

ACLU
Maryland

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GOVERNMENT
OFFICE BUILDING

A Landmark Win for Voting Rights in Wicomico

By Nehemiah Bester

After decades of unyielding advocacy by Black Wicomico County residents, a federal judge this year ordered sweeping reforms to the way local elections are conducted—finally addressing historic discrimination in the county’s election system and advancing equal opportunities for Black voters. For decades, Wicomico’s Black residents were denied fair representation and had their votes diluted by a flawed system that gave white voters increased influence and limited Black representation. **That injustice ends now.**

This landmark victory was made possible by the determination and leadership of local Black residents, including **Monica Brooks, Dr. Eddie Boyd, Amber Green, Luc Angelot, and Mary Ashanti**, as well as the **Wicomico County NAACP, the Caucus of African American Leaders, and the Watchmen with One Voice Ministerial Alliance.**

This historic decision overhauls the election systems for both Wicomico County Council and the local school board. The change replaces a discriminatory at-large voting structure with seven single-member districts, including two districts in which Black residents make up the majority of the voting-age population. That change alone will give Black residents a real opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

But the win goes even further. Unlike many other voting rights settlements, this agreement includes creative and community-focused remedies designed to help repair the deep harms of past discrimination. These reforms include: creating a new Wicomico Human Rights Advisory Committee; adding the first-ever permanent student member position on the school board, mandating anti-bias training for local officials; and establishing twice-yearly working sessions between the county and plaintiff organizations to ensure continued accountability and inclusion in elections policies.

Amber Green, an individual plaintiff in the lawsuit and longtime community advocate, summed up the moment best: **“This victory belongs to the people.** It is a testament to the power of collective action and a reminder that **when we fight for justice, we win.”**

Learn more about the Wicomico County lawsuit and consent agreement on the ACLU of Maryland website.

FREE STATE LIBERTIES

SUMMER
2025

FREE STATE LIBERTIES

The newsletter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland and the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland.

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Documents and information filed under the Maryland Solicitations Act may be obtained from the Maryland Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401.

COVER IMAGE: Wicomico County residents and plaintiffs rally for press conference with Amber Green at the lectern. Photo by Lorena M. Diaz.

PAGE 2 IMAGE: Advocates, returning citizens, and their families at the Life After A Second Chance premiere. Photo by Yanet Amanuel.

PAGE 3 IMAGE: The 2025 Day of Action Rally in Annapolis during Lobby Day. Photo by Mary Ella.

PAGE 3 IMAGE: ACLU of Maryland staff gathering before the 2025 legislative session. Photo by William Rowel.

DEAR FRIENDS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

In times of challenge, our collective commitment to justice becomes even more vital.

Just months into this new administration, we've seen more than 40 Executive Orders targeting the rights of immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, schools, and children—with no regard for constitutional protections or respect for the democratic process. **Have no doubt – the ACLU is prepared for this moment!**

With your support, **we've taken over 110 legal actions against the administration.** Within hours of Trump's inauguration, we filed our first case, challenging his effort to dismantle the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of birthright citizenship. We won multiple orders blocking Trump's invocation of the 1798 Alien Enemies Act, defended immigrants targeted for detention and deportation and protected the First Amendment free speech of students in school and on college campuses.

We are grounded in racial justice and guided by our belief in the dignity of every person. We are fighting these dangerous orders in court, in our communities, in coalition – **and we will not back down.**

This moment demands more than resistance. It calls for imagination, care, and resolve. We will defend police accountability, uphold immigrant rights, challenge discriminatory election systems, protect the rights of the incarcerated, and ensure that the voices of the marginalized are heard and respected. You'll find highlights of that work in the stories and updates throughout this newsletter.

From the start, this administration has tested the limits of our democracy—but the ACLU didn't flinch. No matter who is in office, we will continue to hold the line. **Any administration that seeks to remove constitutional rights and freedoms from you, will have to go through us.**

Thank you for being with us. Your commitment makes this work possible.

With gratitude and solidarity,



DANA VICKERS SHELLEY

Executive Director,
ACLU of Maryland



COREY STOTTELMYER

Board President,
ACLU of Maryland

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES



FAIRER SENTENCING STARTS WITH REEVALUATING EXTREME PUNISHMENT

Thanks to the powerful advocacy of formerly incarcerated people and their families—alongside our support and that of community partners—the Maryland Second Look Act is now law. It allows certain people who committed crimes between the ages of 18 and 25 and have served at least 20 years of an extreme sentence to petition the court for resentencing. In a state with some of the worst racial disparities in incarceration, this law offers a path to redemption and healing by giving judges the chance to recognize growth, accountability, and readiness to return home.



EXPANDING LANGUAGE ACCESS FOR MARYLAND VOTERS

As part of the landmark Maryland Voting Rights Act, we worked with advocacy partners to win new language access requirements that ensure more voters can understand the voting process. The new provisions expand on existing federal laws requiring translation of election materials, lowering the population threshold required for coverage and increasing the number of languages covered. These changes ensure that election materials are more accessible for historically excluded communities and are part of a broader package of protections designed to defend and expand voting rights statewide.

KEEPING ICE OUT OF SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS AND OTHER SAFE SPACES

After the federal government rolled back longstanding protections against immigration enforcement in spaces like schools, hospitals, courthouses, and places of worship, we joined immigrant rights advocates on emergency legislation to stop ICE from targeting Marylanders. The Protecting Sensitive Locations Act requires the Attorney General (AG) to develop policy guidelines for locations that provide essential state-funded services to the public and prohibits federal immigration law enforcement from entering the location unless it presents a valid warrant issued by a federal or state court. Sensitive locations named in the legislation include public schools, public libraries, courthouses, facilities operated by the Comptroller, state-funded healthcare and mental health facilities, shelter care, and other locations determined by the AG.

FIXING MEDICAL PAROLE TO PROTECT HUMAN DIGNITY

When lawmakers removed the Governor from life-sentence parole decisions in 2021, they accidentally left out medical parole—trapping seriously ill people in a dangerous and unnecessary delay. For four years, we've advocated for a critical fix so that people with terminal illnesses aren't forced to die behind bars while waiting six months for the Governor to act. This legislative session, lawmakers passed SB 181/ HB 1123, making the Parole Commission the final decision-maker for all parole cases.

LEGAL BRIEFS

PROTECTING TRANS YOUTH AND GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE

In a victory for transgender people and their families nationwide, a U.S. District Court in Maryland blocked a discriminatory executive order that sought to block gender-affirming care for minors. Before a courtroom packed with supporters of LGBTQ+ rights, Judge Brendan Hurson rejected arguments made by the Department of Justice and ruled that cutting off medically necessary care would cause irreparable harm to young trans people. The court issued a nationwide injunction to stop the order. That ruling will remain in effect as the case moves to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

**"When we
fight for
justice,
we win."**



DEFENDING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

The ACLU of Maryland is pushing back against efforts to ban diversity, equity and inclusion programs in schools and workplaces—a key tenet of the Trump Administration's agenda. In amicus briefs and court filings across the country and here in Maryland, we have argued that these anti-DEI restrictions violate due process, the First Amendment, and federal funding laws. Our efforts are gaining traction: federal judges in Maryland and other states have temporarily blocked anti-DEI requirements, recognizing that Trump Administration efforts to silence speech or defund schools and institutions that promote inclusion are unconstitutional.

CHALLENGING DANGEROUS IMMIGRATION POLICIES

People born in the United States are American citizens by right, as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. We're organizing alongside our partners to defend birthright citizenship and protect Maryland's immigrant communities from racist and dangerous immigration policies. That includes fighting against programs like 287(g) that encourage racial profiling and challenging efforts to detain and deport people who have every right to be here. No matter who is in office, we're committed to ending inhumane detention practices, protecting the dignity and rights of immigrants across our state, and guarding against the illegal removal and deportation of American citizens.

Learn more at our website aclu-md.org



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