

FLORIDA FRONTLINE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

WINTER EDITION



MESSAGE FROM THE FRONTLINE

December Edition

Courage is contagious. And in Florida, choosing courage over fear is how we protect our communities—and the future of our democracy.

As we close out this year, I find myself reflecting not only on what we've faced, but on what you've made possible. For 70 years, Floridians like you have shown that a single voice—raised at the right moment—can spark change that lasts.

This year, as we marked our milestone anniversary, we honored leaders of courage across our state. Their stories reminded us that courage has no political affiliation. It doesn't wait for permission. It comes from lived experience—and from the clarity that silence is never neutral.

We've seen courage up close this year: people stepping forward to defend rights in court; people using their time, resources, and platforms to push back against cruelty; and everyday Floridians speaking truth to power in city halls, school board meetings, and community spaces across the state.

And while Florida is experiencing a wave of government overreach—efforts to control what students can read, what educators can teach, what healthcare decisions families can make, who gets to vote, and who gets to belong—this season reminds me of something deeper: we are not alone, and we are not powerless. We are connected by shared values and by the simple, steady decision to keep showing up for one another.

Our Defender of Democracy Awardee Dr. Marvin Dunn put it plainly: “whatever our age or capacity, we share an obligation to stand up.” As we head into the new year, may we carry that obligation with us—not as a burden, but as a source of purpose. Because when we choose courage together, we make room for hope—and we make it harder for fear to win.

Thank you for being part of this movement, and for all the ways you've shown up this year. Because in Florida, we don't just witness the fight for freedom—we lead it and understand it is our duty to win it.

Indeed, we are the frontline of resistance and the vanguard of courageous advocacy and activism that will make the vision of a Free Florida and Free Nation real.

In solidarity,

Bacardi L. Jackson

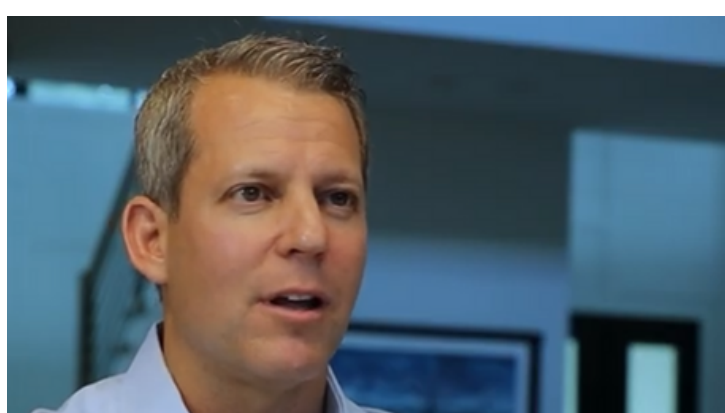
Executive Director, ACLU of Florida





This season, we continued—and completed—our 70th Anniversary Celebration across Florida, gathering with communities that have long shown what courage looks like: steady, collective, and unshakable. From Tampa Bay to Miami, we honored seven decades of resistance and recommitted to what has always made this work possible—people willing to stand up and speak out.

On November 7, we celebrated in Tampa—hosted by longtime journalist Ernest Hooper and opened by the electrifying Howard W. Blake High School Marching Band. Tampa Bay’s spirit of activism and determination has long lit the way for the rest of Florida, reminding us that defending democracy requires persistence, unity, and conviction. We’re grateful to our Tampa Liberty Sponsors, Alex Sink and Brandon Harris, for helping make this celebration possible.



Justice & Liberty Partner Award :
Andrew Warren

A leader who has shown that justice is a practice—and that public service must answer to people, not power.

Defender of Democracy Award:
Nadine Smith

A relentless champion for LGBTQ+ equality who has built coalitions and reminded Florida that defending democracy is a movement.





Courage in Action Award:
[Arthenia Joyner](#)

A trailblazing advocate whose lifetime of leadership, conviction, and barrier-breaking has expanded justice across Tampa and beyond.

On December 4, during Art Basel week, we marked the finale of our 70th Anniversary Celebration in Miami at the Historic Hampton House—opened by a performance from the Booker T. Washington Tornadoes and featuring works by Miami-based artists Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez and Melissa Oliveira. The ACLU of Florida was founded in Miami in 1955, and we returned to honor leaders whose courage carries that legacy forward. We're thankful to our **Miami Freedom Sponsors, Berger Singerman LLP and Boies, Schiller, and Flexner**, for supporting this milestone night.

Defender of Democracy Award:
[Dr. Marvin Dunn](#)

A historian and educator who refuses to let truth be buried, standing firm against censorship and for honest education.



Courage in Action Award:
[Miguel "Mike" Fernandez](#)

An immigrant and philanthropist who has used his platform to defend vulnerable communities and challenge cruelty.

Courage of Conviction Award:
[Ana Navarro](#)

A principled voice who has spoken out against abuses of power and defended immigrants and targeted communities.





Lifetime in Achievement Award:
Howard Simon

The longest-serving state director in ACLU history, whose decades of leadership strengthened the ACLU of Florida through pivotal civil liberties battles..

Thank you to every supporter, partner, volunteer, and community member who showed up and made our 70th Anniversary Celebration what it was: a living reminder that courage is collective. If you couldn't join us—or want to share these stories with others—you can view the full four-city tour and meet the honorees whose leadership is shaping Florida's future [here](#).





We are the frontline of
RESISTANCE



LEGAL UPDATE: WHERE JUSTICE MEETS RESISTANCE

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

Tallahassee is balancing its budget on the backs of its most vulnerable — and it's doing so unconstitutionally. A city may try to disguise an illegal tax as a “fee,” but it cannot do so an end-run around our Florida Constitution. That's exactly what Tallahassee has done with its so-called fire services fee, quietly tacking it onto monthly utility bills and threatening residents with shutoffs, liens, collections, and even foreclosure if they don't pay.

This isn't a neutral policy mistake. It's a regressive scheme that hits hardest where people can least afford it. The flat, per-household charge disproportionately burdens low-income residents, renters, students, and Black and Hispanic households. Worse still, the city structured the fee into two zones: an inner zone that is more racially diverse and lower-income — and pays more — and an outer zone that is wealthier, whiter, and pays less. Same city. Same fire protection. Unequal cost.

Florida's Constitution is clear: local governments don't get to invent new taxes. Tallahassee knows this. That's why it labeled this charge a “fee” and slipped it into utility bills instead of going through the lawful, constitutional process required for taxation. It's unlawful, and it violates long-standing safeguards meant to prevent exactly this kind of abuse.

We've filed suit on behalf of Tallahassee residents and community advocates who refuse to accept a system where essential public services are funded by punishing the poor and entrenching racial inequity. Fire protection is a basic public good — not a revenue tool to be weaponized against struggling households.

This case is about more than a line item on a bill. It's about whether local governments are bound by constitutional limits, and whether residents are entitled to fair and equal treatment under the law. We're demanding an end to this unconstitutional tax — and accountability from a city that crossed the line.

More Legal Highlights:

- ***Brown v. Young*** – In our case challenging a state biologist's dismissal for an indifferent social-media post concerning Charlie Kirk, the court denied the state's motion to dismiss the case. Our case is therefore continuing on an expedited track.
- ***Lippe v. DeSantis*** – When Governor DeSantis failed to call a special election for a vacancy in Senate District 14 – in violation of a statute that requires a special election to be called – we filed suit. Then, in yet another victory in our string of victories in election-vacancy cases, the Governor called the election right before the state's response was due in our litigation.
- ***Bettencourt v. Bryant*** – On November 21, we filed an amicus brief in the Eleventh Circuit advocating for the ability of inmates to bring lawsuits directly in federal court in certain circumstances, without having to go through the sometimes extremely burdensome administrative requirements of the Prison Litigation Reform Act.

WHERE THE PEOPLE MOVE

GRASSROOTS POWER IN ACTION

In November, our field team and volunteers turned energy into action—showing up where it mattered, building community power, and growing our capacity across Florida.

In Tallahassee, we prepared three volunteers to speak out at the Capitol against the civil liabilities bill, making sure lawmakers heard directly from Floridians pushing back on government overreach. In Miami, we partnered with the League of Women Voters to host a City of Miami Mayoral Run-Off Forum with 150+ attendees, live-streamed on WPLG-TV, and convened a volunteer-led Community Conversation on LGBTQ+ Activism in Florida.

Our outreach and mobilization work surged at the Miami Book Fair, where volunteers collected 300+ petitions and brought in 150+ new volunteer sign-ups. Altogether, our petition drive has now surpassed 1,500+ petitions collected—a major step forward. To keep that momentum strong, we also hired four canvassers focused on high-turnout events to boost collection rates.

We continued advancing free speech and campus organizing through our volunteer-led Community Conversations series, targeted outreach to student clubs using our protest toolkit, and this month's Banned Book Club selection, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat. We also deepened collaboration with FIU ICE Breakers to support student advocacy—including protests, meetings with campus police, and pressure on administrators to end 287(g).

In December, we expanded outreach for the **RAISE hotline** through weekly events, calls with local organizations, and planning for a **December 6 Day of Action** to promote the hotline and recruit volunteer observers. We also supported partner actions by providing legal observers for a **December 17** press conference with FLIC and partners at the ICE Field Office, and by helping host **December 18** community workshops and a toy collection for unaccompanied minors and farmworkers.



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 defending civil liberties across Florida—whether you can show up in person or take action from home.

Legislative Advocacy

Florida's legislative session in Tallahassee starts in January, and our volunteers are getting ready to show up and be heard. Committee meetings are already underway and bills are moving, so now is the time to plug in. If you live in Tallahassee—or plan to travel—join us in person. If you're outside the area, you can still make a powerful impact by calling your state senator and urging them to vote no on harmful bills. Be sure to share your ZIP code so your call is counted as a constituent contact. Not sure who your senator is? Use the look-up tool [here](#).

WHERE THE PEOPLE MOVE

GRASSROOTS POWER IN ACTION

In November, our field team and volunteers turned energy into action—showing up where it mattered, building community power, and growing our capacity across Florida.

In Tallahassee, we prepared three volunteers to speak out at the Capitol against the civil liabilities bill, making sure lawmakers heard directly from Floridians pushing back on government overreach. In Miami, we partnered with the League of Women Voters to host a City of Miami Mayoral Run-Off Forum with 150+ attendees, live-streamed on WPLG-TV, and convened a volunteer-led Community Conversation on LGBTQ+ Activism in Florida.

Our outreach and mobilization work surged at the Miami Book Fair, where volunteers collected 300+ petitions and brought in 150+ new volunteer sign-ups. Altogether, our petition drive has now surpassed 1,500+ petitions collected—a major step forward. To keep that momentum strong, we also hired four canvassers focused on high-turnout events to boost collection rates.

We continued advancing free speech and campus organizing through our volunteer-led Community

Conversations series, targeted outreach to student clubs using our protest toolkit, and this month's Banned Book Club selection, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat. We also deepened collaboration with FIU ICE Breakers to support student advocacy—including protests, meetings with campus police, and pressure on administrators to end 287(g).



In December, we expanded outreach for the RAISE hotline through weekly events, calls with local organizations, and planning for a December 6 Day of Action to promote the hotline and recruit volunteer observers. We also supported partner actions by providing legal observers for a December 17 press conference with FLIC and partners at the ICE Field Office, and by helping host December 18 community workshops and a toy collection for unaccompanied minors and farmworkers.

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 defending civil liberties across Florida—whether you can show up in person or take action from home.

Legislative Advocacy

Florida's legislative session in Tallahassee starts in January, and our volunteers are getting ready to show up and be heard. Committee meetings are already underway and bills are moving, so now is the time to plug in. If you live in Tallahassee—or plan to travel—join us in person. If you're outside the area, you can still make a powerful impact by calling your state senator and urging them to vote no on harmful bills. Be sure to share your ZIP code so your call is counted as a constituent contact. Not sure who your senator is? Use the look-up tool [here](#).

WHERE POLICY MEETS THE PEOPLE

TURNING OUTRAGE INTO IMPACT



Democracy Doesn't Draw Itself: What We're Fighting for in 2026

Voters should choose our elected officials—not the other way around. But Florida lawmakers are preparing to move forward with a partisan redistricting power grab that puts politicians' self-interest ahead of voters and our communities.

Floridians already said no to partisan gerrymandering. In 2010, voters overwhelmingly amended the Florida Constitution to ban drawing districts to favor a political party or incumbent—and we will keep holding lawmakers to that promise.

Stop the Partisan Power Grab (December 2 Day of Action)

On December 2, we stood with Equal Ground, the Southern Poverty Law Center, All Voting is Local, and Floridians from across the state to deliver a clear message to the Legislature: Stop the Partisan Power Grab. [\[Watch our remarks\]](#)

Legislative Session Starts January 13

Florida's 60-day Legislative Session begins January 13, and our team will be at the Capitol fighting for laws that protect and strengthen our civil liberties—and pushing back against attacks on our rights. [Sign up for our Legislative Town Hall Series](#) to stay up to date on the best and worst bills moving this session, and how you can take action.

Blocking a Dangerous Anti-Abortion Bill (HB 289 / SB 164)

During interim committee weeks, legislators attempted to fast-track a sweeping anti-abortion bill (HB 289 / SB 164) that would endanger health care and invite harassment and punishment. The bill would open the door to lawsuits seeking unlimited damages against health care providers—and even against friends and family members who help someone access care. It also attempts to treat fertilized eggs as people under Florida law, with far-reaching consequences. We're working with Planned Parenthood and partners to stop it. [Read our testimony](#) and *watch the [committee hearing](#)*.

WHERE POLICY MEETS THE PEOPLE

TURNING OUTRAGE INTO IMPACT

Stronger Miami: Two Major Milestones for Fair Representation

Our Stronger Miami campaign reached two incredible milestones:

- Miami voters passed Referendum 3, a citizen-led reform that bans political gerrymandering in city elections and establishes the City of Miami's first-ever Citizens' Redistricting Committee.
- The campaign also surpassed 15,000 petitions toward a comprehensive 2026 City Charter Amendment to strengthen accountability, boost turnout, and protect fair maps. *[Learn more and get involved at StrongerMiami.org]*

Standing Up to Attacks on Nonprofits and Targeted Communities

In December, we joined partners—including State Voices of Florida, the NAACP Florida State Conference, and Common Cause—to oppose Governor DeSantis's attacks on nonprofit organizations led by, and primarily serving, immigrant communities and communities of color. When leaders try to stigmatize and silence voices in civil society, we respond with solidarity—and action.



FUELING THE FIGHT

DEFENDING FREEDOM AND EXPANDING OUR FUTURE

Give Miami Day 2025

Each year, the ACLU of Florida participates in Give Miami Day, a community-wide online fundraising event benefiting more than 1,400 nonprofits across Greater Miami. **For the second consecutive year, we not only surpassed our annual goal but also set a new record**—raising \$43,164, with nearly 50% of contributions coming from first-time ACLU of Florida donors.

These results reflect the growing momentum behind our mission and the expanding community of supporters who believe in and are investing in the fight to protect civil liberties across Florida.



Featured Event: Confronting Inequality with Deborah N. Archer, ACLU National President

We encourage you to attend Highways & Byways as Borders, a powerful conversation featuring Deborah N. Archer, ACLU National President, civil rights attorney, scholar, and author of *Dividing Lines: How Transportation Infrastructure Reinforces Racial Inequality*. In her groundbreaking work, Archer reveals how highways, roads, bus routes, and even sidewalks were deliberately designed to entrench segregation and restrict access long after the end of Jim Crow. From multilane highways cutting through Black neighborhoods to exclusionary suburban planning, she exposes the hidden architecture of inequality—and offers a vision for a more equitable system.



End of Year Giving

As you make your end-of-year giving decisions, we hope you will stand with the ACLU of Florida. Your gift powers litigation that protects voting rights, advocacy that defends free speech, organizing that builds stronger communities, and rapid-response work that meets every new threat to our freedoms.

Yes, the stakes are high. But the power is ours — and your support fuels this fight.

By making a generous, tax-deductible gift before the end of the year, you will help us maintain our capacity to defend democracy, freedom, and equality for all Floridians now and for generations to come.

FUELING THE FIGHT

DEFENDING FREEDOM AND EXPANDING OUR FUTURE

There are many impactful ways you can give:

Cash Contributions: A straightforward and immediate way to make a difference via check or online.

Stock Gifts: Donate appreciated securities to maximize your tax benefits.

IRA Gifts & Required Minimum Distributions: Use your RMD to support the ACLU of Florida while potentially reducing your taxable income.

Should you wish to make an end-of-year gift, please contact our development team at 786-363-4432.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

THE RESISTANCE IS YOU

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.

- **Follow Us:** [BlueSky](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Mobilize](#) | [Threads](#) | [TikTok](#) | [Twitter/X](#)
- **Volunteer with Us**
- **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