

# ACLU of Maryland 2025 *Annual Report*



# Letter from the Executive Director & Board President

Dear Friends,

2025 reminded us how fragile our rights can be—and how much they depend on people willing to defend them.

Across the country, we saw renewed efforts to restrict fundamental freedoms: attacks on immigrants and LGBTQ+ people, censorship in classrooms and libraries, and policies that sought to narrow who belongs and whose voices matter. These challenges were not abstract. They had real consequences for families, students, voters, and communities.

**Here in Maryland, we met this moment with purpose and focus, working alongside communities across the state to defend rights where they were most at risk.**

In courtrooms, in the legislature, and alongside community partners across the state, the ACLU of Maryland worked to uphold and protect constitutional rights for all of us. We defended voters against discrimination, demanded transparency and accountability in policing, fought for fairness in the legal justice system, protected students' freedom to learn, stood with immigrant families, and defended access to essential health care for transgender youth.

This work required persistence, collaboration, and trust. It meant listening closely to those most impacted and building strategies grounded in their experiences. It also meant recognizing that progress is rarely linear, but that sustained effort matters. This year, that effort led to real results: harmful bills stopped, critical reforms passed, precedent-setting court victories secured, and thousands of Marylanders reached through education and outreach.

The pages that follow reflect more than a list of accomplishments. They tell a story about people who refused to accept exclusion, secrecy, or fear as inevitable. About partners who organized under pressure. About staff who brought skill and care to some of the most complex challenges of our time.

## Letter from the Executive Director & Board President

When democratic values are tested, the strength of our institutions depends on public engagement and collective resolve. In 2025, Maryland showed what's possible when communities organize, coalitions lead with courage, and when we refuse to look away.

We are grateful to everyone who stood with us this year and helped ensure that Maryland remains a place where rights are protected, and dignity is respected.

Thank you for your continued trust and support. The work continues—and we remain committed to meeting it with clarity, integrity, and purpose.

With gratitude and in solidarity,



*Dana Vickers Shelley*

Executive Director  
ACLU of Maryland



*Corey Stottlemeyer*

Board President  
ACLU of Maryland



# 15

Harmful bills  
defeated



# 03

Public  
education  
events hosted



# 68

Bills influenced  
through testimony  
and advocacy



Thousands  
reached through  
statewide  
education and  
outreach



# 09

Amicus briefs  
filed or signed  
onto in key civil  
rights cases



# 02

Nationwide  
injunctions  
granted



# 04

Priority bills  
passed



**126** federal and  
state court filings,  
**8** court hearings,  
and **5** court  
judgments,  
including  
**2** nationwide  
preliminary  
injunctions reining  
in the Trump  
Administration's  
abuses of power

# Our Impact By The *Numbers*

The ACLU of MD combined the power of litigation, legislation, and community engagement to meet the moment.



# In The Courts: Defending Rights And Setting *Precedent*

In 2025, we defended democracy, dignity, and accountability. Through strategic litigation, the ACLU of Maryland worked to protect voting rights, demand police transparency, advance racial justice, defend students and educators, safeguard transgender youth, and hold immigration enforcement accountable to the law.

## Defending Democracy & The *Right To Vote*

### Securing Fair Representation in Wicomico County

After decades of advocacy, Black voters in Wicomico County secured a transformative victory for fair representation. In 2025, a federal court entered judgment in an ACLU voting rights case challenging the County's long-standing partial at-large election system, which diluted Black voting power and denied communities an equal voice.

The ruling replaces that system with seven single-member districts, creating fairer and more representative elections and giving communities a real opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. The case was brought by Black voters and civil rights organizations who had raised concerns about vote dilution for years, despite Black residents making up a substantial share of the county's population.

The victory went beyond redrawing district lines. Building on precedent from our landmark 2024 case in Federalsburg, the agreement includes forward-looking measures to address long-standing exclusion and rebuild trust in local government. These include the creation of a Wicomico Human Rights Advisory Committee, anti-bias training for government officials, and the county's first permanent student seat on the School Board. The case affirms a core democratic principle: representation should reflect the people who live in a community.

## Police Accountability & Transparency

### Defending Anton's Law and the Public's Right to Know

We are representing the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability in a critical legal fight to protect Anton's Law—a landmark police transparency measure named for Anton Black, a young man killed by police on Maryland's Eastern Shore in 2018. The law was designed to ensure public access to police disciplinary records and strengthen accountability when officers abuse their power.

The Fraternal Order of Police sued Montgomery County to block the release of a police officer's disciplinary records and to have Anton's Law declared unconstitutional. The union also sought to shield the case from public view by sealing the court proceedings. We intervened to unseal the case and defend Anton's Law on the merits, exposing and challenging

## Racial Justice & Criminal *Legal Reform*

a backdoor arrangement that gave the FOP advance notice of records requests, enabling delays and last-minute court actions that undermined the law's purpose.

The case will determine whether Maryland upholds the public's right to know how police departments discipline officers accused of misconduct. Anton's Law reflects more than five years of sustained advocacy by community members and coalition partners seeking to build accountability and trust between police and the communities they serve. The case was fully briefed and argued in 2025, and a decision is pending.

### Protecting the Promise of Meaningful Parole

A decade ago, we brought a groundbreaking civil rights lawsuit challenging Maryland's practice of treating children sentenced to life imprisonment as parole-eligible in name only. At the time, no one serving a parole-eligible life sentence had been released without executive clemency in nearly 25 years. Through this litigation, we exposed a parole system that failed to provide any real opportunity for release or consideration of growth and rehabilitation.

The resulting settlement marked a critical turning point. It required Maryland to dismantle entrenched barriers to parole and to provide people serving life sentences a meaningful, individualized opportunity to demonstrate who they had become. Since then, families across the state have experienced long-overdue reunions as individuals who entered prison as children returned home after decades of incarceration.

In recent years, these hard-won reforms have come under renewed attack. A separate lawsuit seeks to undo a key parole regulation and would once again tilt the system toward permanent incarceration if successful. We intervened to defend the regulation, representing individuals whose parole prospects are directly at stake, but who were previously voiceless in the matter. This litigation is about preserving the promise of meaningful parole and ensuring that Maryland's system reflects constitutional principles by considering growth, maturity, and rehabilitation—not only the worst act of a person's youth.

# Education Equity & Civil Rights



## Challenging Censorship and Discrimination in Somerset County Schools

In January 2025, newly elected Somerset County School Board members took office and quickly advanced a politically driven agenda that threatened students' rights, educational integrity, and public trust. The all-white Board moved aggressively against diversity, equity, and inclusion, engaging in censorship, discrimination, and conduct that raised serious legal concerns.

Beginning in early 2025, the Board adopted sweeping book removal and curriculum policies, threatened school librarians, and sidelined the district's Black superintendent under circumstances suggesting racial intolerance. These actions were accompanied by secretive meetings, retaliation against educators and parents who spoke out, and the unlawful hiring of politically aligned legal counsel. The turmoil culminated in the superintendent's departure just over a year into her contract, her replacement by a white male administrator, and the Board's refusal to disclose buyout terms reportedly exceeding \$1 million while seeking to reduce its funding obligations to students.

We joined with parents and community members to demand transparency and accountability, pursuing public records related to censorship, personnel decisions, and Board conduct in preparation for potential legal action. As the Board has continued to stonewall, state oversight authorities have intervened, citing possible violations of the First Amendment and Maryland's Freedom to Read Act. We remain committed to ensuring Somerset students can learn in environments free from censorship, intimidation, and discrimination.

## Defending Access to Essential Health Care for Transgender Youth

Soon after taking office in January 2025, the Trump Administration issued a series of executive orders targeting the rights, speech, and health care of transgender people. One order directed federal agencies to withhold funding from medical providers that offer gender-affirming care, including puberty blockers and hormone therapy, to patients under 19. The directive threatened essential federal funding and placed already-limited access to care for transgender youth at immediate risk. In response, some provider networks began canceling appointments and announcing plans to stop providing care.

In February 2025, we joined with the National ACLU, Lambda Legal, and the law firms Hogan Lovells and Jenner & Block to file suit in federal court in Maryland on behalf of transgender young people and their families whose care had been disrupted. The lawsuit also included organizational plaintiffs PFLAG and GLMA, the nation's largest organization of LGBTQ+ and allied health professionals.

Early in the case, we secured a critical court ruling: U.S. District Judge Brendan Hurson issued a temporary restraining order barring federal agencies from conditioning or withholding funds because a provider offers gender-affirming medical care to patients under 19. The order was later extended and converted into a preliminary injunction, preserving access to care while the case proceeds. The case is now before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and is temporarily paused. The injunction remains in effect.



# Immigrant Justice & Civic Belonging

## Stopping Deceptive “Bait and Switch” Deportation Tactics

Throughout 2025, we continued defending a major court victory against Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s abusive “bait and switch” deportation tactic as the federal government appealed the ruling to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. The case challenges a practice used during the first Trump administration in which ICE agents lure immigrants to routine marriage interviews by suggesting a path to lawful status, only to arrest them, detain them, and move quickly to deport them.

The litigation began with the case of Wanrong Lin, a Maryland resident married to a U.S. citizen for 14 years and the father of three U.S. citizen children. ICE arrested Mr. Lin during his marriage interview and placed him on a fast track to deportation, prompting our legal team to file emergency federal court papers as he was being put on a plane to China. A late-night court order issued just before the plane landed returned Mr. Lin to the United States and reunited him with his family. His case led to broader relief through a permanent ruling protecting other Maryland families from the same deceptive tactic. ICE has appealed that ruling. Oral arguments were held in January 2026. The appellate court decision will determine whether immigration enforcement must adhere to basic principles of fairness or may continue relying on deception.



## Beyond the Courts: Power in Community

Defending rights doesn’t only happen in courtrooms. It happens in communities, classrooms, and the halls of Annapolis. This year, the ACLU of Maryland showed up alongside our partners to defend due process, expand democracy, and protect families from harm. Through coalition-building, grassroots advocacy, and persistent organizing, we helped move legislation that translated constitutional values into real protections for Marylanders.



# Legislative Wins For Marylanders

# Standing With Immigrant Communities

## Protecting Sensitive Locations

In response to the federal government's rollback of long-standing protections, Maryland took action to ensure that people can safely access essential services without fear of immigration enforcement. New protections now limit when and how federal immigration agents may enter schools, libraries, courthouses, shelters, and state-funded health centers. By requiring judicial warrants or true emergency circumstances—and clear guidance from the Attorney General—this victory helps restore trust and ensures that places of care and justice remain places of safety.

During the 2025 legislative session, we worked alongside a powerful statewide coalition led by CASA to advance a coordinated package of immigrant justice legislation. At a time of escalating federal immigration enforcement and growing fear in immigrant communities, our collective advocacy focused on one clear principle: everyone in Maryland deserves safety, dignity, and constitutional protections—regardless of immigration status.

## Safeguarding Personal Data

We also pushed for stronger limits on how personal data is shared with federal agencies. While comprehensive data privacy legislation stalled, key protections were ultimately secured. State agencies and their contractors are now required to implement safeguards for sensitive information, such as location data and identification records, reducing the risk that personal information is used to target or endanger Marylanders and their families.

## Maryland Values Act: Building Momentum For Immigrant Justice

The most far-reaching effort of the 2025 legislative session was the Maryland Values Act, aimed at ending Maryland's participation in voluntary federal immigration enforcement agreements that deputize local law enforcement as immigration agents. These programs have fueled racial profiling, family separation, and deep mistrust between communities and police.

As federal threats and intimidation escalated, grassroots leaders, directly impacted families, and advocates across the state mobilized in unprecedented ways. Although a full ban on these agreements was stripped out in the final moments of session, the law that passed still marked significant progress, incorporating multiple protections from the broader immigrant justice package and laying critical groundwork for future reform. The depth and breadth of public support made one thing clear: Marylanders want policies that protect families, uphold due process, and reject fear-based enforcement. We are building on that momentum in the year ahead.



## Expanding Democracy Through *Language Access*

Maryland took an important step toward a more inclusive democracy by expanding language access in elections. New reforms lower barriers that previously limited when translated voting materials were required and broaden the range of languages covered. This victory, driven by the Maryland Voting Rights Act Coalition and community partners, brings us closer to an electoral system where voters with limited English proficiency can fully participate and have their voices heard.

# Restoring Fairness And Humanity In The *Criminal Legal System*



Together, these victories tell a larger story: when communities organize, when coalitions lead with courage, and when we refuse to accept injustice as inevitable, real change is possible. Last year in Annapolis, the ACLU of Maryland didn't just defend rights—we helped shape a future where more people are seen, protected, and empowered.

## Correcting Medical Parole

For the fourth consecutive year, we advocated to fix a lingering flaw in Maryland's parole system that left people seeking medical parole subject to gubernatorial approval—an oversight that contradicted earlier reforms. This session, lawmakers finally corrected that error, ensuring that decisions about medical parole are made fairly and consistently, without political interference.

## Second Chances Through The *Second Look Act*

After years of tireless advocacy by directly impacted people and grassroots partners, Maryland passed the Second Look Act—rooted in the belief that people are more than their worst mistake. The law allows individuals who were convicted of certain crimes between the ages of 18 and under 25 and have served at least 20 years of their sentence the opportunity to petition the court for a sentence reduction or modification. Building on earlier reforms for people sentenced as youth, this victory reflects a growing commitment to fairness, rehabilitation, and human dignity.





A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a tan coat, speaking into a microphone at a protest. She is looking upwards and to the right with a determined expression. Behind her, a diverse crowd of people, mostly young women, are visible, some wearing hoodies. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor event at sunset.

# Empowering *Communities*

Something remarkable happened this year in Salisbury, a rural town on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Against long odds and months of pressure from county leadership, Wicomico County residents – fresh off their pathbreaking voting rights win – successfully stopped a proposed 287(g) agreement with ICE. A multiracial coalition, led by those most directly impacted and supported by local civil rights advocates, immigrant leaders, faith communities, farmworkers, and partners like CLINIC, chose to organize rather than agonize. Through town halls, teach-ins, and relentless outreach, the coalition educated neighbors about the dangers of ICE collaboration and mobilized the broader community. In a county deeply reliant on Haitian and Central American workers who sustain its farms and poultry plants, hundreds showed up, many for the first time, to pack County Council chambers, share their stories, and demand dignity, due process, and real public safety.

That overwhelming public opposition changed the political calculus. Council members who initially supported the proposal began raising concerns about staffing shortages, legal liability, and financial risk – concerns echoed by the Maryland Attorney General's warning about ICE detainers. Ultimately, the proposal collapsed because the community exposed it for what it was: a costly political stunt that would have enabled racial profiling, torn families apart, and wasted scarce local resources without improving safety. At a time when ICE enforcement is already devastating families across Maryland, Wicomico County refused to use local resources to deepen that harm. This victory shows what's possible when communities come together, and it fuels our resolve to take this fight statewide and ensure that 287(g) is outlawed in Maryland once and for all.



# Maryland Voices: Stories Of Courage And Impact

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“Every President’s Day, I’m reminded why this work matters. What began as a Lobby Night has grown into a Day of Action where people from across Maryland, across generations, backgrounds, and lived experiences, come together to demand dignity, humanity, and justice.

The most powerful moments aren’t just the crowds on Lawyers Mall. They’re in the quiet, in-between moments, watching people step into their power, share their stories, and realize they are not alone. Seeing community members meet with legislators and advocate for themselves and their loved ones reminds me that real change happens when Marylanders show up for one another.”



**Lorena M. Diaz**

Campaign Strategist at  
the ACLU of Maryland

“Coming home after incarceration still overwhelms me. There was a time when I had no hope of ever leaving prison. Today, I find myself living a life I once believed was impossible. By the grace of God, I was given a second chance, and with it came both freedom and responsibility. I carry that responsibility proudly because I want the world to see what growth, accountability, and redemption truly look like.

I entered prison at 18 and learned that growth of the whole person is essential, spiritually, mentally, physically, and educationally. I saw people who were loyal, respectful, and genuinely kind, yet defined by a single act. That should never be the end of anyone’s story.

This opportunity has given me a bright future and a purpose beyond prison walls. I am responsible for how I live, how I treat others, and how I show up in freedom. And I do so with hope.”



**Melvin Powell**

Maryland Community Member

# What Will You Give To Ensure...



Your investment in the ACLU's work is an investment in the protection and expansion of civil rights and liberties for all. Together, we can ensure that the values we hold dear are upheld and that our democracy remains strong.

Thank you.

## *What is the difference between a membership & a donation?*

The ACLU of Maryland consists of two sibling entities: the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland and the ACLU Foundation of Maryland.

- The American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland is a 501(c)(4), which means that contributions are not tax-deductible and can be used for political lobbying. Membership contributions always fund the Union.
- The ACLU Foundation of Maryland is a 501(c)(3) charity, which means that contributions are tax-deductible and cannot be used for political lobbying. Gifts to the Foundation fund our litigation, communications, advocacy, and public education efforts in Maryland and across the country.

## *What is the difference between donating to the ACLU of Maryland and the National ACLU?*

At the ACLU of Maryland, we work closely with our colleagues at the National ACLU to defend civil liberties in our state and across the country. Gifts to the ACLU of Maryland are shared with the National ACLU, and vice versa.

# We The *People* Means all of us?

## *Online*

Give securely at [www.aclu-md.org](http://www.aclu-md.org).

## *Mail*

ACLU of Maryland, 3600 Clipper Mill Rd., Ste. 200,  
Baltimore, MD 21211

Make checks out to ACLU Foundation of Maryland (tax-deductible donations) or the ACLU of Maryland (membership contributions).

## *Donor-Advised Fund*

Recommend a gift for immediate impact or set up recurring donations to the ACLU Foundation of Maryland.

## *IRA QCD*

Ask your IRA custodian to send a check to the ACLU Foundation of Maryland (Tax ID: 23-7209538) at our mailing address, specifying it's a QCD.

## *Stock/Securities*

Transfer to the ACLU Foundation of Maryland's account (30A121398) at T. Rowe Price (DTC# 0443).

## *Beneficiary Designations*

Name the ACLU as a beneficiary for retirement accounts, life insurance policies, or bank or brokerage accounts.

Fill out your provider's beneficiary designation form with the following details:

- Legal Name: American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland, Inc.
- Tax ID: 23-7209538

## *Workplace Giving*

ACLU Foundation of Maryland participates in the Combined Federal Campaign (15328).

## *Questions?*

In honor or memory, by will or trust, or for more information about additional giving opportunities, the ACLU of Maryland's Office of Development is happy to provide resources to help you fulfill your philanthropic interests and passions in a way that is consistent with your values.

**Contact [development@aclu-md.org](mailto:development@aclu-md.org)  
or (410) 889-8550 ext. 153.**



# Audited *Financials*

⌚ Expenses

Total \$8,092,972

Our fiscal year runs from April 1 - March 31.

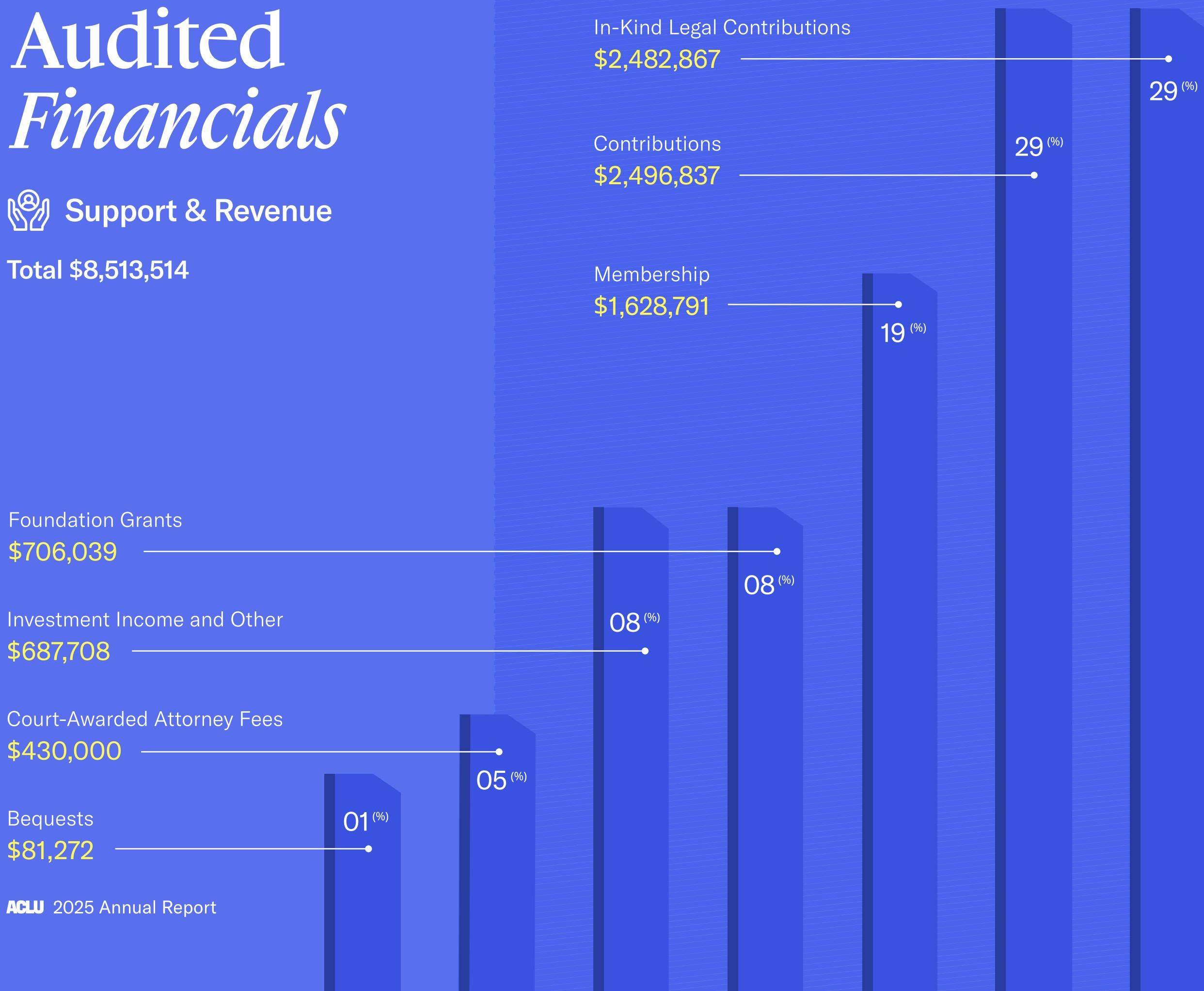
These financials reflect our fiscal year 2025, which ran from April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025.

# Audited *Financials*



## Support & Revenue

**Total \$8,513,514**





The QR code links to an ACLU Foundation of Maryland donation page.

## Donate Online!

Use your phone camera to hover over the QR code on the left. You will see a prompt to click to open a website. The QR code links to an ACLU of Maryland donation page.

# None Of This Work Happens Without You

The ACLU of Maryland is deeply thankful for our member-donors who partner with us to defend civil rights and civil liberties across our state. Together, we are helping Marylanders claim their rights and ensuring the law reflects their inherent dignity and humanity.

*As Threats To Democracy Grow Louder  
And More Coordinated, Our Work Has  
Never Been More Urgent.*

With your continued support, we can protect what we've won and push forward toward a more just future. Please consider making a generous contribution today to help meet the challenges of this pivotal moment.



# Our Team



*Dana Vickers Shelley*

Executive Director

*Veronica Dunlap*

Deputy Executive Director

*Janet Amanuel*

Director of Public Policy

*Nehemiah Bester*

Communications Strategist

*Tierra Bradford*

Senior Policy Counsel

*Sebastian Brown*

Campaign Strategist

*Amy Cruice*

Legal Program Manager

*Lorena Magdalena Diaz*

Campaign Strategist

*Gina Elleby*

Legal Advocacy Manager

*Shawn Essien*

Director of People & Culture

*Deborah Jeon*

Legal Director

*Dara Johnson*

Interim Policy Counsel

*Sonia Kumar*

Senior Staff Attorney

*Courtney Lee*

Director of Finance & Operations

*Frank Patinella*

Senior Public Policy Advocate

*Rebecca M. Phillips*

Donor Relations Officer

*Fathima Rifkey*

Executive Coordinator  
& Board Liaison

*David Rocah*

Senior Staff Attorney

*Olivia Spaccasi*

Public Policy Analyst

*Jenny Trust*

Director of Development

*Danielle Tyler*

Director of Strategic Communications

# Our Team

## *Legal Partners and Law Clinics*

- American University College of Law's Decarceration and Re-Entry Clinic
- Americans United for Separation of Church and State
- Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP
- Ballard Spahr LLP
- Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP
- Center for Constitutional Rights
- Children's Rights
- Civil Rights Corps
- Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP
- Crowell & Moring LLP
- Disability Rights Maryland
- Eversheds Sutherland LLP
- Hogan Lovells
- Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP
- Mayer Brown LLP
- Michael Abrams, Esq.
- Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP
- Movement for Family Power
- National ACLU
- Perkins Coie LLP
- Public Justice Center
- Schulman, Hershfield & Gilden, P.A.
- University of Maryland School of Law's Youth, Education and Justice Clinic
- Venable LLP
- Washington Lawyers' Committee
- Wiley Rein LLP
- Wilkinson Barker Knauer LLP
- Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP
- Zuckerman Spaeder LLP

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Since 1931,  
The ACLU Of Maryland  
Has Been A Champion  
For Liberty, Justice, And  
*Equality*



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Thank You For  
Working With Us!

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