

FLORIDA FRONTLINE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY '26 EDITION

ACLU 75
Florida

We the People

of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish
and maintain domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to
our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article. I.

Section. 1. All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

DISSENT

is not grounds

for deportation

Section. 6. The Senators and Representatives shall in all Cases, except Treason, Impeachment, and Bribery, be privileged in their respective Houses, and in going to and returning from another Place.

No Senator or Representative shall, during the Time for which he was elected, be appointed to any civil Office under the Authority of the United States. They shall in all Cases, except Treason, Impeachment, and Bribery, be privileged in their respective Houses, and in going to and returning from another Place.

MESSAGE FROM THE FRONTLINE

January Edition

What we are witnessing right now demands courage of a different order.

Not the symbolic kind. Not the retrospective kind we like to celebrate once the danger has passed. But the kind of courage that is required when authoritarianism is no longer theoretical, when it is actively testing the limits of our institutions, our communities, and our willingness to resist.

Citizens are being killed, and immigration enforcement is swelling into something unchecked and unaccountable. Peaceful protests are being met with escalation instead of restraint. Detention centers are being proposed and built with little transparency, as if its quiet speed of construction might dull public concern.

This is what authoritarianism looks like in real time: a system that expands its reach, demands obedience, and punishes dissent – while insisting it is doing so in the name of “order.” It is the Orwellian bargain we are being asked to accept: that safety requires silence, that state violence is “protection,” and that the public’s right to question power is the real threat.

When plans for a new detention center in Orlando emerged, more than 300 community members organized, mobilized, and refused to be sidelined. When communities in Minnesota took to the streets to demand dignity and accountability, they reminded the nation that protest is not disorder, but one of democracy’s most essential tools. When ICE overreach becomes normalized, it is ordinary people, advocates, and local leaders who step forward to say: this is not who we are, and this is not acceptable.

These moments matter because authoritarianism does not arrive all at once. It advances through small permissions. Through the normalization of cruelty. Through the quiet hope that people will decide it is safer to stay home than to stand up. Courage interrupts that strategy.

We must understand this moment through a clear-eyed framework. First, we must work to slow it. We fight back in the courts, in legislatures, and in the public square, using every tool available to disrupt harm and expose abuse of power. Second, we must work to stop it. We prepare our communities, strengthen coalitions, and plan for multiple scenarios, knowing that resilience requires foresight, not reaction. And third, we must work to reverse it and rebuild better. Because resisting authoritarianism is not enough if we do not also commit to building systems that are fair, accountable, and rooted in dignity for everyone.

This is where courage becomes contagious. It moves from protest to power-building. From defense to imagination. From survival to transformation.

History teaches us that authoritarian movements depend on isolation. They fracture communities and convince people they are alone. Our response must be the opposite. Collective. Relentless. Grounded in the belief that democracy is not self-sustaining; it is upheld by people who are willing to act, even when the outcome is uncertain.

We are living through a moment that future generations will study. They will ask who spoke up, who organized, who refused to accept the erosion of rights as inevitable. The answer is still being written. We must stand with every person who chooses courage over comfort, solidarity over silence, and action over fear. The road ahead is difficult, but it is not uncharted. Others have faced moments like this before and prevailed, not because they were unafraid, but because they understood that courage is a discipline, practiced together.

We are not merely resisting what is wrong. We are laying the groundwork for what must come next. And in this moment, that work has never been more urgent.

Together, we prove that democracy, when defended by courageous people, is stronger than fear.



Bacardi L. Jackson
Executive Director, ACLU of Florida





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

Racial Gerrymandering on Trial

In our ongoing racial-gerrymandering litigation, *Cubanos Pa'lante v. Florida House of Representatives*, the state has been forced to explain why it carved up South Florida's communities into congressional and State House districts drawn with race as the overriding factor — not geography, not community ties, not fair representation. Over four days in January, we laid out a straightforward case at trial. These districts were engineered to hit racial targets. They stitch together far-flung neighborhoods, split established communities, and contort themselves into noncompact shapes — all to manufacture districts based on stereotypes about Hispanic and Latino voters. But politicians who treated these voters as nothing more than a checkbox on the census form cannot be trusted with the mapmaking pen. At trial, we presented twelve witnesses — experts, legislators, and community members whose lives are shaped by these maps — and cross-examined two more. Over the course of the trial, the evidence piled up: the maps make no sense, they can only be explained by racial goals, and the state had no constitutional reason to sort voters in this manner. The law is clear: racial gerrymandering is illegal. We'll continue to fight to ensure that all voters in the wonderfully diverse state of Florida have a chance to make their voice heard.



Courtroom sketches are courtesy of @tonio.art

More Legal Highlights:

- **Parnell v. School Board of Escambia County** - On December 29, we filed an amicus brief in the Eleventh Circuit challenging Escambia County's removal of *And Tango Makes Three* from public school libraries. The school board banned the age-appropriate children's book based on viewpoint-driven objections, claiming it promotes an "LGBTQ agenda." We argued the decision violates the First Amendment by censoring access to ideas simply because government officials disapprove of the message.
- **Naples Pride v. City of Naples** - In our lawsuit challenging the City of Naples' unconstitutional restrictions on Naples Pride's annual Pride festival, the district court denied the City's motion to dismiss on January 13. In a detailed 36-page ruling, the court held that our claims may proceed, allowing the case to move forward as we continue challenging government attempts to burden protected speech and public assembly.
- **Brown v. Young** - In our case challenging the dismissal of a state biologist based on a social media post about Charlie Kirk, we filed a motion to compel "Liberals of TikTok" to respond to our subpoena for documents concerning their involvement in our client's firing. "Liberals of TikTok" ultimately produced responsive information, and we voluntarily dismissed the motion.
- **C.M. v. Noem** - In our case challenging barriers to legal counsel at the Everglades immigration detention facility, grimly known as "Alligator Alcatraz," we appeared in federal court in Fort Myers for a two-day evidentiary hearing and oral argument. We are seeking a preliminary injunction on behalf of a class of detained individuals who have been denied the ability to retain and communicate with legal counsel, in violation of due process and constitutional protections.

WHERE THE PEOPLE MOVE

GRASSROOTS POWER IN ACTION

In January our field team has been on the ground preparing volunteers to be RAISE legal observers for immigration enforcement and legal observers for protests and rallies. We know many communities are scared right now, and we've also seen an overwhelming number of Floridians reach out and show up to volunteer to take care of their neighbors - we are so grateful to our volunteers! There are so many ways to volunteer, from legal observing, to translating materials, making advocacy calls, leading trainings/trainers, and so much more - sign up to volunteer and we'll reach out to invite you to our next volunteer orientation, where you will learn about all the opportunities to join us.

January was also the start of legislative session in Florida, our Tallahassee organizer has been working closely with community partners and local volunteers to make their voices heard at important bill hearings. If you are local to Tallahassee and want to join this team, join our next Tallahassee local meeting or contact us at volunteer@aclufl.org. If you are not in Tallahassee your voice also matters, join our legislative alerts so you can receive texts about the latest bills, and how you can make a difference. If you are curious about legislative session we also invite you to our Legislative Townhall Series where we will break down proposed bills and how to take action. We also have two remaining training sessions on government transparency and immigration as well as reproductive justice, where we will do a deep dive into the issues and bills proposed.

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! We need to collect over 20,000 signed petitions from Miami registered voters to get on the ballot.

JOIN AN UPCOMING TRAINING OR EVENT

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

IT STARTS
WITH YOU

Legislative Session

- [Sign up here](#) to stay up to date on bills and actions during the legislative session!
- Legislative Town Hall Series - stay in the know on the latest bills in Tallahassee, join us for a live session with our Policy and Field teams*
 - [February 12](#)
 - [February 26](#)
 - [March 12](#)
- Rise Together for Florida's Legislative Session: Government Transparency & Immigration - [February 5](#)*
- Rise Together for Florida's Legislative Session: Reproductive Freedom - [February 10](#)*

Campaign Team Meetings

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

- Floridians for Immigrant Justice Campaign Meeting (virtual) - [February 2](#)*
- Banned Book Club (virtual) - [February 3](#)*
- Storytelling Planning Team (virtual) - [February 4](#)*
- Free Speech Team Meeting (virtual) - [February 11](#)*
- Detention Advocacy Team (virtual) - [February 18](#)*
- Reproductive Justice Team Meeting (virtual) - [February 24](#)*
- Spanish Translators Team (virtual) - [February 25](#)*

Community Meet-Ups and Local Activism

Join our teams on the ground across Florida:

- Paint Your Story Orlando (in-person) - [February 7](#)*
- Broward Action Team Meeting (virtual + in-person) - [February 12](#)*
- Tampa Bay Action Team Meeting (virtual + in-person) - [February 18](#)*
- Orlando Team Meet Up (virtual) - [February 19](#)*
- Tallahassee Action Team Meeting (virtual + in-person) - [February 24](#)*

Trainings

Empower yourself and your community:

- RAISE Legal Observer Training (for immigration enforcement) (virtual) (this training is recurring, find a shift that works for you!) - [February 4](#)*
- Legal Observing Training: Protests and Rallies (virtual) (this training is recurring, find a shift that works for you!) - [February 13](#)*
- Power and Training Bootcamp for FSU students (in-person) - [February 17](#)*
- A Voice for Reproductive Justice: A Training for Medical Professionals (virtual) - [February 18](#)*

WHERE POLICY MEETS THE PEOPLE

TURNING OUTRAGE INTO IMPACT

On January 13, Florida's legislative session began. For the next 60 days, politicians in Tallahassee will be making decisions and passing bills that affect our civil liberties. Our senior campaign strategist Abdelilah Skhir participated in a roundtable discussion hosted by our partners at Equal Ground in response to Gov. DeSantis' State of the State speech. You can [watch the legislative roundtable](#) on Equal Ground's YouTube channel.

Several dangerous bills have already seen movement. The Florida House passed HB 289, which would lay the groundwork to give fertilized eggs and embryos the same rights as living people. This means if a pregnant Floridian needs health care even in an emergency, it would be lawyers - not doctors - getting involved. Interim political director Kara Gross testified against this legislation when it was heard in the House Judiciary Committee. You can [watch that testimony on the Florida Channel](#) (testimony starts at 1:43:40). The Senate version of the bill was heard in its second committee on January 28, and we will continue to oppose this extreme legislation. On January 22, 2026, the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the ACLU of Florida, Planned Parenthood, House Minority Leader Fentrice Driskell, and Senate Minority Leader Pro Tempore Tracie Davis held a [press conference in support of Florida's Reproductive Freedom Act](#), which would create a fundamental right to reproductive health care. (HB 1151/SB 1308, Reproductive Freedom Act)

Be sure to sign up for our legislative town hall series to stay up to date on how you can use your voice to get involved.

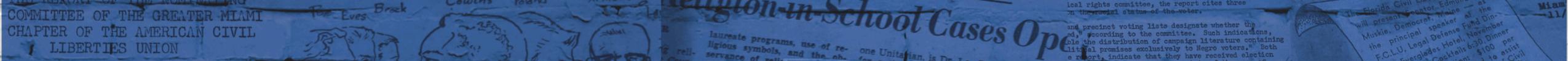


In January, the Stronger Miami campaign celebrated collecting over 18,500 petitions for our movement to end corruption and create a city that works for everyone. What started in May 2025 has become a groundswell of grassroots support for real change in City Hall. The Stronger Miami ballot initiative would create a truly representative government by:

- Moving city elections to higher turnout even years
- Making city districts smaller
- Strengthening guardrails against rigged districts

Registered voters in the City of Miami can visit strongermiami.org for more information and to sign the petition.





FUELING THE FIGHT

DEFENDING FREEDOM AND EXPANDING OUR FUTURE

Harnessing the Power of Philanthropy: Standing for Dignity, Accountability, and the Common Good

There are moments in our history when we are forced to pause and ask a deeper moral question: *Is this who we want to be?* Across the country and our state, communities have watched disturbing footage of heavily armed immigration agents using force against civilians. Families have been shattered. And many Americans, across lines of background and belief, are asking whether these tactics reflect our shared values.

This is where philanthropy and the ACLU of Florida play an essential role. For seventy years, the ACLU of Florida has been Florida's first line of defense against injustice. When the powerful tried to silence, intimidate, or erase, the ACLU of Florida stood firm. Today, we find ourselves at a defining moment for democracy, not only in Florida, but across the nation.

The Nonprofit Responsibility in Times of Crisis

When government power is exercised without transparency, restraint, or accountability, it is often civil society organizations that step in to document abuses, defend constitutional rights, and ensure that human dignity remains at the center of public life. In moments like these, nonprofits serve as both a moral anchor and a practical safeguard — providing legal support, elevating community voices, and pushing back against policies rooted in fear or political expediency. They help make sure the public is informed, that impacted people are not left to navigate harm alone, and that power is met with principled resistance when it overreaches.

At the ACLU of Florida, philanthropy fuels this work. Your continued investment allows us to:

- Hold government agencies accountable when constitutional lines are crossed.
- Defend the rights of immigrants and U.S. citizens alike
- Challenge the normalization of excessive force
- Protect communities caught in the crosshairs of aggressive enforcement

This is the power of philanthropy and it matters now more than ever.

As the new calendar year begins, our investors are encouraged to consider increasing their level of giving to help sustain and expand this work. Increased philanthropic investment allows the ACLU of Florida to deepen its legal capacity, strengthen organizing efforts, and respond quickly as new threats to civil liberties emerge.

Interested in Learning More?

Members of the ACLU of Florida's development team are available to share more about current priorities and ways to deepen your impact in the year ahead. We welcome the opportunity to connect and explore how your support can help advance justice and liberty across Florida. Please call [786-363-4432](tel:786-363-4432) or email kgelok@aclufl.org.



FLORIDA ON THE FRONT LINES OF JUSTICE

What Dr. King's Work in Florida Demands of Us Now

by Keisha Mulfort, Deputy Director of Communications

Each year, we speak the name of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with reverence. We quote him. We post him. We recite his words that haven't left us since they initially touched our hearts. We pride ourselves on being the descendants of his legacy. We recognize that we are his dream. But if we are honest with ourselves, the version of King we often commemorate is different from the one who lived. The real Dr. King was not simply a dreamer. He was a disruptor, a strategist, and contrary to the version we often juxtapose with Malcolm X, he very much was a man who demanded that America confront its own brutality and change it.

The state of Florida was integral to this demand.

Florida was not a convenient stop on the map for his fight for civil rights. It was a proving ground. In Florida, the movement collided with open, unapologetic resistance. Resistance that was not hidden behind just segregation, but enforced with clubs, jail cells, economic threats, and terror. Especially today, Florida reminds us that civil rights victories were never inevitable. They were fought for, paid for, and opposed at every turn. That is why King's lessons here still carry weight. Florida has always been a place where freedom is tested and where the nation reveals what it is willing to tolerate.

Florida teaches us that progress does not arrive because people in power suddenly grow a conscience. Progress arrives when ordinary people decide they will no longer contort themselves to fit inside systems that deny their humanity. When Dr. King came to St. Augustine in 1964, he stepped into a city where segregation was not simply a social custom, but a system maintained through fear.

In Florida, disruption demanded a particular kind of courage. It required people to be seen. To be arrested. To be spat on. To send their children into the streets knowing jail or physical harm might follow. People stepped forward knowing they could lose their jobs, their homes, their safety, or their lives, and they stepped forward anyway.

This is the part of King's legacy that is often minimized.

We celebrate the outcome but move quickly past the unfathomable terror. We honor the victories while softening the significant risks associated with challenging systems designed to retaliate. But the moral force of the movement came from its willingness to confront power openly and repeatedly until it fractured. When people today are criticized for being too loud, too angry, or too disruptive, we look to Dr. King's presence in Florida for clarity. He revealed that justice has never been achieved by asking politely for permission. Rather, it is achieved through deliberate confrontation, disciplined persistence, and a willingness to remain visible until power is forced to respond.

Florida's movement was sustained by people whose names are rarely recorded. Students, pastors, domestic workers, elders, parents, and neighbors made extraordinary choices in ordinary places. They held meetings in churches and living rooms, spaces that doubled as sanctuaries and strategy rooms. They planned quietly because phones were monitored and retaliation was expected. They understood that even speaking openly could invite consequences. They turned scarcity into strategy and exhaustion into resolve, building networks of advocacy and coordination with whatever resources they had at their disposal.

This is what the movement looked like in real life. Tired people doing brave things.

Florida reminds us that movements are not built by viral moments or singular leaders. They are built by people who show up again and again, long after attention fades, when retreat would be easier and silence would be safer.

Every meaningful step toward equality has been followed by resistance designed to limit participation and dilute power. When progress expanded who could vote, new rules emerged to restrict how, when, and whether those votes would count. When representation grew, boundaries were redrawn. When communities organized, barriers were erected to exhaust them. The methods shift with the times, but the purpose remains constant. Control who participates. Control who decides. Control whose voices shape the future.

King warned us of this not to instill fear, but to cultivate readiness. He understood that freedom requires maintenance. That democracy demands attention. That the rights people fought to secure can be weakened, delayed, or reversed when vigilance fades.

Florida illustrates how interconnected injustice truly is.

When voting rights are restricted, the consequences surface in classrooms, workplaces, housing markets, hospitals, and courtrooms. When history is censored, communities lose the language to understand their present and imagine alternatives. When bodily autonomy is controlled, families are forced to navigate life-altering decisions under political scrutiny. When protest is punished, harm multiplies in the absence of accountability.

Dr. King did not come to Florida because it was welcoming. He came because it was necessary. Florida's resistance revealed the nation's moral failures, and Floridians revealed what courage looks like when there is no margin for comfort and no guarantee of safety. The hostility was not incidental - it was the point. And it clarified the stakes of the movement with unforgiving honesty.

So, the question is not whether King's lessons still apply.

The question is whether we are willing to honor them honestly.

Florida has always been a front line. It was during King's lifetime, and it remains one today. The pressures have shifted in form, but not in purpose. The test remains the same: *Whether we will meet resistance with resolve, whether we will recognize the tide rising before it pulls entire communities under, and whether we will accept responsibility not just for remembering the past, but for shaping what comes next.*

If we allow ourselves to sit with the weight of what was endured and fully acknowledge what is being asked of us now, King's legacy becomes more than memory - it becomes instruction, obligation, and a measure of our own willingness to act.

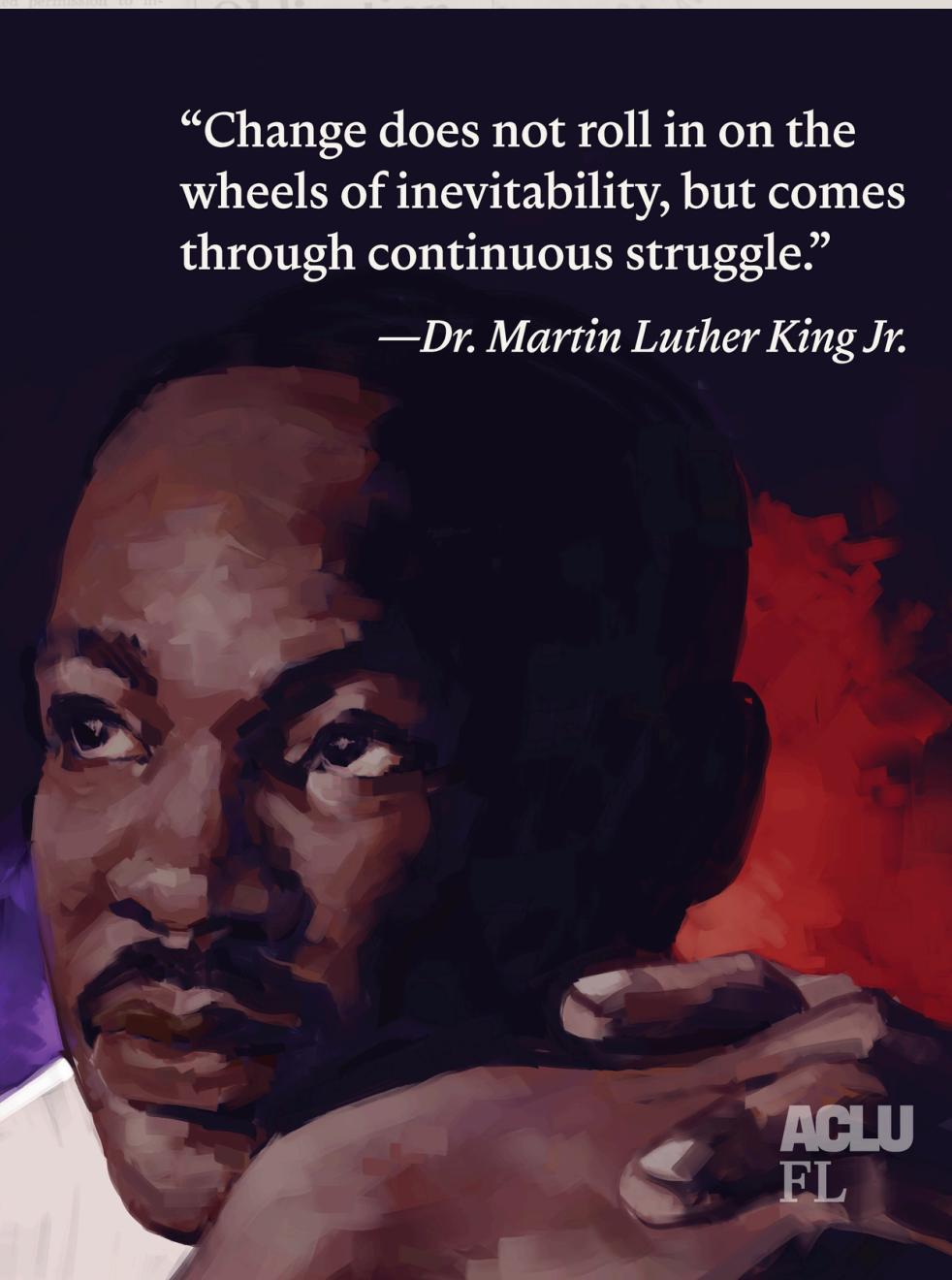
Dr. King's movement is not over.

Dr. King's work is not finished.

Dr. King's call remains.

“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



by Jerry Jerome, Digital Strategist

Doe v. Rhoden • C.M. v. Noem • USA v. Brooks • Austin v. Lamb • Cambridge Christian Schools v. Florida High School Athletic Association • Florida Bar v. Girley • HM Florida-Orl, LLC v. Griffin • Netchoice v. Moody • Pernell v. Florida Board of Governors of the State University System • Tray v. Florida State Board of Education • Cubanos Pa'lante v. Florida House of Representatives • Nord Hodges v. Albritton • Hispanic Federation v. Byrd • Florida Immigrant Coalition v. Uthmeier • ACLU of Florida v. Baker County Sheriff's Office • De Leon Serrabi v. United States of America • The Farmworker Association of Florida v. Uthmeier • The Florida Department of Law Enforcement v. CIS • Claire v. Others v. Tony • ACP v. City of Jacksonville •

MEETING THE MOMENT WITH TRUTH AND COURAGE



ACLU

Florida

THE RESISTANCE IS YOU

This movement is powered by people who refuse to back down. With your continued support, we'll keep holding the frontline to freedom.

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