FLORIDA FRONT LINE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER EDITION

ACLU Florida

DISSENT

is not grounds

for deportation

MESSAGE FROM THE FRONT LINE

September Edition

Resisting the Fear that Endangers Our Democracy

There is a particular kind of government overreach that announces itself loudly. It bans. It prosecutes. It punishes. It tells you explicitly what you may not say, teach, fund, celebrate, or believe.

And then there is the quieter kind.

It creates enough uncertainty, enough threat, and enough fear that people begin doing an authoritarian government's work for it.

We are seeing both in Florida – each reinforcing the other and endangering our democracy.

Fear becomes concession. Concession becomes compliance. Compliance becomes complicity. Complicity silences resistance. And silence signals surrender.

But the power of resistance is reclaimed the moment Floridians shed their silence and hold local leaders accountable when they succumb to abusive and illegal exercises of state power instead of keeping the promises they made to protect their communities. Complicity ends when Floridians say no to universities and cities voluntarily deputizing their police force as agents of ICE and when local officials refuse to comply with an intentionally vague law before it even goes into effect or to concede more cuts to diverse, equitable and inclusive services than the law, its exemptions and our constitution actually require. And, fear completely loses its grip when Floridians openly challenge the state's unconstitutional overreach.

This past month, the governor and his cabinet unilaterally labeled over 90 groups as "domestic terrorist organizations," including a prominent, nationwide Muslim civil rights organization that works to protect free speech, religious freedom and equality, harkening back to the perilous times of Florida's Johns Committee and its decade-long reign of terror that targeted civil rights groups and the LGBTQ+ community by attempting to link them to communism.

At the same time, Floridians witnessed a surge in ICE enforcement and excessive use of force against people across the state. In Southwest Florida alone, over 500 arrests occurred in less than one week. In Naples Manor, ICE agents brutally assaulted a U.S. citizen as they lashed out at a crowd that had gathered to protest an arrest.

September also revealed lapsing courage in the face of the looming anti-diversity law, Senate Bill 1134 (SB1134) — a law that seeks to restrict Florida cities and counties from funding, promoting, or taking certain official actions related to what the statute vaguely defines as diversity, equity, and inclusion. It prohibits local DEI offices and officers, places restrictions on local grants and contracts, allows residents to sue cities and counties over alleged violations, and, in contradiction of the plain language of Florida's constitution, it suggests that local officials can be removed from office by proclaiming violations of SB1134's prohibitions constitute "misfeasance or malfeasance in office."











MESSAGE FROM THE FRONT LINE

Public records show that some counties and cities are already pre-complying based on the local governments' interpretation of SB 1134's requirements: Leon County and Fort Myers have already terminated programs designed to support minority and women-owned businesses, Jacksonville has changed grant application guidelines, and Largo ended its Inclusive Workplace Committee—all to "comply" with a law not yet in effect.

That is, local officials stop asking, *What does my community need?* and start asking, *What might get me in trouble?*

But it is in these moments of cruel, unjust overreach that the conviction and courage of the people can prevail and it only takes a willing few to win. Earlier this month, we mobilized people in Miami and Tallahassee who secured crucial votes in their city commissions and successfully protected vital funding and resources for diverse communities. We continue to support community groups, residents, and allies protesting ICE abuses and to train RAISE legal observers – and they are creating momentum in cities like Doral to end their 287(g) agreements. And, we filed suit to stop the state from designating civil rights organizations they disagree with as terrorists and depriving them of basic due process because they don't like the content of their speech.

Resistance to government overreach does not require extraordinary power. It requires ordinary people consistently exercising the democratic power they already possess.

Our call today is both simple and complex, and we affirm it proudly: Do not normalize government by fear.

Stand with community and step into courage to reclaim our freedoms because while they may be self-evident, they have always been hard-earned.

As we face this consequential midterm election, remember resistance isn't defeated from the outside. It's surrendered from within. Choose to be among the guardians of democracy who vote and make sure every eligible voter you know is registered, has a plan to vote, and understands that exercising their right is an act of defiance to those who have tried to strip it away. And, demand that the people you elect champion the civil liberties and civil rights of all people.

This is how we protect our democracy.

This is how we embody the front lines of resistance.

This is how freedom wins.

In solidarity,

Bacardi L. Jackson
Executive Director, ACLU of Florida











We are the frontline of

RESISTANCE



LEGAL UPDATE: WHERE RESISTANCE DEFIES INJUSTICE

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

Defending the Right to Speak, Organize, and Exist

On September 29, Governor DeSantis and the rest of the Florida Cabinet voted to designate CAIR, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights organization, and its Florida chapter as "domestic terrorist organizations." They did it under HB 1471, a new state law passed this year. Neither group has ever been charged with a crime, let alone convicted of one. The law lets five state executive officials decide on their own that an American nonprofit is engaged in terrorist activity. No charges are filed, and there is no judge, no jury, no adversarial hearing, and no burden of proof. The process given to CAIR was so thin, it was hardly a process at all.

The seven-page notice against them relied on recycled allegations from a twenty-year-old prosecution of a defunct organization and a chart of decades-old associations involving other people. At the vote itself, an ACLU attorney stood and asked to be heard on behalf of CAIR, and the Governor ignored her. The whole approval of our clients' designation as terrorist organizations took about 30 seconds. The consequences are severe.



Photo Credit: Mitch Perry/Florida Phoenix

If the designation takes effect on November 5, CAIR's ordinary work in Florida would become a felony: its pro bono legal help for Florida residents, its voter-registration drives, and its educational and advocacy work. Donating even one dollar, working for CAIR, renting it office space, or providing it banking or technology services could bring decades in prison, and some penalties reach life imprisonment.

On October 1, together with the National ACLU, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and Bondurant Mixson & Elmore LLP, we filed yet another emergency lawsuit on behalf of CAIR and CAIR-Florida. We are asking the court to block the designations before they take effect.

We argue that the law violates the First Amendment and the Fourteenth Amendments guarantee of due process, and that federal law preempts it. CAIR may be the first target, but the law reaches any organization in the country. If state officials can declare a nonprofit a terrorist group because they disagree with its views, no advocacy organization, including ours, is safe. No state government should hold the power to unilaterally extinguish domestic advocacy organizations because of their First Amendment-protected activity. We intend to stop this dangerous law.

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More Legal Highlights

- ***Vote! v. City of Daytona Beach*** — In our racial-gerrymandering challenge to Daytona Beach's redistricting map, we filed a "motion for partial summary judgment," asking the court to rule in our favor on an important part of our claim before our upcoming trial.
- ***ICEBreakers v. Nuñez*** — In our challenge to the punishment of seven FIU students for their silent protest against FIU's 287(g) immigration-enforcement agreement, the court held a hearing on FIU's motion to dismiss our claim for damages against some of the defendants on the grounds of "qualified immunity." We await a decision. In the meantime, our preliminary injunction against the enforcement of FIU's unconstitutional speech restriction remains in place, and FIU has appealed the granting of the preliminary injunction to the appeals court, the Eleventh Circuit.
- ***Naples Pride v. City of Naples*** — In our challenge to the unconstitutional restrictions on the annual Pride celebration of our client, Naples Pride, we filed a "motion for partial summary judgment," asking the court to rule in our clients' favor on key issues rather than holding a trial on those issues.
- ***De Leon Serrabi v. United States of America*** — In our challenge to the inhumane treatment of our client in immigration detention (he was harassed, violently assaulted, and placed in solitary confinement for 88 days to pressure him to sign his deportation papers), we filed a motion to compel the federal government to hand over evidence that it is currently unlawfully withholding. The court has set a hearing for the motion on October 21 in Jacksonville.
- ***Keohane v. Comerford*** — We filed a post-trial reply brief in our case challenging the Florida Department of Corrections' policies restricting access to gender-affirming care. We now await a trial order from the court.
- ***Sohn v. City of Key West*** — We filed a second lawsuit against the City of Key West concerning its unconstitutional conduct with respect to our clients. The first lawsuit concerned the city's selective enforcement of its regulations against our clients, who had painted fence pickets in rainbow colors to protest the city's removal of its Duval Street rainbow crosswalks; yet the city chose not to cite other noncompliant households for similar fence-color violations. The second lawsuit concerned the city's retaliation against our clients for filing the first lawsuit: the city opened code enforcement cases against several of our clients' neighbors, falsely identifying our clients as the complainants — despite knowing our clients did not submit any code violation complaints.



FIELD UPDATE: WHERE THE PEOPLE MOVE

GRASSROOTS POWER IN ACTION

Our field team has grown over the past two months, and we're excited to announce that we now have a Program Manager to focus on growing our key programs like the College Campus Initiative, Banned Book Club, and more. We're also thrilled to announce that we've hired organizers in some of our key regions, including Tampa Bay, Miami, and Tallahassee, adding to organizing staff in Broward and Orange Counties. Each organizer will continue to build power in these critical hubs and mobilize our supporters to take action for civil liberties. And, you are welcome to join us!

Election Safeguarding

It's been a busy election season, and our organizers and volunteers have been hard at work with election safeguarding and getting out the vote. During the August Primary, they trained non-partisan poll monitors to report problems and voter intimidation at priority polling locations in Hillsborough, Leon, Orange, and Miami-Dade Counties. We engaged voters on the ground in Tallahassee in the 2nd Circuit Court Judicial Elections, going door-to-door providing information about the candidates and important election deadlines.

Our field team and volunteers also made over 30,000 phone calls across the state to remind voters to request their Vote-By-Mail ballots ahead of the primary and general elections.

Protecting Our Neighbors

We hosted multiple canvasses in Little Haiti and North Miami to distribute immigrants' rights resources to business owners and offer information on our Rapid Response Alliance for Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (RAISE), which includes a Florida statewide immigrant support hotline.

We also continue to support the work of the Stronger Miami coalition and collect petitions for a Charter Amendment that will build a city commission that represents all Miamians, not just a select few by:

- Aligning cities with state and national elections now (not just years from now) to increase voter participation and reduce costs;
- Making commissioners more accountable and responsive to the neighborhoods they serve by increasing representation from 5 to 9 commissioners, consistent with cities of similar size; and
- Adding fair redistricting standards.

A big thank you to our amazing volunteers and supporters who braved the Florida heat to help knock doors, poll monitor, and collect petitions with us!



VOLUNTEER WITH US

·We need volunteers to join us! If you'd like to learn more about what volunteering looks like at the ACLU of FL, sign up at aclufl.org/volunteer, and we'll invite you to our next new volunteer orientation.

FIELD UPDATE: 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

Team Meetings

Learn more and get involved in one of our core volunteer teams:

- Storytelling Team Meeting **10/6**
- Banned Book Club Meeting **10/6**
- Free Speech Team Meeting **10/21**

Community Meet-Ups and Local Activism

Join our teams on the ground across Florida:

- Miami Action Team Meeting - **10/13**
- Orlando Action Team Meeting - **10/21**
- Tampa Bay Action Team Meeting - **10/28**

Trainings

Empower yourself and your community:

- Poll Monitor Trainings – **10/5**, **10/12**, **10/19**, **10/26**
- Know Your Rights While Voting (Spanish) - **10/8**
- Know Your Rights While Protesting: Safety Training - **10/13**
- Know Your Rights While Voting (Haitian Creole) - **10/15**
- Know Your Rights While Voting (English) - **10/19**

Take Action

- Protect the Polls: Apopka Election Protection Sign Distribution
- Protect the Polls: North Miami-Dade Election Protection Sign Distribution
- Protect the Polls: South Miami-Dade Election Protection Sign Distribution
- Protect the Polls: Hillsborough County Election Protection Sign Distribution







POLICY UPDATE: WHERE ADVOCACY MATTERS

TURNING OUTRAGE INTO IMPACT

Everyone in America has the right to move freely without being surveilled. Across the country, hundreds of thousands of automated license plate readers are creating an inescapable network of surveillance that gives police new power to track all of our movements, endangering our freedom.

But communities across the country are fighting back against these creepy cameras and winning. Cities and police departments are canceling their contracts with Flock in response to public pressure. After the Florida Department of Transportation ordered the removal of ALPRs from state roads, our policy staff met with reporters and local officials to discuss the ACLU's position on this technology.

When the Tallahassee City Commission took up an agenda item on its use of ALPRs earlier this month, we were there to urge the city to ban these invasive cameras. The City voted unanimously to suspend its ALPR program, and the Leon County Commission voted to prohibit ALPRS on county property.

These wins for our rights are just the beginning. Flock, Axon, Motorola – it doesn't matter which company has its creepy cameras in your neighborhood. They all have the same problems: a lack of transparency, oversight, and regulation into how they collect, store, and use our data, and how to hold public and private actors accountable if they abuse it.

You can find a toolkit at aclu.org/GetTheFlockOut to learn how you can drive change in your community today.

No Flock. No ALPRs. No exceptions. No excuses. Get the Flock out of Florida.

To learn more about ALPR's and the impact of our advocacy, check out this coverage from around the state:

- WFSU | Flock cameras are being shelved across Florida. They may not be gone forever.
- Sun Sentinel | In the 'free state of Florida,' fear of Flock cameras | Editorial
- iPulse Live | September 4, 2026 |Flock Cameras, Haiti TPS, Lynn University & More
- Miami Herald | 'Pervasive and ungovernable.' South Florida's surveillance network is entrenched
- Tallahassee suspends all license plate reader cameras in unanimous vote
- Tallahassee reverses course, suspends Flock cameras



FUELING THE FIGHT

DEFENDING FREEDOM AND EXPANDING OUR FUTURE

Put Your IRA to Work for Civil Liberties

As we approach the end of another consequential year for civil liberties in Florida, we are reminded that protecting our freedom requires more than responding to the challenges of today. It requires supporters who are willing to invest in the long-term strength of this movement.
For some ACLU supporters, one meaningful way to make that investment is through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from an Individual Retirement Account.

If you are age 70½ or older, a QCD allows you to make a gift directly from your IRA to the ACLU of Florida Foundation. The distribution is generally not treated as federal taxable income and may count toward your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD), if applicable. Most importantly, your gift goes to work advancing the mission you care about. QCD gifts help provide the resources needed to defend democracy and protect civil liberties, allowing the ACLU of Florida to continue meeting the challenges facing our state today while preparing for those still ahead.

Don't Miss the December 31 Deadline

If a QCD is part of your year-end giving plans, timing is important. Your QCD must be completed by December 31 of the tax year for which you want it to count. Because IRA custodians may require additional processing time as the end of the year approaches, we encourage supporters to begin the process early.
Every gift represents something bigger: a commitment to protecting the freedoms we share and ensuring the ACLU can remain a powerful defender of civil liberties for years to come.

Interested in making a gift from your IRA? We're here to help. Contact our Development Department at 786-363-4432 or philanthropy@aclufl.org to learn more.

This information is not intended as tax or legal advice. We encourage you to consult with your financial or tax advisor about your individual circumstances







Join the resistance.

WE'RE HIRING!



Spread the word within your networks.

- Compliance Coordinator and Operations Administrator
- Deputy Legal Director
- Director of Equity and Culture
- Executive Assistant
- Executive Program Assistant
- Fall 2026 Orlando Intern
- Policy Analyst/Counsel
- Senior Digital Strategist
- Senior Communications Strategist

All positions will remain open until filled.

ACLU Florida

APPLY NOW

aclufl.org/jobs