





FRONT LINE

PRIORITIES

Defending Democracy

After a historic Supreme Court win, the ACLU continues its push to expand voter access in the South and beyond.

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a favorable ruling in a monumental voting rights case, *Allen v. Milligan*, brought by the ACLU and its partners to challenge Alabama’s racially gerrymandered congressional maps. The decision not only reinforced that the state legislature cannot disenfranchise Alabama’s voters of color, it also clearly affirmed Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which bans racial discrimination in voting nationwide. The decision bodes well for similar ACLU challenges in Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, and other states. While forces working to dilute Black votes remain widespread and aggressive, this ruling supports the ACLU’s push for fairer maps for voters of color across the country.

As efforts to suppress the vote have surged over the past decade, so too have the ACLU’s efforts to defend democracy, particularly across the South and in battleground states, by bolstering election infrastructure, fighting racist voter suppression efforts,

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stopping gerrymandering, and expanding access to the ballot through legislative advocacy. The ACLU of Georgia is expanding a poll worker recruitment program to support election administration and fighting a slew of anti-voter bills that threaten to disenfranchise thousands. Other progress includes successfully settling a racial gerrymandering case in South Carolina, challenging Mississippi’s district lines that deprive the state’s Black population of equal representation, and blocking the Jacksonville City Council’s newly drawn maps, which disenfranchise Black voters in Florida.

Meanwhile, the ACLU is driving the movement to restore the right to vote to people with conviction records in Kentucky and Mississippi. A similar movement in Nebraska is advocating for two key voter restoration bills that could help as many as 20,000 Nebraskans reintegrate into the community and engage with civic life. “You can’t say that a person is fully engaged or feels part of their community if they have no say in what actually goes on,” says Demetrius Gatson, a former court-watching supervisor for the ACLU of Nebraska and current executive director of Queens Butterfly House, the first women’s safe home in the state. Gatson completed a felony sentence in 2018 but still cannot vote. “One of the most important parts of our democracy,” she says, “is being able to vote on what happens in your community, your state, and your country.”

ACLU affiliates in key battleground states are engaged in a multifaceted effort to expand and defend the vote. The ACLU of Michigan is working with the governor and the legislature to make sure the recently passed pro-voting rights ballot measure, Proposal 2, is fully funded and implemented. Affiliates are expanding county clerk engagement programs in Michigan, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin to protect the integrity of the election system and increase voter access. The ACLU of Pennsylvania is educating voters about a state Supreme Court election in November with significant implications for voting rights, and the Nevada affiliate is building a potent legal network for election protection and voting rights litigation.

With the crucial 2024 elections on the horizon, the ACLU will continue fighting in the courts, in statehouses, and in Congress to ensure that voting remains accessible to everyone and that all voices are genuinely represented by elected officials. The United States will never be a truly fair democracy until all voters, regardless of color, have equal access to the ballot box. —JAY A. FERNANDEZ



Jury Justice

Twenty-five percent of eligible Black residents in Manhattan have been disqualified from jury service. A class-action lawsuit challenges that exclusion.

When Manhattan resident Daudi Justin was studying for his undergraduate degree at Columbia University in 2016, he received a jury summons. He was astonished to learn that he was permanently disqualified from serving on a jury because of a past felony conviction. Justin had been arrested for drug possession nearly a decade earlier, an experience in part that prompted him to pursue a law degree to fight for prisoners’ rights. Now a staff attorney with the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, he represents clients in the same courts that bar him from sitting on juries.