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★ SPECIAL INSERT ★

VOTE
FOR THE FUTURE OF CA

Read our full list of ballot
recommendations on p. 5

CENTER INSERT POSTER:
VOTE NO ON PROP 39

THE ACLU MOBILIZES AGAINST PROP 39, THE VOTER SUPPRESSION BALLOT MEASURE

BY TAMMERLIN DRUMMOND

As we approach the November midterms, the Trump administration is employing every tactic in its authoritarian playbook to cling to power. Here in California, Trump allies have sponsored Proposition 39—a voter ID ballot measure whose sole purpose is to make it harder for millions of eligible Californians to cast a ballot. It mirrors similar efforts nationwide to suppress turnout among voters who oppose Trump's anti-democratic policies.

Defeating Prop 39 is a top election priority for the ACLU of Northern California. We've brought together a wide-ranging coalition—voting rights groups, disability advocates, labor unions, community organizations, civil rights organizations and elected officials—to block it.

ACLU NorCal provided the seed funding to launch Californians for Voting Rights, the coalition campaign to defeat Prop 39, alongside

our own on-the-ground organizing, voter education, and get-out-the-vote work to ensure Californians understand what's at stake and vote NO on Prop 39.

U.S. Senator Alex Padilla has joined the Californians for Voting Rights effort to debunk the measure's misleading claims and expose how it would create obstacles to casting a ballot for eligible voters.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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Protect the right to VOTE

NO on Prop **39**

NoOnProp39.com

See the center spread of this issue for a poster you can use as a window sign! →

HERE'S WHY THESE FAMILIES SUPPORT THE ACLU

The ACLU of Northern California is powered by the conviction that liberty and justice for all are always worth fighting for — especially when those values are under siege. Financial resources help transform our passion into greater impact. This is where the ACLU’s powerhouse community of supporters comes in. We wanted to know: What fuels the people who help fuel the fight? So we asked some of our steadfast donors: What motivated you to become an active ACLU supporter? And what keeps you giving today? Here’s what they said.

LILY AND RIAZ MOLEDINA

ACLU supporters since 2002

During the drumbeat towards Dick Cheney’s Iraq war, the government was making all sorts of accusations, none of them sticking, until someone dreamt up “Weapons of Mass Destruction.” To us it was clearly just another falsehood, and we went out to protest for the first time in our lives.

It seemed like the ACLU was the only organization out there with the resources and determination to protect citizens from the government’s suppression of dissenting opinions. And simply make the government follow its own laws.

Those were the good old days. The government has only become less tolerant. The ACLU needs our support more than ever.



STEVE MORRIS ON BEHALF OF THE MORRIS FAMILY

ACLU supporters since 2004, with the second and third generations giving since 2025

Our country is more divided now than any time in my life, and the battles over ideologies have become so vicious that many believe the only way to win is to take away the rights of the other side. They don’t realize that, in taking the rights of others, they are eroding their own.

I’m grateful to the ACLU for protecting my right to say what I believe, but I support them because they are just as dedicated to protecting the rights of those I vehemently disagree with. We cannot save our country by sacrificing its principles.

SOPHIE AND SEAN VONG-KARLAGE

ACLU supporters since 2017, giving monthly through Guardians of Liberty since 2025

We became ACLU supporters because we believe America’s promise depends on protecting the rights of every person, especially when those rights are threatened or denied. For more than a century, the ACLU’s staunch defense of individual freedoms has shown us that constitutional principles endure only when people are willing to defend them. The urgency of that work keeps us giving today. When injustice feels overwhelming, the ACLU transforms principle into action in courts, legislatures, and communities, bringing our country closer to its promise of liberty, equality, and justice for all. As two Americans who share that belief, we remain proud supporters.

Like the Moledinas, the Vong-Karlages and the Morris family, you have your compelling reasons to support civil liberties. Visit aclunc.org/donate/more-ways to make your gift today. 



ACLUNews

The publication of the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California

For more information about the ACLU, call (415) 621-2493 or visit www.aclunc.org. Address changes: giving@aclunc.org

Nancy Stuart, Chair

Abdi Soltani, Executive Director

Candice Francis, Editor-in-Chief

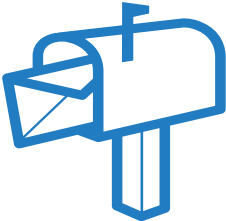
Gigi Harney, Managing Editor & Designer

Lisa P. White & Carmen King, Proofreaders

39 Drumm Street, San Francisco, CA 94111

(415) 621-2493 | editor@aclunc.org

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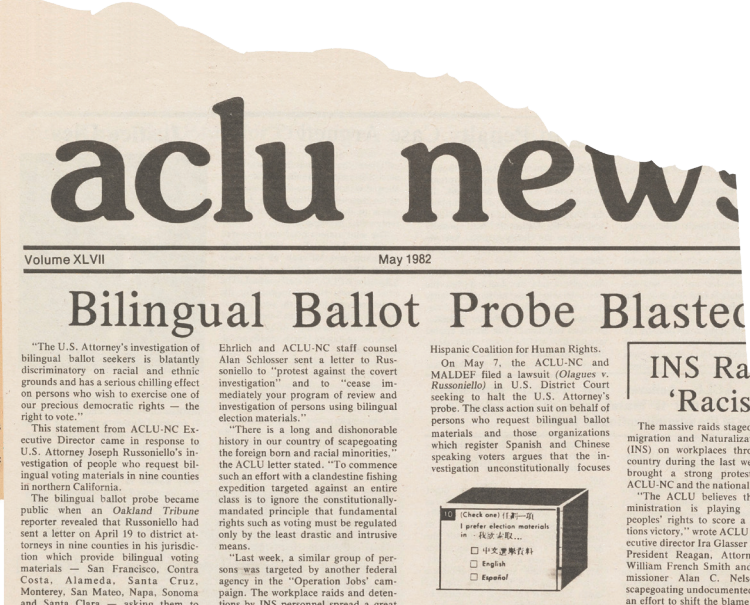
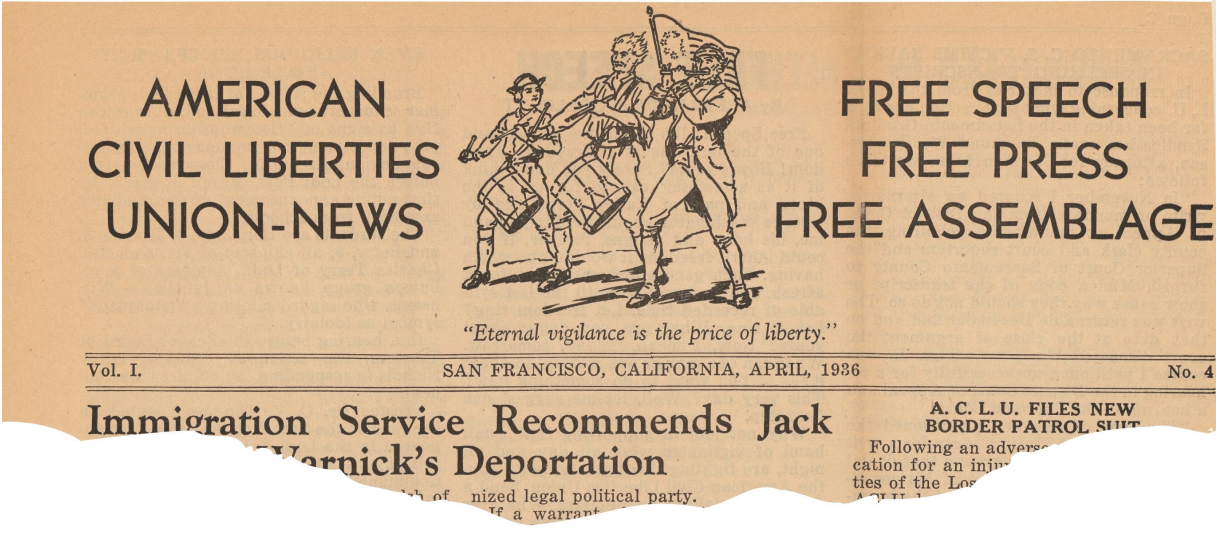
CHECK OUT THE NEW *ACLU NEWS* ARCHIVE, A TIME MACHINE BACK TO 1936

In 2020, the ACLU of Northern California worked with the California Historical Society (CHS) to digitize each issue of the *ACLU News*, beginning with the inaugural issue in 1936. Our CHS archive is now the CHS Collection at the Stanford University Libraries, along with a big upgrade in functionality. It can be explored at exhibits.stanford.edu/aclu-norcal-news.

Through the eight decades of *ACLU News* issues that have been archived through this project, you'll find 710 newsletters and 4002 pages of content, all fully searchable. You can use the top search bar to search for anything you're curious about or browse using options like date ranges and specific topics we've already tagged. You can also look at old issues by flipping through the scanned images.

The archive is a true time capsule that shows the civil rights and civil liberties challenges we've faced across the decades—and how ACLU NorCal fought back, and continues to do so today. *ACLU News* issues from 1936 to 2020 are on the Stanford site at exhibits.stanford.edu/aclu-norcal-news, with 2021 to the present on the ACLU NorCal website at www.aclunorcal.org/newsletter. 

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"The *ACLU News* archive is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the social history of California."
—Al Bersch, digital archivist at the California Historical Society Collection, Stanford Libraries
.....



Two snapshots from the archive: Above, our 1936 masthead showing two lead stories on immigration and border patrol. Above right, conservative activists in the 1980s promoted the same false allegations about noncitizen voting as they do today. ACLU NorCal sued the Reagan administration over a covert investigation of Bay Area residents who requested bilingual voting materials. Dorothy Ehrlich, ACLU NorCal's executive director at the time, said, "The U.S. attorney's investigation of bilingual ballot seekers is blatantly discriminatory on racial and ethnic grounds and has a serious chilling effect on persons who wish to exercise one of our precious democratic rights, the right to vote." Read more at exhibits.stanford.edu/aclu-norcal-news.

IN MEMORIAM: DRUCILLA STENDER RAMEY

BY DOROTHY EHRLICH

Drucilla Stender Ramey, a transformative leader of the ACLU of Northern California, died on August 5 in San Francisco. Elected as chair of the board in 1978, she was the first woman to serve in this role and her extraordinary efforts to build a more diverse and inclusive ACLU have had a lasting impact.

A legendary leader in the legal community, she served as general counsel and executive director of the Bar Association of San Francisco, where she initiated the first goals and timetables for equitable hiring in the legal profession, later replicated by bar leaders throughout the nation. Dru worked for the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund early in her career and later as Executive Director of the National Association of Women Judges and Dean of Golden Gate Law School, while also serving on many national and local boards and commissions.

My own relationship with Dru is a testament

to her unwavering commitment to build diverse institutions. As the ACLU NorCal board chair, she oversaw the process that had me hired as the first woman to serve as its executive director in 1978, and ensured that our growing organization would build a racially diverse board of directors and staff.

Dru brought her brilliant wit and powerful charm to bear as she wielded her considerable influence to bring up those behind her.

Dru's beloved husband, civil rights attorney Marvin Stender, died earlier this year. She is survived by her daughter, Jessica Stender Ramey, the policy and deputy legal director at Equal Rights Advocates, as well as countless friends and beneficiaries of her pioneering efforts to lift up women and other underrepresented groups. 

Dorothy Ehrlich is a former executive director of ACLU NorCal and retired deputy executive director of the ACLU.



ACLU NorCal is proud to recognize Dru Ramey posthumously with the Lola Hanzel Courageous Advocacy Award, given each year to recognize a person for their impact as a volunteer with the ACLU.

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES RALLY TO “GET THE FLOCK OUT”

BY CARMEN KING

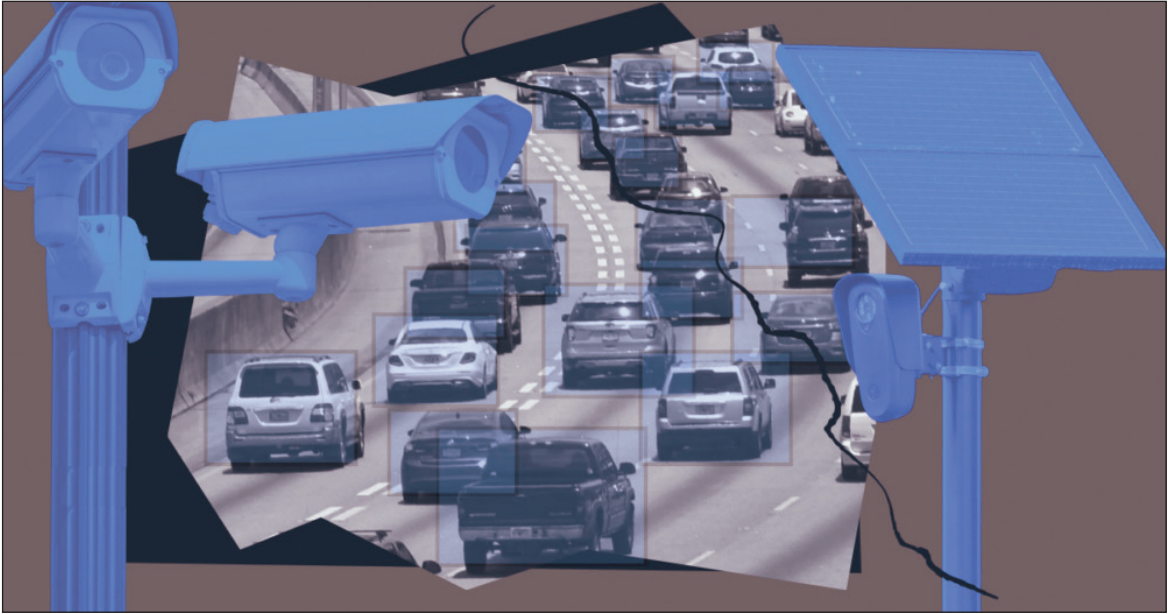
Communities across California are rejecting one of the fastest-growing surveillance networks in the country: automated license plate readers built by Flock Safety and other companies. Over the past year, residents from Santa Cruz to El Cerrito have organized their neighbors, packed city council meetings, and demanded answers—and one by one, cities are canceling their Flock contracts and taking the cameras down.

Flock’s automated license plate readers (ALPRs) aren’t like normal traffic cameras. They record every car that comes into view, and an AI algorithm catalogs the make, model, color, and license plate number, along with the location, date, and time. That information is uploaded to massive databases that can be shared with any law enforcement agency with a Flock contract—with little regulation or oversight on how the data is used. With a few clicks, local, state, and federal agencies, including ICE, can access a trove of data revealing millions of drivers’ daily movements as they travel to and from home, work, school, doctors’ offices, and places of worship.

The dangers are not theoretical. Last year, a Texas sheriff’s deputy searched more than 83,000 far-flung ALPR cameras across the nation to find a woman who had sought reproductive health care. And from August 2024 through February 2025, the San Francisco Police Department reportedly let out-of-state agencies run more than 1.6 million searches of the city’s license plate reader database—in violation of state law—including at least 19 searches marked as related to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

As use of these cameras has spread, so has public understanding of what they can do. “People now understand how surveillance data is part of the ICE deportation machine,” said Tammy Kreznar, senior organizer at the ACLU of Northern California, who has supported communities organizing against Flock across the region. For many people, mass tracking is simply incompatible with a free society. “Authoritarian governments are the places that have cameras everywhere, where you can’t go anywhere without being tracked,” she added. “That’s not what we want in our country.”

Communities are fighting back—and winning. In January, Santa Cruz became the first city in California to cancel a Flock contract, and took the cameras down in March. Mountain View and Santa Clara County have since ended their contracts. In May, after residents turned



can plug into.” Education is at the heart of these campaigns. Some local officials are unaware of how these systems work and of the dangers they pose. Residents who learn the facts can share them, giving their council members the understanding and the community backing they need to act. To make that easier, we have developed an advocacy toolkit, www.aclunc.org/get-the-flock-out, with guidance for finding out whether ALPR cameras are operating in your city,

resources to help you organize. We are also fighting Flock surveillance systems in court. In November, the ACLU of Northern California and the Electronic Frontier Foundation sued the city of San Jose on behalf of local civil rights groups to challenge San Jose police officers’ practice of searching location information collected by Flock cameras without a warrant. The San Jose Police Department has blanketed the city with nearly 500 cameras, uses that network to collect millions of records a month about people’s movements, and, at the time our lawsuit was filed, stored the data for a year. It allows its own officers—and other law enforcement officials from across the state—to search that database at will and without a warrant.

The pressure is working. After we filed the lawsuit, the San Jose City Council cut its data retention period from a full year to 30 days and moved to end data sharing with federal agencies. But the core constitutional violation continues, and so does our case.

Mass surveillance is not inevitable. When residents organize and demand accountability, contracts get canceled and cameras come down. Find out whether Flock cameras are operating in your community and get the tools to act at www.aclunc.org/get-the-flock-out. 

Carmen King is a senior communications strategist at the ACLU of Northern California.

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“Authoritarian governments are the places that have cameras everywhere, where you can’t go anywhere without being tracked. That’s not what we want in our country.”

—ACLU NorCal Senior Organizer
Tammy Kreznar
.....

out at council meetings and an audit revealed that federal agencies had accessed data from El Cerrito’s 40 cameras, the City Council voted against renewing the city’s contract. The cameras went dark in June and are now being removed. At current count, more than a dozen California cities have terminated their contracts with Flock.

These victories are community driven. In city after city, neighbors are educating each other, sharing what they learn, and showing up to city council meetings—again and again—until their elected officials act. ACLU NorCal is proud to support and amplify this grassroots movement, and Kreznar’s first piece of advice to residents who want to join it is to find each other. “Figure out if there’s already a DeFlock group in your city,” she said. “If there isn’t one, ask yourself: What is the existing activist base in your community—people working on immigrant rights, doing rapid response? Those are already built-in networks you



2026 ACLU VOTER GUIDE

NO on PROPOSITION 39

Prohibits citizens from voting unless they present government-issued ID.

Voting is a fundamental right, and every eligible Californian should be able to cast a ballot without unnecessary barriers.

Prop 39 would require voters to present a government-issued identification card for in-person voting and add a personal ID number on vote-by-mail envelopes. The measure is unclear on which kinds of ID would be accepted, creating an unnecessary barrier to the democratic process that will deny eligible voters access to the polls. These barriers would make it harder for eligible Californians to vote and put voter privacy at risk.

The burdens created by Prop 39 would especially affect voters who already face obstacles to participating in our democracy including voters of color, young voters, and voters with disabilities.

Californians should protect every eligible person's freedom to vote – not make it harder to exercise that right.

YES on PROPOSITION 1

Authorizes bonds for housing affordability programs.

YES on PROPOSITION 3

Provides permanent funding for schools and healthcare by extending existing tax on high incomes.

YES on PROPOSITION 4

Repeals prohibition against public funding of election campaigns.

NO on PROPOSITION 41

Prohibits new state taxes that exclude revenues from state spending limit. Requires audits for new state special taxes.

NO on PROPOSITION 42

Prohibits new state personal property taxes and certain retroactive state taxes.

NO on PROPOSITION 43

Limits voters' ability to raise revenue for local government services.

Learn more: aclucalaction.org/2026-election-guide

www.aclunorcal.org/vote

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ACLU LAUNCHES VOTER OUTREACH CAMPAIGN TO BOOST VOTER TURNOUT IN CENTRAL VALLEY

BY TAMMERLIN DRUMMOND

This November’s elections are among the most critical in recent memory. Every vote counts. But in the Central Valley, home to many rural, working-class, and Latino communities, voter turnout has long ranked among the lowest in California. During the June primary election, voter participation was below 30%. That’s why the ACLU of Northern California has launched a major voter outreach and education campaign in Fresno County and the surrounding Central Valley to help change that—with a focus on California’s 13th and 22nd Congressional Districts.

“We just need to do a lot of outreach to folks who are harder to reach,” said Luis Ojeda, ACLU NorCal’s organizing director. Many residents are renters who move frequently, which can knock them off the voter rolls without their knowledge. They share the same concerns around cost of living, but voting isn’t necessarily at the front of their concerns.”

The 13th District includes Merced, Madera, and parts of Stanislaus, Fresno, and San Joaquin Counties. The 22nd District includes most of Kings and parts of Tulare and Kern Counties.

In 2024, the 13th District race was decided by just 187 votes, which makes voter participation so critical.

Our ACLU organizers and volunteers are calling and texting eligible voters to educate them about the key state and federal issues on the November ballot.

That includes Proposition 39, the state voter suppression initiative championed by Trump allies in California, which we urge all eligible voters to oppose.

As part of this outreach, we will promote our



Will Martinez

.....
Our voter outreach and election protection work is unfolding against a backdrop of immigration arrests and raids across the Central Valley over the past year that have ripped families apart.
.....

Know Your Rights guide of voting resources covering the basics every voter needs to know in the Central Valley and beyond. It also spells out

rights that may be unknown such as the right to bring someone to help you vote, the right to paid time off work to cast a ballot, and the right to track a mail ballot online to confirm it was received and counted.

Once voting starts, ACLU volunteers will monitor polling places in the Central Valley—part of a nationwide campaign to train volunteers to flag problems at the polls in real time.

Our voter outreach and election protection work is unfolding against a backdrop of immigration arrests and raids across the Central Valley over the past year that have ripped families apart. The prospect of federal intimidation at the polls is a valid concern in a region where many voters live in mixed-status households.

We will continue to fight for everyone’s right to vote. We must all use our voices to check the Trump administration’s autocratic policies and protect the right to vote from unprecedented attacks. 

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

THE ACLU MOBILIZES AGAINST PROP 39, THE VOTER SUPPRESSION BALLOT MEASURE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

If Prop 39 were to pass, no one could vote in person without producing a government-issued ID. For the more than 80 percent of Californians who vote by mail, they’d have to write the last four digits of their ID number on their ballot return envelope—making voters easy targets for identity theft.

Voters would have to choose between voting by mail and protecting their privacy.

One transposed or indecipherable digit could cause a ballot to be rejected. Election officials would be required to re-check every voter’s citizenship against government databases—systems known for inaccuracies that can mistakenly sweep up naturalized citizens and other legitimate voters, putting them at risk of being purged from the rolls.

Communities of color, lower-income Californians, voters with disabilities and older residents with incomplete or outdated paperwork would have greater likelihood of not having their voices counted.

Furthermore, anyone who’s changed their name or moved recently, would have to update their government ID to vote in person.

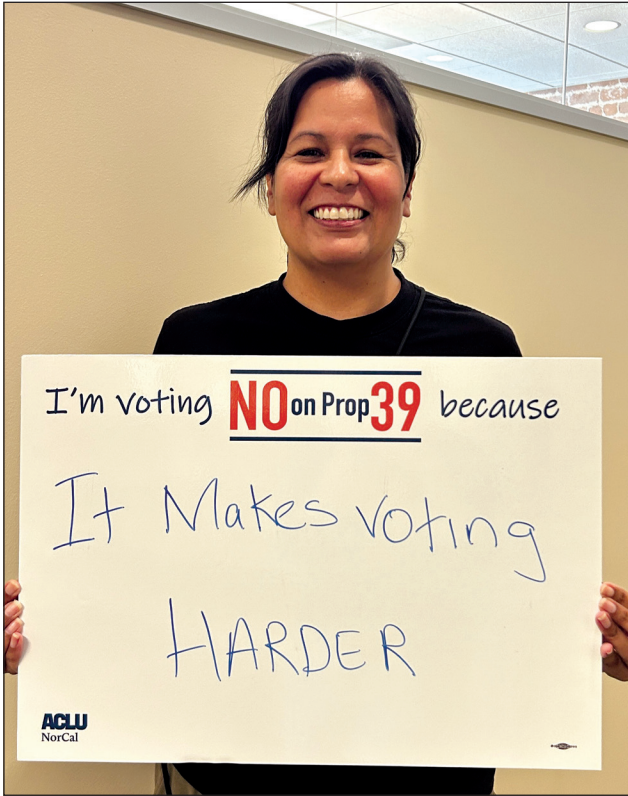
The state estimates the measure could cost tens of millions of dollars to implement, plus millions more annually.

Prop 39 is backed by Republican Assemblymember Carl DeMaio of San Diego, a Trump ally, who submitted signatures for the measure in March after failing to push the policy through the legislature.

Numerous studies—from the Brennan Center to the Cato Institute to the Bipartisan Policy Center—confirm that voter impersonation and noncitizen voting are exceedingly rare. An analysis of the Heritage Foundation’s own database found that over more than 20 years, there were just 77 documented instances of noncitizen voting out of billions of ballots cast.

“California elections are already secure. We verify individuals’ information at every stage of the registration process,” said Angélica Salceda, program director of the ACLU NorCal Democracy, Speech and Technology program. “This is voter suppression, pure and simple.”

Remember the number: 39. And vote No in November. 



Voter Michelle M. shares why she's voting NO on Prop 39.

WARRIORS FOR DEMOCRACY SPOTLIGHT: DORSEY NUNN

Warriors for Democracy is a series where we periodically uplift individuals and community organizations at the frontlines defending democracy.

Dorsey Nunn co-founded All of Us or None, a grassroots civil and human rights organization dedicated to protecting the rights of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. He partnered with the ACLU of Northern California to restore voting rights for people in jail and on parole.

Mr. Nunn is also the author of a memoir *What Kind of Bird Can't Fly*, which the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has banned from prisons. He recently spoke with Tammerlin Drummond, a principal communications strategist at ACLU NorCal.

You went into San Quentin at 19, barely able to read. What was the first book that you remember reading?

The Autobiography of Malcolm X. It made me think that I could be something more than I was at the time I was arrested. I also read George Jackson's *Blood in My Eye*, but that one was contraband. They copied it out longhand, chapter by chapter, and passed it around. So, I read it out of order, whatever chapter was available. Those books shaped the whole context of my life.

You wrote a memoir called *What Kind of Bird Can't Fly*? What does the title mean?

There's a joke that goes around when people are going home: what kind of bird can't fly? A jailbird. But all birds can fly—we've got ostriches and penguins running around zoos, so even that's not really true. What I'm getting at in the book is the same idea. Nothing says a person who's been caged has to stay on the ground.

What made you decide to write the memoir?

I thought I had something important to say to incarcerated people and formerly incarcerated



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“With the ACLU, we sued to win incarcerated people in county jail the right to vote. And we helped pass the laws that restored voting rights to people on parole. Thousands and thousands of people got their vote back.”
—Dorsey Nunn
.....

people. I was trying to transfer information from one generation to the next. There's an old saying in our community: when an elder makes his transition without passing on his experiences, a library has been burnt. I've been doing this work, if I count the internal organizing [while in prison], about 50 years or better.

Tell me about your work advocating for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.

I co-founded All of Us or None in 2003. I was one of the people who initiated the Ban the Box campaign. Now, over 260 million people live in jurisdictions that have banned it from job applications. With the ACLU, we sued to win the right to vote for incarcerated people in county jail. And we helped pass the laws that restored voting rights to people on parole. Thousands and thousands of people got their vote back.

The California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation banned your book. ACLU NorCal wrote a letter to CDCR calling for them to reverse their decision.

I wrote a memoir. I didn't write a manifesto. I didn't write a plan for people to escape. I'm telling the people left behind that I'm alright, that it's alright out here, and that when they come home they should engage in the politics of this world and see themselves as people who can benefit the community.

What's next for you?

I'm hopefully going to sue the California Department of Corrections and make them respect my freedom of speech, and other people's freedom of speech. I've got stacks of books written by formerly incarcerated people and I intend to keep fighting for the right of people inside to read them. 

What Kind of Bird Can't Fly is published by Heyday, a non-profit publisher which has partnered with ACLU NorCal on a number of its books. Visit heydaybooks.com or visit your local bookseller to order a copy of Mr. Nunn's memoir.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: KEY BILLS MOVE TO THE GOVERNOR'S DESK

BY ALICIA BENAVIDEZ

This year, ACLU California Action secured legislative approval of key bills that, as of press time, now await Gov. Gavin Newsom's signature. Co-sponsored by the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA), the Protect California Rights Act (SB 1105 Pérez) is a response to ICE's escalation of violence and targeted attacks against individuals and organizations practicing their first amendment rights. SB 1105 ensures California law enforcement agencies will not engage in racial profiling, criminalization of speech, or use of unauthorized weapons of war against people exercising their First Amendment rights, all of which are prohibited already under state law, when they coordinate operations with federal agencies.

We sent SB 1164 and SB 1360 (Cervantes) to the governor to expand the protections under the California Voting Rights Act in response to continuing attacks from the U.S. Supreme Court and federal officials on the federal Voting Rights

Act. SB 1164 prevents use of district maps and election systems that do not represent diverse communities, weakening and silencing the voting power of communities of color. SB 1360 expands language access for California's diverse communities to ensure greater participation in our elections.

We also sent AB 1165 (Gipson) to the governor. The CA Housing Justice Act requires the state to create a financing plan to address housing insecurity and homelessness in California. AB 1165 also includes the development of a strategic roadmap to end homelessness and California's housing affordability crisis, informed by research and data on what works to ensure state investments have the most powerful effect.

We successfully addressed bench warrant rules under AB 2122 (Kalra). AB 2122 will end the practice of sending people to jail for non-jailable infractions such as minor traffic violations,

street vending without a permit, and littering by eliminating custodial bench warrants for these types of infractions.

We also successfully advocated for new funding for California's Immigration Legal Services Programs in the state budget, securing \$175 million to ensure due process, protect community safety, and keep immigrant children, families, and communities together amid the federal government's escalating campaign of mass immigration raids, detentions, and deportations.

In addition to these legislative and budget priorities, ACLU staff reviewed, monitored, supported, opposed, or amended hundreds of other bills to safeguard civil liberties and civil rights. Your support makes our work possible, and we thank you for raising your voice for our legislative priorities this year. 

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

LEGAL ADVOCACY UPDATES

ICE ARRESTS BARRED AT COURTHOUSES NATIONWIDE

LITIGATION

In June, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California set aside the Trump administration's unlawful policy of arresting immigrants at courthouses nationwide and reinstated the 12-hour limit on detention in temporary holding cells in hundreds of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. The decision in *Pablo Sequen v. Albarran* restores protections for people lawfully pursuing their immigration case.

U.S. District Judge P. Casey Pitts concluded that, "the lack of connection between ICE's stated rationales for the 2025 courthouse arrest-policies and the expansion of arrests at immigration courthouses results not from merely unreasoned decision making but a complete lack of decision-making."

Although the federal class-action lawsuit the ACLU of Northern California filed with partners in September 2025 challenged ICE arrests at immigration courts, Judge Pitts' ruling applies to every courthouse across the country.

For decades, the federal government prohibited civil immigration arrests in and around courthouses to ensure individuals could access the justice system without fear of being detained. After the Trump administration abruptly rescinded these policies in January 2025, ICE agents ambushed and arrested people at mandatory court hearings and held them for days in inhumane conditions inside rooms designed only for short-term stays.

In a previous ruling in this lawsuit, the court ordered ICE to supply beds, mattresses and clean bedding; distribute toiletries and menstrual products; and provide access to medical and mental health care inside the holding facility at its San Francisco office.

EMERGENCY LEGAL PETITIONS FREE IMMIGRANTS FROM DETENTION

ADVOCACY

The Constitution and federal law protect habeas corpus, which for centuries has given individuals the right to appear in court to challenge their detention or imprisonment as unlawful. When arrests at mandatory immigration court hearings and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) check-in appointments surged across the Bay Area and the Central Valley last year, attorneys filed habeas petitions to seek their clients' release.



This strategy has freed dozens of immigrants from detention.

To help attorneys and people who do not have legal representation file petitions, the ACLU of Northern California and our partners developed two sets of templates and instructions to guide them step-by-step through the process.

One set of documents is for people with attorneys who have been detained in Northern and Central California in violation of a ruling in *Garro Pinchi v. Noem*, a federal class-action lawsuit we filed with our partners in October 2025. The court order blocks the Trump administration's unlawful policy of re-arresting and re-detaining immigrants the government previously released from custody because they are not dangerous or a flight risk. The second set is for people who don't have a lawyer who are detained in the Golden State Annex, Mesa Verde, California City, or Central Valley Annex detention facilities.

According to the most recent data from the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, an average of about 6,400 people are being held in the eight detention centers in California, most of which have a documented pattern of widespread human rights violations, including abuse and medical neglect.

CALLING ON GOV. NEWSOM TO COMMUTE ALL DEATH SENTENCES

ADVOCACY

On June 30, the ACLU of Northern California joined civil rights and faith leaders at the State Capitol to call on Gov. Gavin Newsom to commute every death sentence in California. Advocates lit candles, one for each person currently sentenced to death in the state and delivered petitions to the governor's office urging universal clemency to spare the lives of people on death row.

ACLU NorCal Executive Director Abdi Soltani condemned California's death penalty as not just broken, but indefensible. Who is sentenced to death in California is not determined by the facts of a case or the fairness of a trial. Instead, the biggest predictors are arbitrary: the county where the crime took place, the race of the defendant and the victim, and a defendant's income. The result is a two-tiered system of justice that favors people who are rich and guilty rather than if they are poor and innocent.

Nearly all people on California's death row could not afford to hire their own attorney when they faced trial, and 70 percent have no lawyer to appeal their death sentence.

Justice demands equal treatment under the law. Building on decades of ACLU advocacy on the



California death penalty, we call on Gov. Newsom to stand for fairness and commute these death sentences once and for all.

SETTLEMENT RESTORES WATER ACCESS FOR ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN SISKIYOU COUNTY

LITIGATION

In June, the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors agreed to a settlement resolving the remaining claims in *Mathis v. County of Siskiyou*, a lawsuit the ACLU Foundation of Northern California, the Asian Law Caucus, and Covington & Burling LLP brought on behalf of residents of Shasta Vista, a rural community of approximately 1,000 people, most of whom are Asian American and primarily members of the Hmong community.

Twice, the county attempted to severely restrict water access in Shasta Vista—first through water ordinances passed in 2021, and then, after those were repealed, through enforcement of zoning ordinances to block water deliveries. These man-made crises forced residents to make impossible choices between bathing, watering vegetable gardens, and caring for their animals and themselves. Some left the community altogether.

The settlement prohibits the county from enforcing the ordinances to cut off water deliveries for household needs, bars racially discriminatory enforcement, and protects residents' right to pursue a permanent water system for their community. The court will oversee the agreement for at least five years, and that oversight can be extended under certain conditions.

As Shasta Vista works toward a permanent water source, this agreement affirms that its residents deserve the same access and respect as any other community.

ACLU LAWSUIT FORCES CITY OF VALLEJO TO RELEASE LONG-SUPPRESSED BADGE-BENDING REPORT

LITIGATION

In November 2022, the ACLU of Northern California filed a public records lawsuit in Solano County Superior Court to compel the City of Vallejo to release the records of an investigation into allegations that Vallejo Police Department officers bent the tips of their badges to mark the act of shooting or killing a civilian in the line of duty.



CONTINUED ON FOLLOWING PAGE

The city hired former Sonoma County Sheriff Robert Giordano to conduct the independent investigation in 2020. But when it was completed in 2021, Vallejo officials refused to release the 150-page report in violation of California’s public records laws.

ACLU NorCal filed suit to compel disclosure under S.B.1421, California’s police transparency law which we helped draft and pass expanding public transparency of law enforcement misconduct records.

In October 2024, the court granted our petition in part, ordering that some documents previously considered confidential (including a partially redacted version of the report) be made public. However it denied our request for release of the remaining documents, including those identifying the officers involved. We appealed seeking full release of all public records; the city also appealed to prevent any disclosure.

That First District Court of Appeal unanimously ruled in our favor and ordered Vallejo to publicly release all the withheld records—including the full investigative report, findings, and interview transcripts. The city refused to publicly release the records despite this court order and instead petitioned the California Supreme Court for review. The state supreme court denied review in September 2025.

Between June and August 2026, after more than five years of stonewalling the public, Vallejo finally released a redacted report on the badge-bending scandal and additional background materials that informed the report.

Though these records are now public, their contents reveal that high-ranking Vallejo officials hid evidence of the badge-bending scandal from the public for years and that none of the officers involved were ever held accountable for their participation in badge bending. This is a key step in our ongoing advocacy for police accountability in Vallejo specifically and California generally. 

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 ACLU of Northern California

DEFENDING OUR RIGHTS IN THE COURTS, THROUGH THE BALLOT BOX, AND IN OUR COMMUNITIES

BY ACLU NORCAL DIRECTOR OF APPELLATE ADVOCACY NEIL SAWHNEY

Laws don’t enforce themselves. Writing protections into law is necessary, but it’s just the first step. We must continually defend our rights—in the courts, through the ballot box, and in our communities—to ensure that they are more than mere words on paper.

California has some of the most rights-protective laws in the country, but that can mean little if they are not followed or properly implemented. Take SB 34, a law that the ACLU of Northern California helped pass, as an example. For more than a decade, that law has prohibited police from sharing sensitive data collected from automated license plate readers with the federal government and out-of-state agencies. Yet the San Francisco Police Department and other departments across the state have repeatedly violated this law by sharing ALPR data out of state, including with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

We have brought multiple lawsuits challenging this intrusive and unlawful surveillance. At the same time, community members across the state—including many ACLU NorCal members—have convinced local officials to cancel contracts with companies like Flock. This organizing and local advocacy has been central to enforcing SB 34 and other state privacy protections.

Our litigation is critically important, but it takes time. That theme cuts across many of the stories and updates in this newsletter. In Vallejo, for example, it took years of litigation, including an appeal, to get the city to obey another state law that we helped pass. Eventually, though, our court victory led to the city releasing a

damning report—and we hope that further litigation and advocacy will give teeth to the strong police transparency measures that the legislature enacted.

Similarly, in April 2024, we filed a petition in the California Supreme Court challenging the state’s current death-penalty system as racially discriminatory under the state constitution’s equal protection clause. Earlier this summer, the court held that we had set forth a valid legal theory and ordered that the lawsuit proceed in superior court. Although this is a major step forward for the case, it



ACLU of Northern California Director of Appellate Advocacy Neil Sawhney

will be a long time before we get a final ruling on our constitutional claims.

The political process can work far more quickly. That’s also why ACLU NorCal, along with a coalition of civil rights organizations and leaders, has called on Gov. Gavin Newsom to commute all death sentences in California. With a stroke of his pen, the governor can accomplish what could potentially take years in our lawsuit.

But the most lasting impact on our rights this fall will not come from the courts or any one official. It will come from you. Proposition 39 would require ID to vote in person and interfere with the vast majority of us who vote by mail—proof that rights can be written out of law as readily as written into it. Defeating it is our top election priority, and we will use every tool we have—litigation, organizing, poll monitoring—to protect your right to vote. And our democracy depends on one thing—that we each get out and vote. 

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A LETTER FROM ACLU OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ABDI SOLTANI

The ACLU is in full mobilization mode as we approach the midterm election. We are motivating voters across the country to vote, while also deploying our legal resources in unprecedented ways to safeguard the election and the right to vote. If there was a lesson from the 2020 election and the events leading to up to January 6th, it is that Donald Trump will stop at nothing to undermine democracy. We must meet that threat with vigilance and activism.

For this coming midterm election, our teams are conducting legal research in preparation for 25 potential scenarios or threats that will require impactful responses. All means and methods of voting face threats, beginning with early voting through the processing and counting of ballots, declaration, certification, and seating of winners.

As serious as the threats to our rights and democracy are, I am heartened by the powerful intergenerational response of so many people.

This summer, I was proud to attend the ACLU’s national conference that brought together board leaders from ACLU affiliates around the country as well as high school students for our National Advocacy Institute. As you know, we suffered a devastating setback in the U.S. Supreme Court in our advocacy to defend the rights of immigrants with Temporary Protected Status from countries such as Haiti and Syria. In response, 1,200 ACLU affiliate board members and high school students went to Congress on July 27th to lobby for passage of the Dream and Promise Act that would provide a path to legal status for long-term immigrants. We



Photos by Gabriel Calamba

In July, as part of an ACLU conference over 1,000 high school students lobbied Congress to pass the Dream and Promise Act.

visited over 400 congressional offices, including 165+ Republican offices and 230+ Democratic offices to advocate for that legislation. Being with so many high school students was truly the highlight of my summer. As a “lobby captain” for a delegation from Northern California, I was blown away by the commitment, persuasiveness and power of the young people in our group as they met with staff of our two U.S. Senators and members of the House. I draw inspiration from these young people, but I am also grateful for the long-term perseverance



ACLU of Northern California Executive Director Abdi Soltani

As serious as the threats to our rights and democracy are, I am heartened by the powerful intergenerational response of so many people.

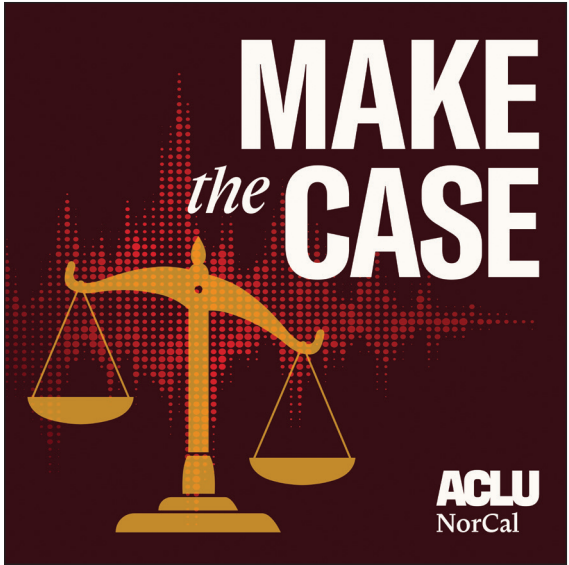
and stamina of people who have been in the fight for civil rights for decades. One such person was Drucilla Ramey who recently passed away and is profiled on page 3. Dru was the first woman to chair the ACLU NorCal board of directors and was the longtime leader of the San Francisco Bar Association, where she established initiatives that are transformative for access to justice. We are proud to recognize Dru posthumously with the ACLU NorCal Lola Hanzel Courageous Advocacy Award for her leadership and service to ACLU NorCal. And I also thank you, ACLU members and supporters who make our work possible with your financial support, civic engagement, and powerful voice. It has been my pleasure to see and meet many of you at the Defend Democracy Tour, which has just concluded after visits to 15 cities throughout Northern and Central California. I am proud to do this work with you. Thank you.

Abdi Soltani

Abdi Soltani, Executive Director
ACLU of Northern California

CHECK OUT OUR NEW PODCAST: LAUNCHING OCTOBER 6!

The ACLU of Northern California is excited to announce the upcoming release of its podcast *Make the Case*, hosted by Carmen King.



Go behind the scenes of the work you support. Hear our attorneys and organizers “make the case” for why this work matters. A case may begin with a person or group facing a specific harm, but its outcome can shape how others are treated under the law for years. *Make the Case* helps make sense of how the people doing this work approach that responsibility. Through searching conversations, we give challenging questions a thoughtful hearing and explore what our rights mean in practice. Each episode offers a concrete way to get involved. The first episode airs on October 6th. Learn more and listen at aclunorcal.org/make-the-case.