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FIGHTING THE VOTER SUPPRESSION BALLOT INITIATIVE

BY LISA P. WHITE

With democracy under attack, the balance of power in Congress up for grabs, and the Trump administration determined to make it harder to vote, the midterm election is shaping up to be one of the most consequential—and contentious—in recent history. In the run-up to November, the ACLU of Northern California will defend voting rights and educate voters about the key races on the ballot.

VOTER ID IS VOTER SUPPRESSION

Californians face a decision that could shape the state's elections for decades to come. After numerous failed attempts to push a bill through the legislature, in March Republican Assemblymember Carl DeMaio of San Diego and his allies submitted signatures to place a voter ID initiative on the November ballot. Defeating this ballot measure is the ACLU of Northern

California's top election priority.

If passed, Californians voting by mail would have to write the last four digits of a government-issued



ID on the outside of their mail ballot envelope, raising privacy concerns and the risk of identity theft. A mistake, such as a transposed or illegible digit, could result in a rejected ballot.

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THEN AND NOW, THE ACLU DEFENDS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS

BY TAMMERLIN DRUMMOND

In California and across the U.S., immigrants show up to court for mandatory immigration hearings, as immigration laws require them to do. Under President Trump, agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have been lying in wait to ambush and arrest them, often moments after they leave the courtroom.

Overnight, the Trump administration turned courthouses into traps, ripping individuals from their families and disappearing them to inhumane detention centers. That has left asylum seekers and other immigrants seeking a legal pathway to remain in the United States with an impossible choice: appear in court and risk detention and deportation without due process, or skip a mandatory hearing and lose their immigration case by default.

In August 2025, the ACLU of Northern California joined the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area and other legal partners in court to stop the Trump administration's policy of illegal courthouse arrests. We filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of asylum seekers arrested after attending their hearings and other immigrants who had upcoming court dates and reason to fear the same fate.

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IN MEMORY OF SONNY TRIPP, ADVOCATE FOR NATIVE YOUTH (1965–2025)

BY CARMEN KING

Walking alongside Sonny Tripp on work trips in Humboldt County meant stopping every few blocks as he called out enthusiastically to someone he knew. With each interaction, he lit up—radiating a pure *I'm happy to see you* energy that conveyed genuine care. He had an extraordinary ability to make people feel valued, and his effectiveness as an advocate stemmed from that.

As a Karuk tribal member and descendant of the villages of Katimiin, Aameekyáaraam, and Asamnaamkaruk, Sonny was deeply rooted in his Indigenous heritage and culture—and he brought that wisdom to his work.

As an Indigenous education advocate at the Northern California Indian Development Council (NCIDC), Sonny worked directly with Native students, families, and communities to help them navigate and assert their rights within the public school system. His position was initially established with support from ACLU NorCal—a partnership aimed at shining a light on education equity issues facing Native students in the region.




In his role, Sonny ran workshops, supported families at disciplinary hearings, and intervened in cases of racial discrimination and bullying. His goal was to increase visibility and representation in the classroom, incorporate Indigenous perspectives and languages into curricula, and address discipline in ways that kept kids in school rather than pushing them out—and, above all, to ensure each student was recognized for their full potential.

For Sonny, that work was grounded in a clear-eyed understanding that Native students were navigating a system not designed for them. His

own grandmother was sent to the Sherman Indian Boarding School in Riverside, California. Despite her mother's ability to speak five languages fluently, his grandmother left Sherman speaking only English and broken Karuk. Sonny understood that this was by design: Indian boarding schools existed to sever Indigenous children's connection to their languages, their tribes, and their land. Sonny carried that knowledge into every school, every relationship, every conversation—

when he sat with a struggling student, stood beside a family at a disciplinary hearing, or pushed back against an administrator, he brought the full weight of that history with him.

Sonny passed away on October 31, 2025. His departure leaves an absence that will be felt—in our partnership, in the schools and communities of the North Coast, and in the lives of everyone fortunate enough to have walked alongside him, pausing every so often to see his face light up at the sight of someone he loved. 


IN MEMORIAM, PROF. ALLEN STEWARD HAMMOND, IV

The ACLU of Northern California mourns the passing of Allen Steward Hammond, IV, a longtime board member who dedicated his career to expanding fairness and access in media and telecommunications. Born in 1950, Allen passed on January 11, 2026.

A professor of law at Santa Clara Law School and a former director of the Broadband Institute of California, Hammond also launched the Minority Telecommunications Development Program under President Carter.

Hammond served two six-year cycles on the ACLU NorCal board.

"Allen was a gem of a human being, exuding kindness and wisdom in equal measure throughout his years of service on our board," reflected former board Chair Magan Ray.

"Law professor, ACLU board member, and fitness instructor all at the same time: Allen was truly a renaissance man. We will miss him dearly," said Executive Director Abdi Soltani. 



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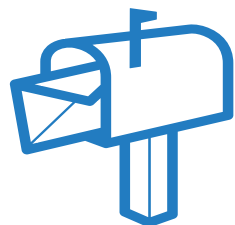
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NEW BOOK: THE DIVERSITY PRINCIPLE

The Diversity Principle

The Story of a Transformative Idea

David B. Oppenheimer

Legal scholar and former ACLU NorCal board member David B. Oppenheimer's new book, *The Diversity Principle*, explores how England, Germany, South Africa, and the United States have grappled with the ideal

of creating a truly inclusive society, finding that diversity is a foundation with societal benefits for all.

WARRIORS FOR DEMOCRACY SPOTLIGHT: GISELLE GARCIA

Warriors for Democracy is a new series where we periodically uplift individuals and community organizations at the frontlines defending democracy in the face of the Trump administration's unprecedented assault on the Constitution and people's rights.

Giselle Garcia is programs director of NorCal Resist, a mutual aid immigration justice group based in Northern California. She spoke with Tammerlin Drummond, a principal communications strategist at ACLU NorCal, about how she got involved in immigration rights advocacy and NorCal Resist's courageous work.

You're a first-generation American. Where did you grow up and how did that shape your worldview?

I was born in San Francisco but grew up in South Sacramento—an incredibly diverse neighborhood, at one point considered one of the most diverse areas in the country. It's also one of the poorest neighborhoods in Sacramento, but for me it always felt like home. Being surrounded by so many cultures, while seeing economic inequality up close, became a source of inspiration for the work I do today.

Your parents immigrated from Nicaragua. How did their experiences influence you?

My parents, though both Nicaraguan immigrants, had distinct experiences once in the United States. For example, my dad worked doing farm labor and other low-wage jobs. Here he experienced a lot of trauma—people warning the neighborhood when immigration authorities were coming, everyone hiding wherever they could.

What struck me most was that many immigrants internalized guilt and shame, even though they were simply trying to survive. Seeing the contrast with my parents' experiences showed me how dramatically immigration status can shape someone's life and opportunities.

How did you find your way into immigration advocacy and NorCal Resist?

It wasn't a straight path. I started at community college and enrolled in an introductory sociology class that opened my eyes to how institutions shape people's lives. Around 19, I began volunteering as an interpreter for a nonprofit serving asylum seekers. Sitting in those rooms and hearing what people had fled from changed everything. In 2018, a friend invited me to NorCal Resist. What struck me was that they don't create barriers to action—people from all walks of life come together and just do the work.



What is the mission of NorCal Resist?

At its core, the mission is mutual aid—when your neighbor is struggling, you step up. Later, when they're able, they help someone else. We see that constantly. People we've helped return as volunteers. We serve about 25 counties in Northern California, from Sacramento to the Oregon border, including many rural communities.

What kinds of services does the organization provide?

We address gaps wherever the community needs support. We run an auto-repair clinic where volunteers fix headlights and brake lights for free, helping prevent traffic stops that can escalate into immigration enforcement. We also run weekly food distributions and a food-reclamation project that collects surplus food from grocery stores and restaurants. A major effort is court watch, where trained volunteers observe immigration proceedings, document enforcement tactics, and help connect detained individuals with attorneys and their families.

You've worked through both Trump administrations. What differences are you seeing now?

The aggressive pursuit of immigrants is at a completely different level in terms of pace and intensity. The administration moved quickly with policies targeting immigrants, dramatically expanding enforcement capacity and changing tactics in rapid succession. There has been no attempt to even give [these policies] a guise of decency.


We've also seen a sharp increase in arrests and a strategy that often targets the primary financial providers in immigrant families. When a father or main wage earner is taken, the impact can be devastating—emotionally and financially—for entire households.


This work can be dangerous. How do you address risks to volunteers?

We're very honest with volunteers. Everyone has to assess their own level of risk and decide where they can contribute. Some roles involve direct observation of immigration enforcement and can be dangerous. Others are behind the scenes.

We've had volunteers pushed, assaulted, and arrested while documenting enforcement activity. Everyone receives training on their rights and safe documentation practices. Unfortunately, that's the reality of this work right now.

How do you handle the emotional toll of this work?

It is emotionally heavy. We hear heartbreaking stories about families being separated and losing everything. But what keeps me going is the resilience of the community itself. The people we serve don't have the option of giving up. Seeing their strength motivates us to keep showing up. Until the day when immigration advocacy is no longer necessary, I'm committed to this work and to the families we serve. 



WANT TO TAKE ACTION?

Join our email list to stay informed about current issues and campaigns both locally and nationally, find out about upcoming events, and learn about opportunities to get more involved in the fight to protect civil liberties.

Subscribe to our email action list at [ACLUNC.ORG/EMAIL](https://aclunc.org/email)



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY ALICIA BENAVIDEZ

Every year, ACLU California Action advances key legislation to move our state forward. This year, we are working to advance the following key bills:

SB 1105 (PÉREZ) — PROTECT CALIFORNIA RIGHTS ACT

The Protect California Rights Act will prevent Trump from commandeering state and local police to do his bidding through federal task forces. SB 1105 prevents our state's law enforcement agencies from being forced to support racially discriminatory immigration enforcement activities. It also bars them from investigating organizations and individuals demonstrating against these actions and documenting ICE's abusive practices. These actions violate our laws and jeopardize our rights.

The Protect California Rights Act will protect the safety and rights of Californians by:

- Prohibiting local and state law enforcement from assisting federal agents in operations that involve racial or identity profiling, criminalization of speech, or use of unauthorized weapons of war against Californians.
- Prohibiting federal law enforcement from acting beyond their federal jurisdiction to stop and arrest Californians, except during times of emergency and with the governor's approval.

AB 2669 (GIPSON) — DUE PROCESS SAFEGUARDS

The Due Process Safeguards bill creates an active requirement for prosecutors to consider adverse immigration consequences to ensure a just resolution can be reached. It strengthens existing due process safeguards by ensuring prosecutors are responsible for taking into consideration immigration-related consequences during plea deal negotiations and overall sentencing.

AB 1165 (GIPSON) — CA HOUSING JUSTICE ACT OF 2025


The Housing Justice Act will help the state address our housing affordability crisis by developing a comprehensive plan to deliver housing security to Californians. AB 1165 requires the state to:

- Determine how to invest resources and what impact these investments will achieve, to ensure that the state is investing toward the greatest impact.
- Collaborate to boost and leverage local and federal resources.
- Set goals and accountability measures to ensure all programs and allocated funding contribute to established goals.



ACLU California Action at the Protect California Rights Act bill launch SB 1105 on February 16, 2026. At the podium, ACLU Cal Action Executive Director David Trujillo; at right, Cal Action Director of Legislative Affairs Alicia Benavidez.

AB 2690 (DAVIES) TAXPAYER STANDING

The Taxpayer Standing bill clarifies existing laws to continue the longstanding practice of providing California taxpayers standing to hold the state accountable in court. 

Alicia Benavidez is the director of legislative affairs at ACLU California Action.

ORGANIZING ACROSS NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

BY LUIS OJEDA

Throughout February, ACLU NorCal organizers were busy hosting three organizing convenings in San Jose, Watsonville, and Sacramento. Our goal was to bring together chapter leaders and other veteran activists with new supporters to strengthen our organizing power and prepare for the year ahead.

Together, over 160 ACLU supporters from across the region gathered to connect, learn, and take action. We started each convening by reflecting on the current political climate and how to build community power, before learning more about issues that are a priority to the ACLU and each attendee's local community.

Key issues discussed included:


- **Immigration:** Encouraging volunteers to connect with their local rapid response networks and share know your rights resources with the community.
- **The 2026 Elections:** Emphasizing planning for local elections and candidate forums.

- **Local budget justice:** Working to ensure our resources are being spent on the things we need, including increased funding for public defenders' offices and greater investment in programs focused on alternatives to police.
- **Surveillance:** Pushing back on the growing surveillance tools that are being used to spy on and track us.
- **Pretext stops:** Supporting local ordinances to address racial profiling by limiting the situations where police can stop someone for minor traffic violations.

- **Legislative advocacy:** Participating in in-district lobby visits during spring recess and contacting state representatives regarding important state legislation.

A key component of the convenings was the county breakouts that allowed participants to make new connections and hear from their local chapter leaders about the work they are doing in their communities. Attendees were also able to ask questions and work together to share new ideas and plan actions in their community. As one attendee from Sacramento shared, the highlight

was "the opportunity to make connections and find ways to be active in advocacy in my community."

We're grateful to everyone who joined us, and we look forward to plugging everyone into our organizing programs! Learn more at www.aclunorcal.org/take-action. 

Luis Ojeda is interim organizing director at the ACLU of Northern California.



A crowd of engaged activists at ACLU NorCal's San Jose convening on February 7, 2026.

LEGAL ADVOCACY UPDATES

SUING LANDLORDS OVER AI-POWERED SURVEILLANCE IN TENANTS' HOMES

LITIGATION

The ACLU of Northern California filed a lawsuit in San Francisco Superior Court challenging the forced installation of surveillance technology in tenants' apartments that monitor tenants' comings and goings. The complaint describes how landlords and surveillance vendors appear to be using their tenants' personal information to profile their behavior with AI tools built specially for landlords.

We filed the complaint against Equity Residential, one of the largest corporate landlords in the United States, and SmartRent, the technology company that provides and manages the surveillance systems. The ACLU of Northern California is joined in the case, *San Francisco Tenants Union, et al. v. Equity Residential and SmartRent*, by legal partners Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein, LLP and Tobener Ravenscroft LLP.

At issue are so-called "smart home" devices—including digital door locks, thermostat monitors, wifi hubs, and leak sensors—that tenants across multiple residential buildings were required to accept without meaningful choice. The complaint alleges that these AI-enabled systems identify patterns of tenants' behavior, and feed personal information to landlords who could use it to ultimately push out tenants deemed too costly to keep. The suit was brought on behalf of three current and former Equity Residential tenants and the San Francisco Tenants Union, a nonprofit whose mission is to protect and advance the rights of San Francisco renters.

The case seeks a court ruling affirming that the California Constitution guarantees every resident a fundamental right to privacy in their own home—a right that cannot be waived as a condition of tenancy. Tenants in San Francisco already face some of the highest housing costs in the country, leaving them with little practical ability to simply move if they object to the surveillance. The outcome of this case carries significant implications for renters across the city and beyond.

ACLU DEFEATS DHS SUBPOENA TARGETING ANONYMOUS INSTAGRAM USERS

LITIGATION

The Trump administration has made clear it will illegally target people whose speech it disfavors—but the ACLU is fighting back.

In response to viral videos of masked ICE and



Border Patrol agents snatching people off the streets and assaulting bystanders, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) threatened to prosecute anyone who films and posts footage of federal officers online—even though doing so is squarely protected by the First Amendment.

DHS acted on that threat by demanding that Meta identify anonymous Instagram users, including our client, who reposted a video of a Border Patrol agent conducting official business in public. This case is part of a broader campaign by ACLU to tackle a widespread problem: In recent months, DHS has sent hundreds of administrative subpoenas to Google, Meta, Reddit, and Discord seeking to unmask anonymous accounts that track or criticize ICE.

We brought the first such case challenging those unlawful subpoenas in federal court, arguing that the subpoena violated the First Amendment and exceeded the government's legal authority. After we took the fight to federal court, DHS backed down. In our subsequent cases, the same thing has happened, with the government withdrawing the subpoena when challenged. These victories send a clear message that law enforcement cannot target people it disagrees with when democracy and people's safety are under attack.

The First Amendment protects the right to record law enforcement performing official duties in public. These protections extend to online platforms, including the right to share or repost content identifying or critiquing law enforcement—and to do so anonymously.

CALIFORNIA PRISONS BAN COMMUNITY LEADER'S MEMOIR

ADVOCACY

For people who are incarcerated, reading offers exposure to new ideas and opportunities for reflection and growth. In particular, the experiences of formerly imprisoned people who changed the course of their lives due to their access to books can illuminate a pathway to rehabilitation.

So, we were disappointed when the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) banned Dorsey Nunn's memoir, "What Kind of Bird Can't Fly." Nunn, who spent a decade in San Quentin as a young adult, is a longtime community organizer and advocate for rehabilitation and reentry. In his book, Nunn poignantly describes his life experiences and reflects on accountability, personal transformation, and the process of rebuilding one's life after prison.

In February, we sent a letter urging CDCR to remove Nunn's book from the list of disallowed publications. "In short, 'What Kind of Bird



Can't Fly' is precisely the type of reflective and empowering literature that should be available to people in California's prisons. Allowing access to this book would be consistent with California's stated commitment to rehabilitation, education, and the dignity of those in its custody," we wrote.

While we acknowledge the agency's discretion in determining appropriate reading material, we noted that books by Black authors are disproportionately prohibited. We also reminded CDCR that state law requires transparency regarding its decisions and requested that the agency turn over to Nunn's publisher all records and materials it relied upon in evaluating his book. We hope CDCR will reconsider its decision and provide access to this important work.

SISKIYOU COUNTY AGREES TO TRAFFIC STOP REFORMS AFTER LAWSUIT EXPOSING RACIAL PROFILING OF ASIAN AMERICANS

LITIGATION

Three years after a civil rights class action lawsuit exposed a rampant racial discrimination campaign targeting Asian American residents, Siskiyou County has agreed to major traffic stop reforms and oversight by an independent auditor.

In 2022, we filed suit charging the County with discriminatory restrictions on water access, racial profiling in traffic stops, improper search and seizure practices, and unlawful property liens—all targeting Asian Americans.

Data from 2021 revealed the scale of the campaign: Asian drivers accounted for over 28% of traffic stops despite comprising just 2.4% of the county's population.

Under the settlement agreement, the Sheriff's Office must adopt a Traffic Stop Policy that prohibits race-based stops and bars deputies from pressuring residents into consenting to searches. Deputies must have reasonable suspicion before requesting a search, inform people of their right to refuse, provide interpreters for non-English speakers, and state the reason for stops and searches on camera.

"This settlement is a critical step toward ending the targeted harassment that Asian American residents of Siskiyou County have endured for years," said Emi Young, staff attorney at the ACLU of Northern California. "These traffic stop reforms and the removal of illegal liens are real progress, but our fight will continue until every resident has access to adequate water to meet their daily needs."



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HUMANITARIAN PROTECTIONS CASES CONTINUE

LITIGATION

We are now representing TPS holders in three cases—challenging the Trump administration’s unprecedented effort to strip humanitarian protections from over a million people from more than a dozen countries.



In January, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously affirmed the federal court ruling that the Trump administration’s termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans and Haitians was unlawful. This is our first TPS case, filed in the earliest days of the Trump administration. However, this appeals court decision did not automatically restore the right of TPS holders to live and work in the United States legally because the Supreme Court had granted the government’s request for a stay of the district court’s order. Nonetheless, some Venezuelan TPS holders are using an order from the district court recognizing the illegality of these terminations to challenge their detention or deportation in court through habeas petitions.

In our second TPS case, the Ninth Circuit in February temporarily halted a federal court ruling that had restored humanitarian protections for 60,000 individuals from Nepal, Honduras, and Nicaragua, who have lived and worked lawfully in the United States for more than two decades.

The decision puts them at risk of detention and deportation. The district court had found that the Trump administration’s abrupt decision to terminate TPS for these long-term residents was “preordained” and made without taking into consideration the conditions in the countries, as required by law. The Ninth Circuit stayed this ruling while the case is on appeal. We have sought review from the full Ninth Circuit and that decision is pending.

We are also now representing Syrian TPS holders in a third case which is now on a fast track to Supreme Court review. Six thousand Syrian TPS holders have been stripped of their legal status as part of this administration’s efforts to end TPS for every country that had been designated. While this case is at a preliminary stage, the government asked the Supreme Court to review it on the merits on an expedited timeline. The Supreme Court agreed, and the case will be heard in late April, consolidated with a case on behalf of Haitian TPS holders.

FEDERAL COURT REJECTS TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S BID TO SEIZE CALIFORNIA VOTER DATA

LITIGATION

A federal court dismissed a Department of Justice lawsuit that sought to force California to hand over voters’ personal



information, including addresses, dates of birth, partial Social Security numbers, and driver’s license numbers. The League of Women Voters of California—represented by the ACLU Foundation of Northern California, the national ACLU, and the ACLU Foundation of Southern California—intervened in the case to protect voters’ privacy and safeguard the integrity of our elections. The government has appealed.

Noting that the Constitution grants states authority to run elections, U.S. District Judge David O. Carter wrote in his decision that voters trust elected secretaries of state to keep their personal data safe and believe they won’t be targeted because of their appearance or voting record.

“The DOJ’s request for the sensitive information of Californians stands to have a chilling effect on American citizens like political minority groups and working-class immigrants who may consider not registering to vote or skip casting a ballot because they are worried about how their information will be used,” Judge Carter wrote. “There cannot be unbridled consolidation of all elections power in the Executive without action from Congress and public debate. This is antithetical to the promise of fair and free elections ... and the franchise that civil rights leaders fought and died for.”

The Trump administration’s push to confiscate the voter rolls from 30 states is part of a coordinated campaign to tamper with the midterm elections. 

ENTERING THE SECOND YEAR OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

A Column from Legal Director Shilpi Agarwal

Last year, the ACLU of Northern California responded to the Trump administration’s flurry of attacks on immigrant communities and democratic institutions. We filed multiple impact cases, including the first case in the country challenging an unlawful immigration raid spearheaded by Gregory Bovino (then-Border Patrol commander-at-large), challenges to the termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and multiple cases challenging the re-detention of individuals without constitutionally adequate process. We intervened on behalf of the League of Women Voters to block the administration’s attempt to obtain sensitive voter data, monitored protests to safeguard First Amendment activity, and mobilized in support of our colleagues in Southern California when the National Guard was deployed in Los Angeles. We are incredibly proud of the resistance that we mounted—and those fights have only just begun.

In this second year of this second Trump Administration, we don’t know what additional threats we will encounter. We do know that the legal terrain on which we work has grown more challenging. Securing meaningful

relief at the trial-court level now requires substantially greater evidence and accelerated briefing under emergency conditions. And even when we prevail at the lower court—as we routinely have—we must devote significant resources to defending those victories on appeal, all the while contending with the possibility that preliminary wins will be disabled on the United States Supreme Court’s shadow docket. At the same time, we can no longer depend on the broad base of law firm partnerships that historically amplified our capacity, requiring us to recalibrate how we staff and sustain major cases.

In order to meet this moment, we are developing new strategies to (1) preserve hard-won gains and to (2) push and persuade the courts to serve as a meaningful check on executive overreach.


For example, in a number of our



ACLU of Northern California
Legal Director Shilpi Agarwal

immigration fights, we plan to file targeted habeas petitions (legal action challenging unlawful detention or imprisonment) designed to generate favorable precedent that direct-service practitioners can deploy on behalf of individual clients.

We will continue to look for opportunities to bring cases and issues to the attention of the California Supreme Court, a forum where we have secured some recent wins particularly on issues of racial equity

and access to justice. We will also continue to monitor the administration’s continued efforts to invoke or threaten military force in support of federal law enforcement activities. Finally, we will prepare for the upcoming midterm elections. In addition to opposing the voter suppression initiative (see page 1 of this issue), we will enhance our efforts to monitor election-related activity until the election is certified. 

ACLU APPELLATE LEGAL TEAM FIGHTS FOR EQUAL JUSTICE FOR ALL

BY NEIL K. SAWHNEY AND LAUREN DAVIS

The ACLU of Northern California has a longstanding commitment to supporting lawsuits that seek to advance and protect civil liberties and civil rights in California. Our appellate work at the California Supreme Court is an important venue for achieving this goal. The state Supreme Court is the highest court in California and the final arbiter of the state constitution and statutes. Rulings there set precedent for the largest judicial system in the country, which hears some 6 million cases each year—much more than the federal court system. And, as U.S. federal courts retreat from the judiciary’s traditional role as a check on unlawful government action, California’s Supreme Court takes on even more importance in upholding our rights. We now proactively monitor all cases accepted for review by the California Supreme Court for any civil liberties issues at stake.

A recent case about access to recording civil court hearings caught our attention. In California, a domestic violence survivor seeking a restraining order against their abuser must often first pay hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars to hire a private court reporter. The same is true for many other civil cases, which can be just as life-altering as criminal actions. Besides restraining orders, they include child custody cases, conservatorships, guardianships, and requests for civil protections from domestic and workplace harassment. These are instances where the state could take something precious away from you, including your liberty and family.

If a person can’t afford to do so, they typically won’t be able to get a verbatim transcript of what was said during their court hearings, since state law currently prohibits electronic recording of most civil court hearings.

.....

Someone’s ability to get justice should never depend upon their ability to pay for their own court reporter. But a private court reporter can cost a staggering \$3,300 per day. Low- and even moderate-income Californians are all too often left without records of their cases, even when the rights that they most cherish are at stake.

.....

Without this critical record, they have no real chance of mounting a successful appeal in their case—unlike someone in similar circumstances who has the financial means to hire a court reporter.

Someone’s ability to get justice should never depend upon their ability to pay for their own court reporter. But for most people the cost is simply beyond their means. A private court reporter can cost a staggering \$3,300 per day. Low- and even moderate-income Californians are all too often left without records of their cases, even when the rights that they most cherish are at stake.

To challenge this injustice, we filed an amicus brief at the state’s high court to support the Family Violence Appellate Project and Bay Area Legal Aid in their effort to ensure that all Californians, regardless of their financial status,

can access a verbatim transcript in their civil case. The California Supreme Court is expected to hear arguments in *Family Violence Appellate Project, et. al v. Superior Courts* sometime this spring.


We are calling on the state’s high court to permit electronic recording in instances where there isn’t a court reporter available.

Our amicus brief explains that the wealth-based disparities in accessing a trial court record violate the California Constitution’s equal protection clause.

California is one of the few states in the U.S. that bans electronic recording of most civil court proceedings. At the same time, the state faces a decades-long and worsening court reporter shortage, in large part because fewer people are entering the profession. That coupled with the ban on electronic recording meant that in more than 200,000 civil court cases in 2023 alone, the people in the case had no access to a court transcript, effectively barring their ability to appeal. A review by the court of appeals is a basic procedural safeguard. It is essential for correcting legal errors in the lower courts and helping guarantee equal justice for all Californians.

California has the roadmap needed to address this inequity. Electronic recording is a well-tested solution, and in fact, it is used in two-thirds of states as well as in federal courts. Many California state courts are already equipped to facilitate electronic recording if a court reporter is unavailable. Some superior courts in California have chosen to allow electronic recording in certain civil cases, despite the state ban, if a judge determines that a fundamental right is at stake.

But under the current patchwork system, access to justice depends on geography or even the individual judge presiding over a case. Californians who live in the wrong county—or draw the wrong courtroom—risk having their cases go unrecorded. Leaving constitutional rights to chance is not acceptable.

The ACLU of Northern California remains committed to dismantling barriers to access justice, and will continue our effort to open courthouse doors and ensure that our rights are more than words on paper. 

Neil Sawhney is director of appellate advocacy at the ACLU of Northern California. Lauren Davis is a legal fellow at the ACLU of Northern California.

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ONE MISSION, MANY WAYS TO MAKE AN IMPACT

Every gift to the ACLU is a commitment to freedom, equity, and justice. And there's more than one way to make that commitment.

If you're thinking about how to give wisely, honor someone important in your life, or bring others into the fight for civil liberties, there are meaningful options beyond a traditional cash gift. You can donate appreciated stock, give through a donor-advised fund, make a tribute gift, or even host a benefit event to mobilize your community.

Our new webpage makes it easy to explore these and other options and find the approach that aligns with your values and financial goals. However you choose to give, you are strengthening the movement to defend rights and liberties for all. Visit www.aclunorcal.org/donate today and discover how your generosity can go even further.

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ACLU NORCAL'S DEFEND DEMOCRACY TOUR



ACLU NorCal staff and volunteers at the Defend Democracy Tour stop in Merced.

Photo by Pauline Schindler



Throughout 2026, ACLU NorCal Executive Director Abdi Soltani (top left) is touring Northern California to highlight and celebrate the ways people are stepping up to defend democracy in its hour of need.

When the tour comes to your area, you'll receive an invitation to join us at an event near you. And you can keep up with all the events happening, and RSVP, at www.aclunorcal.org/tour.


ART AS RESISTANCE: TRUTH IN THE FACE OF CENSORSHIP

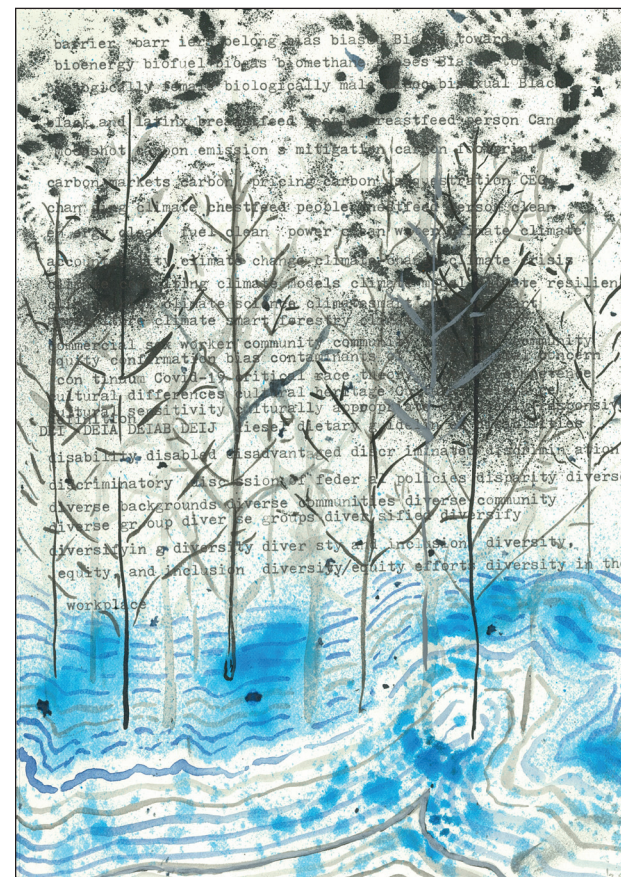
Artists play a critical role in movements for justice. They help protect the truth in the face of censorship, name what others attempt to erase, and imagine the world as it could be. In times when language itself is under attack, art becomes both an archive and an act of resistance.

Leah Korican is an artist and writer living and working in Oakland, CA. She was outraged when the U.S. government removed over 350 words from official websites, including the CDC, NASA, and National Park Service—words that reflect truths about diversity, the environment, health, immigration, LGBTQ+ identity, racism, and women's issues, among others. She understood that systematically deleting these words from government sites was a tactic for creating fear and an attempt to make the ideas and people behind

these words vanish. Leah created "These Truths," a series of works on paper, as a meditation on holding onto values and beliefs in the face of censorship.

Through "These Truths," Leah reminds us that our values cannot be silenced. They live in community, in action, and in our collective commitment to protect our rights and freedoms. We are grateful to Leah and other artists who use their creativity to defend what matters, recognizing that art, culture, and civil liberties are deeply intertwined.

In addition to using her art to make a statement and raise awareness, sales from "These Truths" benefit the ACLU. To learn more about Leah and view the complete series, including prints for sale, visit leahkorican.com. 



One of Leah Korican's "These Truths" pieces.

FIGHTING THE VOTER SUPPRESSION BALLOT INITIATIVE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Voting by mail is incredibly popular—more than 80% of Californians who voted in the 2024 presidential election returned a mail ballot—so this initiative could have a profound impact on our elections. People voting in person would be required to show a driver’s license or other government-issued ID.

The ballot initiative also directs state and county elections officials to verify citizenship through government databases riddled with errors that could wrongly flag naturalized citizens and other eligible voters for removal from the voter roll. The state estimates that the initiative could cost California and local governments tens of millions of dollars to implement, plus millions more annually to satisfy the new requirements.

The entire electoral process in California is secure. The state already requires ID, such as a Social Security number or driver’s license, to register to vote. Officials confirm voters’ identity and eligibility when they register. Poll workers check people in by name and address. And county registrar offices verify the signature on every mail ballot.

For years, conservative activists have promoted false allegations of widespread voter impersonation and noncitizen voting to pass restrictive voter ID laws in 36 states. Multiple nonpartisan studies have thoroughly debunked these claims, including a Brookings Institution analysis of the Heritage Foundation’s election database that found just 77 documented accounts of noncitizen voting out of billions of ballots cast over a 20-year period.

Voter ID requirements are a form of voter suppression designed to disenfranchise people of color, seniors, low-income voters, college students, and voters with disabilities, all of whom are less likely to have valid ID. People without a current ID, including those who have legally changed their names or who move frequently, also may face challenges if they are required to present ID at the polls.

“This harmful initiative would create additional obstacles for voters at a time when we should be encouraging more people to participate in the democratic process,” said Angélica Salceda, director of ACLU NorCal’s Democracy, Speech, and Technology project. “ACLU NorCal has partnered with a broad coalition of voting and civil rights organizations to defeat this measure, and we call on Californians to reject this cynical ploy to deprive citizens of their fundamental right to vote.”

The ACLU of Northern California spearheaded the launch of the opposition campaign and donated \$250,000 to fight the ballot measure. When DeMaio’s group submitted the petition signatures during press events at the state capitol and four county election offices across the state, representatives from the ACLU, the League of Women Voters of California, and Common Cause

showed up to deliver a simple message: This measure is about voter suppression, not election security. Coalition spokespeople were quoted by more than two dozen media outlets, including the Los Angeles Times and the Sacramento Bee.

PUBLIC CAMPAIGN FINANCING IS GOOD FOR DEMOCRACY


We have endorsed the California Fair Elections Act of 2026 which would allow the use of public funds in state and local campaigns in California. Currently, only charter cities can establish public financing systems. This ballot measure addresses a long-term concern, heightened in the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision, about the role of money in politics.

Public campaign financing programs expand the pool of people who can run for office, reduce the undue influence of wealthy donors and special interests in campaigns and public policy, and give residents at all income levels a greater voice in the political process.

SAFEGUARDING ELECTIONS

We are also working on additional issues that could affect the election. In partnership with voting rights advocates and ACLU affiliates across the country, the national ACLU is leading a multistate challenge to the administration’s attempt to seize sensitive voter data, including dates of birth and partial Social Security numbers. Earlier this year, a district court dismissed the Department of Justice’s lawsuit against California, but the government filed an appeal (see page 7). Thus far, DOJ has sued 30 states. But this brazen federal overreach isn’t the only litigation that could upend the midterms.

In March, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case challenging a Mississippi statute allowing mail ballots postmarked by Election Day to be counted if they arrive up to five days after the election. The conservative justices appeared to agree with the plaintiffs’ argument that the statute violates federal election law. The court’s decision will have some bearing on San Diego Republican Rep. Darrell Issa’s lawsuit seeking to stop California from counting ballots that arrive after Election Day. Although the case has been temporarily paused pending the Supreme Court’s decision, if Issa’s challenge ultimately succeeds, hundreds of thousands of California voters whose ballots arrive after Election Day could be disenfranchised in November. We will continue to fight in court for every ballot to be counted.

At this point in the midterm election season, much remains in flux. But no matter what happens, the ACLU will fiercely protect your right to vote and work diligently to get out the vote. 

Lisa P. White is a principal communications strategist at the ACLU of Northern California.



Brittany Stonesifer from Common Cause and David Trujillo from ACLU California Action in Sacramento protesting the campaign to suppress Californians’ voting rights.

WHAT DO CALIFORNIA CANDIDATES THINK?

ACLU California Action asked candidates running for governor about a range of critical civil liberties issues.

To read the survey responses, visit: aclucalifornia.org/2026-election-guide.

QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

Immigrants’ Rights: Do you publicly oppose the Department of Homeland Security’s unlawful actions which have resulted in racially discriminatory raids across the state and country, and the detention of people without evidence or due process simply because of the color of their skin, the language they speak, or the work they do?

Criminal Justice: Will you publicly support efforts to ensure that public defenders’ offices are adequately staffed and funded to ensure that a Californian’s right to counsel and to a fair trial does not hinge on wealth?

Police Practices: Will you publicly support policies that shift responsibility of public safety responses away from law enforcement and instead to trained social service providers for homelessness and mental health incidences?

THEN AND NOW, THE ACLU DEFENDS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In *Pablo Sequen v. Albarran*, we argued that federal officials violated the law when they abruptly rescinded prior policies preventing ICE from arresting immigrants at immigration courthouses. Those prior policies correctly recognized that allowing courthouse arrests would have a significant “chilling effect” by deterring people from appearing for their own mandatory hearings. As part of this case, we also challenged ICE’s decision to waive its own 12-hour limit on detention in temporary holding facilities—a safeguard abandoned in service of the administration’s arbitrary quota of 3,000 daily arrests. In December 2025, U.S. District Judge P. Casey Pitts ordered the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to cease all arrests at immigration courts in Northern California.

In October 2025, we filed *Garro Pinchi v. Noem* to stop ICE’s new, unlawful policy of re-arresting people the government had already released while their cases proceeded—people DHS itself had determined posed no flight risk and no threat to public safety. Judge Pitts ordered a halt to that practice as well.

“Arbitrarily re-arresting people who have already been deemed eligible for release is cruel, baseless, and upends any expectation that people will be treated fairly in our legal system,” said Bree Bernwanger, senior staff attorney at the ACLU of Northern California. “This is especially true when people are re-arrested at mandatory court hearings or check-in appointments. It’s a cruel bait-and-switch with life-changing consequences.”

The courthouse arrests are part of an orchestrated campaign by the Trump administration to punish migrants, strip people of opportunities for lawful immigration status, and use coercion to achieve mass deportation without due process. It is nothing short of an attempt to dictate, by policy and by force, who belongs in this country. The overwhelming majority of people swept up by ICE and Border Patrol are Latinos and other people of color.

Trump has employed a barrage of tactics to achieve his authoritarian and white supremacist vision. He is attempting to gut birthright citizenship, the post-Civil War constitutional guarantee that every person born on American soil is a citizen. In January 2026, the Trump administration banned visas for nationals from 75 countries, including many African, Latin American and majority Muslim countries.

At the same time, he granted asylum to white Afrikaners, descendants of the architects of apartheid in South Africa, claiming they are the victims of “white genocide.” Trump has relentlessly demonized countries like Haiti with Black populations, while calling for more immigrants from Sweden and Norway.

The message could not be clearer.

.....
“The Constitution affords every person in this country due process, regardless of how they look or where they were born.

Our vision is of an inclusive democracy that adheres to these rights for every person. That’s what we fight for.”

—ACLU NorCal Executive Director
Abdi Soltani
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The deployment of state power to marginalize and displace and exclude people of color is not an exception in the course of American history. Long before Trump, the federal government forcibly removed Indigenous nations from their lands, enforced fugitive slave acts, and limited naturalization to “free white persons.” The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred an entire nationality from entry and naturalization and remained law for 60 years. During the Great Depression, and again in 1954, officials “repatriated” or deported well over one million people of Mexican descent. Hundreds of thousands were U.S. citizens, including many children. During World War II, then-President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that forced more than 120,000 Japanese Americans into prison camps—not because of any evidence of disloyalty, but solely because of their national origin.

In each instance, the government used law to make exclusion appear orderly and legitimate.

For more than 100 years, the ACLU has fought to uphold the principle that constitutional rights do not disappear because the government declares an emergency.

During World War II, the ACLU of Northern California represented Fred Korematsu, a Japanese-American who refused to leave his home to report to an incarceration center. Although *Korematsu v. United States* initially upheld the government’s position that it had the authority to imprison Japanese-Americans under wartime necessity, our lawsuit preserved a historic record of the truth and proved that Korematsu’s incarceration was driven by racial prejudice. Decades later, the federal government vacated his conviction and issued a formal apology—proof that legal resistance, even if at the time it results in a court loss, can ultimately help reshape history.

“The Constitution affords every person in this country due process, regardless of how they look or where they were born,” said Abdi Soltani, executive director of the ACLU of Northern California. “Our vision is of an inclusive

democracy that adheres to these rights for every person. That’s what we fight for.”

Today, the ACLU of Northern California is defending immigrants’ rights on multiple fronts:

Warrantless Sweeps and Racial Profiling:

In Kern County, Border Patrol agents swept through farmworker towns, stopping residents without warrants and instead relying solely on race and appearance to detain them. The ACLU Foundations of Northern California, Southern California, and San Diego & Imperial Counties secured a temporary injunction halting those stops. The court ruling reaffirmed that the Fourth Amendment protecting individuals from unreasonable searches does not have a carve-out for immigration enforcement. The federal government appealed the injunction and The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals will hear oral arguments in April.

Temporary Protected Status: The ACLU filed suit against the administration’s termination of TPS for Venezuelan, Salvadoran, and Haitian communities as unlawful and racially motivated. The conditions in these individuals’ countries, which led the government to grant them humanitarian protections, have not changed. This was a Trump administration decision designed to remove hundreds of thousands of people who had lived in the United States legally, contributed to their communities, and done nothing wrong.


Birthright Citizenship: When the administration issued an executive order purporting to end birthright citizenship for children born on U.S. soil, it attacked a guarantee written in the Constitution since 1868. The ACLU joined a broad coalition of civil rights organizations to file a lawsuit challenging the administration’s claim that a president can rewrite the Constitution by executive order. That case, *Barbra v. Trump*, was argued by ACLU National Legal Director Cecilia Wang at the U.S. Supreme Court on April 1, 2026.

The Trump administration is counting on silence—banking on people to look away as courthouses become traps, families are torn apart, and the constitutional guarantees that define this democracy are dismantled one executive order and one policy at a time.

Yet many of us want a humane and fair immigration system that treats people with dignity and respect, not one that violates due process.

Every lawsuit we file, every injunction we win, every constitutional line we hold depends on our members who refuse to look away.

This is the moment. Not next year. Not after the next election.

The ACLU of Northern California is in court and in communities fighting these battles every single day. Stand with us. 

Tammerlin Drummond is a principal communications strategist at the ACLU of Northern California.

A LETTER FROM ACLU OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ABDI SOLTANI

This spring has shaped up to be a critical season for the ACLU in the courts and in our communities. As I write this letter, we are fresh off the major mobilizations of No Kings rallies on March 28 and national ACLU Legal Director Cecilia Wang arguing the birthright citizenship case at the U.S. Supreme Court on April 2.

Looking ahead to the rest of spring, I want to preview some of our priorities and ways you can be involved.

CENTRAL VALLEY RAIDS CASE

ACLU NorCal and our co-counsel will be at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on the morning of April 22 to argue *United Farm Workers v Noem*. This is our case challenging the unconstitutional conduct of federal immigration agencies in raids conducted in Kern County on the eve of President Trump's inauguration in January 2025 (see page 11). Those raids became the playbook that was used across the country. You can listen to the arguments on the Ninth Circuit website that morning. And we will be sure to keep our members, supporters, and communities informed of the developments.

ACLU NORCAL GOING TO THE SUPREME COURT

In a late development, the U.S. Supreme Court scheduled a briefing on the Trump administration's termination of Temporary Protected Status for hundreds of thousands of people who live in the U.S. (see page 11). Taken together, these cancellations reflect what advocates call the largest "de-documentation" event in our country's history. ACLU NorCal's legal team and our co-counsel will be at the Supreme Court alongside our long-standing client the National Temporary Protected Status Alliance (NTPSA). You can listen to the arguments that morning on the Supreme Court website.

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The threat to democracy that we face is not like anything we have seen in our lifetimes. Our response requires a level of strategy and enormous energy to overcome the threat. Defending democracy requires all of us.

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STOPPING VOTER SUPPRESSION

As the Trump administration pushes the Save Act and issues unlawful executive orders to interfere with elections, ACLU NorCal and ACLU affiliates across the country are hard at work defending the right to vote. As described in the cover story, ACLU NorCal is helping lead the coalition to defeat this voter suppression initiative on the November 2026 California ballot. In the coming weeks, it is nearly certain the initiative will be certified for the ballot and will receive a number. Please help us spread the word to encourage everyone you know to vote No on this initiative.

JUNE 2 CALIFORNIA PRIMARY ELECTION

This is the last issue of *ACLU News* before the primary election. Look at the records of the candidates on the civil liberties and civil rights issues you care about. Ask them their positions if they are not clear. Of all the races in June, pay close attention as you vote for California governor, because in California's open primary system, the top two candidates will advance to the general election regardless of party (see the box on page 10 and visit aclucalaction.org/2026-election-guide).



ACLU of Northern California
Executive Director Abdi Soltani

DEFEND DEMOCRACY TOUR

The threat to democracy that we face is not like anything we have seen in our lifetimes. Our response requires a level of strategy and enormous energy to overcome the threat. That is why I am so heartened by the millions of people who have taken to the streets at each No Kings rally, and I'm inspired by our "Warrior for Democracy," Giselle Garcia, and the daily acts of solidarity practiced by her organization, NorCal Resist (see page 4).

Defending democracy requires all of us—and a tour (see page 9). I have really enjoyed the events in Visalia, Fresno, Merced and Santa Rosa in March, and look forward to events in Monterey, Santa Cruz, Modesto, Stockton and Redding scheduled in April. Please look out for invitations to your area, including Humboldt, Sacramento and several locations in the Bay Area later in the spring.

I look forward to seeing you and defending democracy with you.

Abdi Soltani, Executive Director
ACLU of Northern California

DISSENT IS PATRIOTIC

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OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER?

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NEWSLETTER, "THE BRIEF"

WWW.ACLUNC.ORG/EMAIL



ACLU NORCAL HEADS TO
THE U.S. SUPREME COURT

On April 29, the U.S. Supreme Court will be hearing arguments in ACLU NorCal's Temporary Protected Status (TPS) lawsuit.

See pages 7 and 11 of this issue for more details about this litigation, and listen to the oral arguments via the Supreme Courts livestream at www.supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/live.aspx