



FRONT LINE



REUTERS/EVELYN HOOKSTEIN

Last fall, voters in Michigan approved a groundbreaking ballot measure to enshrine reproductive rights in their state constitution.

PRIORITIES

Justice by Geography

In the wake of the midterms, the ACLU continues its fight for justice at the state level—in Michigan and beyond.

We the people showed up for civil liberties in astounding numbers in the crucial November midterms. Nothing illustrates this better than the historic passage, by 56.7 percent, of Michigan's citizen-initiated Proposal 3, a comprehensive constitutional amendment that guarantees reproductive freedom for generations to come. When the amendment took effect December 23, it not only preserved abortion rights for everyone in Michigan, it also situated the state as a much-needed sanctuary for people from nearby states where abortion may be inaccessible or unlawful.

The ACLU of Michigan played a critical role in advancing the record-breaking ballot referendum by supporting the Reproductive Freedom for All (RFFA) ballot committee, which secured more than

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730,000 signatures to place the measure on November’s ballot. Beginning well before *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, the ACLU and the Michigan affiliate contributed \$7.5 million, along with legal and advocacy staff hours, to RFFA’s campaign. This momentous win was also the result of the state’s recent expansion of voting rights. In 2018, the ACLU and ACLU of Michigan supported the Promote the Vote campaign, also called Proposal 3, which modernized Michigan’s voting system to include early voting and Election Day registration. It passed with 67 percent of the vote and laid the foundation for this kind of successful ground-level operation.

“This win belongs to all of us,” says Loren Khogali, executive director of the ACLU of Michigan. “Together, we blazed a trail, making Michigan a national model of what other states can achieve. The work that brought us to this moment has forged a formidable coalition of partners committed to reproductive freedom and justice in Michigan.”

Michiganders were not alone in defending our ability to access essential health care last fall. Voters in Vermont and California overwhelmingly passed constitutional amendments protecting the right to abortion, while voters in Kentucky and Montana rejected anti-abortion ballot measures. Taken together, it was a massive win for reproductive freedom at the polls.

These are extraordinary victories, shining a light on what it takes to achieve progress in key states ahead of the all-important 2024 elections. Yet the United States today is still a story of two countries, where the full rights of citizenship are increasingly determined by where you live. A person’s right to vote or to make personal medical decisions cannot depend on whether they live in California or Georgia. This justice—or *in*justice—by geography compounds entrenched racial, gender, and economic disparities, making national equity impossible.

“Place has always been a determining factor for whether or not you had access to protections under the law,” says Alanah Odoms, executive director of the ACLU of Louisiana. “The center of our work needs to be the people who are most directly impacted, and our proximity to them is through what’s happening in the states.”

The ACLU is mapping a future where “we the people” means everyone can access their fundamental rights—no matter where they live. The recent midterms demonstrated what success looks like when voters have the opportunity to express their will freely and fairly. —JAY A. FERNANDEZ

Merrill v. Milligan

In October, the U.S. Supreme Court heard *Merrill v. Milligan*, a case filed by the ACLU, the Legal Defense Fund, and partners, challenging Alabama’s newly drawn congressional maps. Brought on behalf of individual voters and civil rights groups, *Merrill* asserts that Alabama’s maps are unconstitutional and racially gerrymandered, harming Black Alabamians and communities of color. The court’s decision, which is expected by June, will have profound implications for Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which bans racial discrimination in voting nationwide.



ILLUSTRATION BY LEIF PARSONS