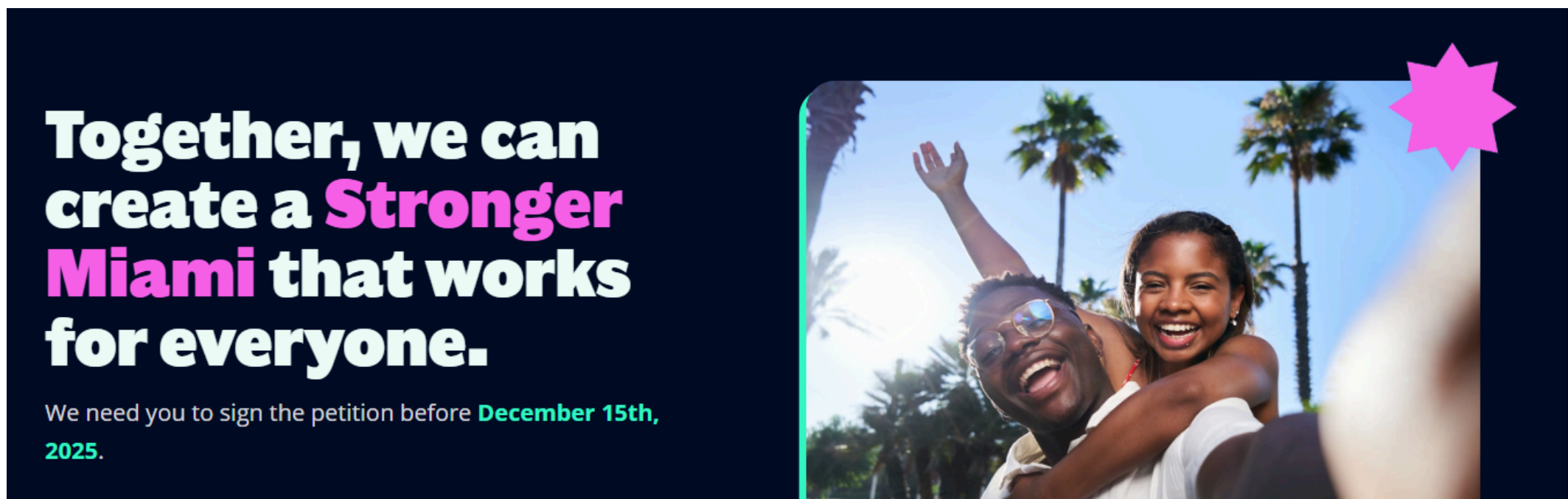
- *Floridians for Immigrant Justice Campaign Meeting* - [September 8](#)
- *Free Speech Team Meeting* - [September 10](#)





# WHERE POLICY MEETS THE PEOPLE

TURNING OUTRAGE INTO IMPACT



## Democracy & Voting Rights Local Campaign - Building a Stronger Miami:

As noted by the [Miami Herald Editorial Board](#),

*“There’s a saying in local politics that everyone who wants something in Miami knows how to count to three — a simple majority on the five-member commission. This concentrates power in the hands of very few commissioners . . .*

*“Decisions in South Florida’s largest city — and second-largest in the state — should require more deliberation and voices. Miami has fewer commission districts than cities with smaller or similar populations, such as Miami Beach, Hialeah, and Tampa.”*

**Because we believe in the power and importance of local democracy, we have united with partners to build a grassroots people-powered movement in Miami through the Stronger Miami Charter Amendment Campaign.** Passing these amendments will amplify the power of historically underrepresented communities and give voters more influence over the decisions that impact their everyday lives by: **(i)** switching municipal elections to align with the General Election, **(ii)** reducing the size of districts and increasing the number of communities with direct representation by adding four city commission seats, and **(iii)** creating fair redistricting standards that ensure that districts are drawn based on community interests rather than partisan agendas.

This month, we made critical strides in our local campaign work to increase voter turnout in Miami municipal elections, ensure that local officials are more accountable to the constituents they serve, and establish fair districting standards:

- We launched our first partner event in Miami and launched our bilingual Stronger Miami [website](#).
- We activated Miamians to successfully oppose a harmful proposal that would have undermined our Stronger Miami campaign effort.
- We secured the endorsement of Miami-Dade County Commissioner, [Former Mayor Suarez](#), and current Mayor Daniella Levine Cava;
- And, we made great advancements in our petition collection efforts!

**If you are a registered voter in the City of Miami, print and sign our petition today and mail it back to us ASAP! And, please share. We need over 20,000 signed petitions from Miami registered voters to get on the ballot: <https://strongermiami.org/2026-amendment/>**



# WHERE POLICY MEETS THE PEOPLE

## TURNING OUTRAGE INTO IMPACT

### Protecting Free Speech on College Campuses

Our free speech rights are under attack, and we are fighting back. We created and are in the process of finalizing our First Amendment toolkit for protecting free speech and protest on college campuses, “[The Power of Protest on College Campuses: Campus Protest Policies & Organizing Toolkit for Students.](#)”

Throughout history, student-led protests have played a critical role in shaping society. From the Civil Rights Movement to anti-war demonstrations, from climate action to the movement for reproductive freedom, students have consistently been at the forefront of demanding change. These fights for freedom have also included targeting and crackdowns from the government.

Protest is more than just an event—it’s a tool for change. Universities are places where ideas are challenged, and policies can be influenced. Through collective action, students have won fights for free speech protections, labor rights, climate policies, and racial justice reforms. However, many universities still impose unclear or restrictive policies on student protests, and recent state laws have introduced new factors that students must navigate.

In Florida, students can peacefully protest in outdoor areas of campus, as long as their protest does not disrupt normal university functions and is consistent with the university's policies and reasonable content-neutral time, place, and manner restrictions.

**But if students can’t effectively navigate these policies, the entire system breaks down** — protests can be delayed, restricted, or even shut down entirely. The First Amendment protects the right to peaceful protest at public universities. Still, campus policies and state laws can protect student activism or restrict it through bureaucratic hurdles, vague rules, and selective enforcement.

This toolkit empowers students to understand their specific campus policies, enabling them to advocate effectively while remaining protected under the law.

#### **This toolkit:**

- Guides students through finding and understanding their school’s protest rules (e.g., permit requirements, designated areas, restrictions on time, place, and manner).
- Provides a step-by-step process for requesting meetings with school officials to clarify policies.
- Empowers students to document, assess, and potentially challenge restrictive policies.
- Encourages the creation of student-led resources, like club guides or protest best-practice sessions.

The graphic features the ACLU Florida logo in white on a blue background. To the right, the words 'WHERE POLICY MEETS THE PEOPLE' are written in large, semi-transparent blue letters. Below this, there is a silhouette of a crowd of people with their arms raised in protest.

# ACLU Florida

## CAMPUS PROTEST POLICIES AND ORGANIZING TOOLKIT FOR ACLU STUDENT CLUBS



# FUELING THE FIGHT

## DEFENDING FREEDOM AND EXPANDING OUR FUTURE

Giving has always been at the forefront of the ACLU of Florida's ability to defend freedom and expand civil rights. Our work is made possible because people who care about justice choose to invest in this mission. Every gift turns values into action and ensures that the promise of the Constitution is not just a vision, but a lived reality for all Floridians.

Today, the need has never been more urgent. Across Florida, fundamental rights are under attack, from voting access and reproductive health to free speech and the right to protest. These fights are not abstract; they shape real people's lives every day. Your generosity fuels our ability to meet these challenges head-on, to take cases that will set precedent for decades, and to build the community power necessary to hold those in authority accountable.

As we approach the final months of the year, a pivotal time when nearly one-third of all charitable giving takes place, now is the moment to plan your support. Your end-of-year gift can ensure the ACLU of Florida enters 2026 ready to respond to threats, fight in the courts, and build long-term strategies for freedom and equality. Whether you give through an annual donation, a donor-advised fund, a gift of stock, or by including the ACLU of Florida in your estate plans, your generosity today strengthens the movement for tomorrow.

**This is a defining moment for civil rights in Florida. With your partnership, we can meet it with the courage, resources, and determination it demands.**

We invite you to [stand with us](#) to recognize our 70 years of impact, and to help shape the next 70 years of civil rights and civil liberties in Florida.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

### The Resistance is YOU

The Summer of 2025 has tested our resolve, but it has also fortified our mission. Every lawsuit, every victory, and every survivor's story brings us closer to the Florida we believe in: one where dignity, justice, and compassion prevail. And with your continued support, we'll keep holding the frontline to freedom.

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- Join or Renew Your [Membership](#)
- Support our work: [Donate Now](#)
- Join Our Team: [Careers](#) at the ACLU of Florida
- [Register](#) for the 70th Anniversary and Call to Courage

In solidarity,  
The ACLU of Florida



70 YEARS OF MEETING THE MOMENT  
WITH TRUTH AND COURAGE

ACLU

Florida

CELEBRATING

70 YEARS