



SOCIAL MEDIA CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

ACLU 70
Florida

THE SCHOLARSHIP

Your voice matters in the fight for freedom. In this scholarship opportunity, you'll explore the 70-year history of the ACLU of Florida and how we've defended the rights and liberties of all people. You'll also learn and showcase why those freedoms still need protecting today—because freedom is earned, not given.

The ACLU of Florida (ACLU FL) is thrilled to announce three \$5,000 scholarships for high school and college students. Scholarships are open to graduating Florida high school seniors and graduates of Florida high schools who are currently enrolled in an accredited vocational school, community college, college, or university. All applicants have to be U.S. citizens.

Students are invited to respond to the video prompt below by conducting their own research, highlighting what's at stake when our freedoms are threatened, and inspiring other young Floridians to learn more about ACLU FL's decades-long mission to protect civil rights and civil liberties across the state.

To apply, create an original video and post it to your public TikTok or Instagram. Your video should reference and cite the ACLU of Florida's work to protect freedom and democracy in Florida. Then, submit your application by uploading your video link(s) using this form.

Winners will be selected based on creativity, follower reach, views, and engagement (likes, comments, shares, etc.) Videos must speak to constitutional rights and values, the importance of defending democracy, and the role of limiting government overreach. Winners will be notified by April 2026.

Paid ACLU of Florida staff, board members, and immediate family members of staff or board members are not eligible to apply. Videos must be educational and fact-based. Any submission that contains misleading information or misinformation, or that includes endorsements of a candidate or political party, will be disqualified.

SCHOLARSHIPS

\$5,000

APPLICATION DEADLINE

MARCH 31

PLATFORMS

**Instagram Reels and/or
TikTok**

THE PROMPT

For the past 70 years, the ACLU of Florida has faced each era's challenges with courage and conviction—defending freedoms that are too often taken for granted. From courtrooms to classrooms, city halls to the streets, we've pushed back against government overreach and worked toward a Florida where truth matters, power has limits, and everyone can speak, learn, protest, and live free from discrimination.

Today, the stakes are just as high. Florida has become a testing ground for policies that can weaken democracy—like censorship, book bans, and extreme abortion restrictions—and for actions that can override the will of voters, including the removal of elected officials by the governor.

After researching the ACLU of Florida's work, explain why it matters to protect—and reclaim—our civil rights and civil liberties today. What does “freedom in a democracy” mean to you, and why is it worth defending right now in Florida?

GUIDANCE

ABOUT THE ACLU OF FLORIDA

The ACLU of Florida, the state affiliate of the national ACLU, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to defending the civil liberties and rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Through litigation, legislation, and public education, the ACLU of Florida strives to ensure that the rights and freedoms of all Floridians are protected.

The ACLU of Florida is non-partisan and does not oppose or endorse candidates. but we must ensure Floridians understand that our civil liberties and democracy itself are on the ballot.

The Social Media Civic Engagement Scholarship does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, military status, or any other restricting classification in its selection of scholarship awardees.

DO'S AND DON'TS

DO: Educate people about Florida's anti-democratic policies.

DO: Focus on the power people have to hold elected leaders accountable and participate in civic engagement.

DO: Center the communities most impacted by harmful laws in your narrative -- BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Disabled, Students, Teachers, Women and other people who can become pregnant, and Immigrants.

DO: Acknowledge policies and practices that are eroding our rights and liberties, but emphasize we can do something about it.

DON'T: For these videos, we ask that you do not endorse or support a candidate for public office directly. The ACLU of Florida does not endorse or support candidates for public office.

DON'T: Name specific candidates or elected officials.

*NOTE: Video submissions that directly endorse, name, or support candidates will be ineligible to receive scholarship funds.

QUESTIONS

For advice and for scholarship application clarifications, you may reach out to media@aclufl.org

RESOURCES

To help inform your creative process, we created a few highlights of our fight for democracy in Florida over the course of 70 years.

1950S–1960S: FOUNDING, FREE SPEECH, AND THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

Explore the rich history of those who dared to resist, stood for our constitutional values, and whose courage shaped our freedoms here in Florida and learn about the ways we are still carrying the torch in this generation for Freedom, Equality, Justice, Dignity, Democracy, Accountability, Liberty, and Courage.

Defying Florida's Red Scare (1956)

During the Cold War, Florida politicians launched a crusade to root out “subversives,” using fear of communism as a pretext to attack integrationists, academics, civil rights leaders, and LGBTQ+ Floridians. The infamous “Johns Committee” relied on intimidation and secret interrogations to silence dissent. In this climate, the Florida Civil Liberties Union—what would become the ACLU of Florida—was born to defend free expression and protect people targeted for their identities and beliefs.

Challenging School Prayer and Religious Coercion (1959)

Miami parent Harlow Chamberlin, with ACLU support, sued the Dade County School Board to challenge mandatory Bible readings and school-led prayer. In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the practice—ensuring public schools remained places of learning, not religious coercion.

Resisting Disenfranchisement and Intimidation (1959)

The 1950s in Florida were marked by violence aimed at silencing Black voters. That year, Rev. Ben Wyland of the Florida Council for Racial Cooperation uncovered that in Gadsden County nearly 11,000 Black residents of voting age yielded only five registered voters. Testimony from clergy like Rev. Dee Hawkins revealed threats faced by those who tried to register. The ACLU helped shine a national spotlight on these injustices, fueling momentum for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Rev. Theodore Gibson's Stand for the NAACP (1959)

Rev. Theodore Gibson, president of Miami's NAACP branch, was ordered to turn over membership lists meant to intimidate activists. He refused, was jailed and fined, and appealed with ACLU support. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned his conviction, affirming that government fishing expeditions into private associations violated the Constitution. Gibson went on to serve on the Miami City Commission, continuing his fight for equality.

Challenging Segregation at the Shell City Lunch Counter (1960)

As sit-ins spread across the South, Black and white protestors in Miami challenged segregation at Shell City. Arrested for refusing to leave, they took their case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which in 1964 overturned their convictions and struck down state-backed segregation. The ruling came just weeks before passage of the Civil Rights Act.

Protecting the Right to Counsel: Gideon v. Wainwright (1963)

When Clarence Gideon was denied a lawyer in his Florida trial, he was convicted and imprisoned. With ACLU support, his handwritten appeal reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1963, the Court ruled the right to counsel fundamental to a fair trial, ensuring that justice would not be reserved for the wealthy. Retrial with a lawyer led to Gideon's acquittal.

RESOURCES

1970S: FREE EXPRESSION, PRIVACY, AND EXPANDING RIGHTS

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Protecting Students and Free Expression (1971)

The ACLU successfully challenged the suspension of students who remained seated during the flag salute, with a federal court affirming their right to dissent peacefully in schools.

Defending Patients' Rights in State Hospitals (1973)

The ACLU exposed inhumane conditions at the South Florida State Hospital, leading to the creation of a "Manual of Rights of Patients" that affirmed dignity and humane treatment for people with mental health disabilities.

Pushing Back Against Political Censorship (1977)

The ACLU opposed a bill that would have created state committees to screen university course materials for "pornography." The bill was vetoed, protecting academic freedom from government interference.

Challenging Barriers to Ballot Access (1976)

When Florida restricted ballot access to candidates from major political parties, the ACLU won an injunction that placed independent candidate Eugene McCarthy on the presidential ballot, affirming voters' right to broader choices.

Defending Reproductive Rights (1979)

The ACLU challenged restrictions on abortion access, arguing against state interference in personal medical decisions. These cases laid groundwork for defending privacy and reproductive autonomy in Florida.

RESOURCES

1980S: DEFENDING COMMUNITIES AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

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Protecting Haitian Refugees (1980)

We filed a class action suit after the INS revoked work authorization for Haitian refugees awaiting asylum, challenging the violation of treaty rights and due process. This fight affirmed that immigrants deserve dignity and protection under the law.

Standing Up for Students and Families (1981–1985)

The ACLU successfully challenged Florida's law requiring minors to obtain parental consent for abortions (1981), protecting young people's autonomy. In 1985, we secured justice for Todd Shuttlesworth, a Broward County employee fired because of his AIDS diagnosis—one of the nation's first workplace discrimination cases of its kind.

Defending Religious Freedom (1984)

When Rev. John Mellish was jailed for refusing to break the confidentiality of confession, we defended him—affirming that clergy cannot be forced by the state to violate their sacred duties. The case helped spur new protections for religious counseling in Florida.

Defending Free Expression and Minority Faiths (1987)

We fought Hialeah's attempt to ban animal sacrifice in the Santería faith. In 1993, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down the ordinances, affirming that minority religions are entitled to the same constitutional protections as any other faith.

Protecting the Homeless in Miami (1988)

For years, Miami police conducted "sweeps" arresting unhoused people during public events. In *Pottinger v. City of Miami*, we won a landmark ruling declaring these arrests unconstitutional and creating safe zones. The case reshaped how cities nationwide address homelessness.

RESOURCES

1990S: EXPANDING RIGHTS AND BREAKING BARRIERS

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Defending Artistic Expression: 2 Live Crew (1990–1992)

When Broward Sheriff Nick Navarro labeled 2 Live Crew’s album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* obscene, we defended their right to free expression. A record store owner was arrested for selling the album, but the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the obscenity ruling, affirming that art—even controversial art—is protected under the First Amendment.

Challenging School Prayer and Religious Coercion (1990s)

We fought persistent attempts to impose prayer and religious instruction in Florida public schools, including challenges to sectarian graduation ceremonies and Bible-based curricula. These cases reaffirmed the separation of church and state in education.

Protecting Parents and Families (1996–1998)

We defended parental rights against intrusive state laws, from forced blood transfusions to unconstitutional “grandparent visitation” laws. In 1998, we helped strike down Florida’s misleadingly named “partial birth abortion” ban, ensuring reproductive freedom was protected.

Fighting Discrimination and Protecting Workers (1995–1999)

We challenged HIV/AIDS discrimination, suspicionless drug testing, and the unlawful targeting of day laborers across Miami-Dade. Settlements secured millions in damages and set precedent that workers—particularly immigrants and people of color—cannot be stripped of their dignity or rights.

Defending the Vulnerable (1990s)

From protecting homeless Miamians against unlawful arrests, to defending people with mental health disabilities from forced institutionalization, our work throughout the 1990s affirmed that civil rights must extend to every community, especially the most marginalized.

RESOURCES

2000S: DEFENDING RIGHTS IN A NEW CENTURY

Explore the rich history of those who dared to resist, stood for our constitutional values, and whose courage shaped our freedoms here in Florida and learn about the ways we are still carrying the torch in this generation for Freedom, Equality, Justice, Dignity, Democracy, Accountability, Liberty, and Courage.

Fighting Voter Suppression in the Wake of Bush v. Gore (2000s)

After the chaos of the 2000 presidential election, we launched the Florida Equal Voting Rights Project to protect voters from disenfranchisement. We challenged broken election systems, fought racial profiling in policing that bled into voting access, and pressed for fairer rules so every Floridian could cast a ballot with confidence.

Advancing Privacy in Healthcare: The Terri Schiavo Case (2003–2005)

We stood against political interference in Terri Schiavo's end-of-life case, where lawmakers tried to override her expressed wishes. By challenging state laws that forced medical decisions against families' choices, we helped ensure that dignity and privacy remain protected in deeply personal medical matters.

Protecting LGBTQ+ Students and Families (2006–2008)

We defended students' rights to form Gay-Straight Alliances and wear symbols of support for LGBTQ+ peers in Florida schools, striking down discriminatory bans. At the same time, we fought to end the state's cruel ban on adoption by gay and lesbian Floridians, ultimately securing a ruling that declared it unconstitutional in 2010.

Safeguarding Free Speech in the Digital Age (2009)

As new technologies reshaped communication, we fought to ensure that free expression kept pace. In *Evans v. Bayer*, we successfully defended a high school student suspended for creating a Facebook page criticizing her teacher—a landmark ruling affirming that constitutional rights extend into the digital space.

Pushing Back Against Government Overreach (2000s)

From stopping suspicionless pat-downs at stadiums, to defending residents targeted for political speech, we kept government power in check. We also challenged surveillance and censorship, underscoring that liberty depends on both safety and freedom.

RESOURCES

2010S: EXPANDING DEMOCRACY AND EQUALITY

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Ending Florida's LGBTQ+ Adoption Ban (2010)

After more than three decades of injustice, we successfully struck down Florida's ban on adoption by gay and lesbian parents. This victory meant thousands of children in foster care could finally find permanent homes, and LGBTQ+ families could embrace their right to love and belong.

Fighting Gerrymandering: The Fair Districts Amendments (2010–2012)

Floridians voted overwhelmingly for Amendments 5 and 6, writing fairness into the state constitution for the first time. When politicians tried to dismantle these reforms through lawsuits and legislative delays, we held the line—winning in court and preserving one of the strongest anti-gerrymandering measures in the nation.

Defending Voting Rights Against Suppression (2011–2019)

When Governor Rick Scott and later legislatures pushed voter suppression laws, we fought back in court—challenging new restrictions designed to keep Floridians from the ballot box. In case after case, we defended access to the vote and pushed back against modern-day poll taxes.

Restoring Second Chances: Amendment 4 (2018)

In one of the largest expansions of democracy since the Civil Rights Movement, nearly 65% of Florida voters passed Amendment 4, restoring voting rights to most returning citizens who had completed their sentences. The victory ended a Jim Crow-era disenfranchisement system and returned more than a million Floridians to the promise of democracy.



RESOURCES

2020S: DEFENDING FREEDOM IN A NEW ERA

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Challenging Classroom Censorship: Pernell v. Lamb (2022)

In 2022, Florida lawmakers passed the “Stop W.O.K.E. Act,” censoring professors and students from openly teaching or discussing issues of race and gender. We challenged the law as unconstitutional, with plaintiffs like Professor LeRoy Pernell warning: “This thought-level policing is inconsistent with a free nation and unacceptable.” A federal court blocked the law, keeping the door open for academic freedom while the case proceeds.

Challenging Florida’s 15-Week Abortion Ban: Planned Parenthood v. State of Florida (2022)

That same year, Florida passed HB 5, banning most abortions after 15 weeks. Health care providers, represented by the ACLU and partners, sued—arguing it violated Florida’s constitutional right to privacy. Though temporarily blocked by a trial court, the ban ultimately went into effect as the state appealed. The case continues, shaping the future of reproductive freedom in Florida.

Protecting Access to Counsel in Detention: Mejia Encarnacion v. Baker County Sheriff’s Office (2022)

Immigrants detained at Baker County faced retaliation for speaking out about abuse, including being denied access to lawyers. We sued the Sheriff’s Office, and a court allowed First Amendment claims to move forward—marking progress in exposing systemic mistreatment.

Challenging Racial Gerrymandering Across Florida (2022–2025)

From Jacksonville to Miami to Daytona Beach, Floridians have faced unfair district maps designed to dilute Black voting power or protect incumbents. In 2022, we joined civil rights partners in NAACP v. City of Jacksonville, challenging the city’s racially gerrymandered plan; by 2023, a court struck it down. That same year, residents and groups in GRACE, Inc. v. City of Miami won a ruling blocking Miami’s unconstitutional map. In 2025, following our lawsuit in Sakhnovsky v. City of Daytona Beach, the city repealed a redistricting plan drawn around incumbents’ addresses. Together, these victories reaffirm a core principle: voters choose their representatives—not the other way around.

Protecting Charitable Bail Funds: Tallahassee Bail Fund v. Marshall (2022)

We represented the Tallahassee Bail Fund in challenging a Florida law that seizes charitable funds used to bail people out of jail. The suit argues the state is punishing organizations for helping people access their freedom before trial, violating constitutional rights.

RESOURCES

2020S: DEFENDING FREEDOM IN A NEW ERA (CONT.)

Defending Student Free Speech: Students for Justice in Palestine v. Rodrigues (2023)
When Florida's university chancellor ordered state schools to deactivate Students for Justice in Palestine, we stood with students at the University of Florida, challenging the move as a violation of free speech and association. The lawsuit defends the principle that students do not lose their First Amendment rights on campus.

Protecting Political Speech for Attorneys: Florida Bar v. Girley (2024)
The ACLU filed amicus briefs for attorneys Jerry and Brooke Girley, who faced suspension after criticizing a judge in a racial discrimination case. We argued their words were protected political speech under the First Amendment. The case is pending before the Florida Supreme Court.

Fighting for Transgender Rights in Prison: Keohane v. Dixon (2024)
We filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of Reiyn Keohane and other transgender women denied gender-affirming care by the Florida Department of Corrections. The suit challenges cruel policies that violate the Eighth Amendment and force women to endure discriminatory grooming standards.

Challenging State Attacks on Amendment 4 (2024)
Ahead of the 2024 ballot, Florida officials tried to derail Amendment 4—the initiative to protect abortion rights—by rewriting its financial impact statement, spreading false claims, and even attempting to censor a campaign ad featuring Caroline, a Tampa woman denied an abortion despite a terminal condition. We went to court on all fronts, blocking the misleading ballot language, halting the misinformation campaign, and stopping the censorship. As one federal judge put it: “To keep it simple for the State of Florida: it’s the First Amendment, stupid.”

Exposing Abuse at Baker County Detention Center (2025)
Detainees at Baker County described horrific conditions, including denial of medical care, solitary confinement, and physical abuse. Survivors like Ana, a trafficking victim punished for asking for menstrual products, shared their stories. We sued, demanding accountability and closure of the facility.

Challenging Academic Censorship: Austin v. Lamb (2025)
We filed a lawsuit against Florida’s SB 266, which bans funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and imposes viewpoint-based restrictions on education. The case defends academic freedom and the First Amendment rights of Florida students and educators.

Blocking Florida’s Anti-Immigrant Law SB 4C (2025)
We sued to block SB 4C, a sweeping law that criminalizes transporting undocumented immigrants into Florida. A federal court halted enforcement, affirming that immigration is a federal matter and that states cannot trample due process through fear and prejudice.

Ensuring DeSantis Upholds Duty to Call Elections (2025)
For the third time, we sued Governor DeSantis after he delayed calling special elections, leaving communities without representation. “From Jeb Bush to Rick Scott, past governors moved quickly,” said ACLU attorney Nicholas Warren. “DeSantis’s refusal is both troubling and illegal.”