



WE DARE TO CREATE A MORE JUST AND FREE D.C.

At ACLU-D.C., we envision a just and free D.C. where all people live without systemic governmental oppression and can exercise their power to protect and expand civil rights, civil liberties, and human dignity. To move us forward in creating such a District, we have launched a new strategic framework that will guide our work in the years to come.



We wanted to create visionary and lasting change, while continuing to respond to violations of civil rights and liberties as they happen. After speaking with communities impacted by our work, we chose strategic priority areas where we could make the most long-lasting impact as an organization — and as a community. Our framework recognizes that visionary change is a community effort, and one of our main goals is to expand the ability of all people in the District, and especially members of communities that have been historically oppressed, to use our rights and to advocate for justice and freedom.

Another major component of our framework is our explicit acknowledgment of how race shapes our political and historical context in D.C. The history of D.C. has been deeply intertwined with anti-Black racism since the District's origins as a hub for the slave trade. Today, Black residents make up a significant portion of those targeted by policing and oppressed through other systemic practices. Understanding and acknowledging this history is essential to building a just and free D.C. for everyone.



After months of thoughtful conversations, anonymous feedback, and rigorous research, we are excited to share with you highlights of our framework. **And we invite you to join us and dare to create a more just and free D.C.**



CONT...

OUR MISSION

The ACLU of D.C. works with District residents and supporters of our vision to protect and advance civil liberties and civil rights by using the tools of public education, political advocacy, organizing, and litigation.

PROTECT

BLACK
TRANS
NATIVE
DISABLED
IMMIGRANT
INCARCERATED
LIVES MATTER



OUR VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

- Accountability
- Anti-racism
- Equity & Inclusion
- Collaboration
- Humility
- Liberty
- Centering Impacted Groups

OUR IMPACT ON D.C.

We achieve outcomes that bring about concrete, positive changes in the lives of community members.

We push for an equal and equitable system of justice.

We advocate for a full and fair democracy for residents of D.C., which includes D.C. statehood.

We champion civil liberties and civil rights in the District.

We aim to eliminate policies and practices that disproportionately harm historically oppressed communities, particularly those experiencing the impacts of racism and discrimination.

We provide accessible and trustworthy legal and political expertise on civil liberties and civil rights issues within the District.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



STATEHOOD

D.C. residents need statehood so that we can make our own laws and spend our own money. The 700,000 people living in D.C. are students, veterans, nurses, families, and neighbors. Like people in every state, we deserve to govern ourselves, as a matter of democracy and self-determination, but also because we know our communities better than anyone else.



FIRST AMENDMENT

The First Amendment protects our freedom to speak, assemble, exercise our freedom of religion or conscience, petition the government, and associate with others without government interference. ACLU-D.C. fights to protect the rights of demonstrators and all community members to express themselves. We also educate people about how to exercise their First Amendment rights so that, together, we can build a more just and free D.C.



FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION

All people in D.C. should be able to freely enjoy the District's opportunities, resources, and rights. But today, many people in the District face discrimination because of their race, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of who they are. ACLU-D.C. fights to ensure equal treatment for all members of the District community in the criminal justice system, government policies, employment, education, and more.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

ACLU-D.C. fights for a fair criminal justice approach that can make all our communities safer. D.C. currently enforces its criminal code along racially biased lines, and this unequal enforcement hurts Black residents the most. That's why we fight for proven solutions that can eliminate racial bias and protect all our fundamental rights.

Learn more about our strategic plan by visiting www.acludc.org/strategicplan



SAVE THE DATE

ADVANCING JUSTICE IN D.C.

FEBRUARY 13, 2024 | 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Hear from ACLU-D.C. staff about how we're building a more just and free D.C. through our Criminal Justice Reform work.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR DETAILS SOON!



Our safety matters, and so do our civil rights. But the **Secure DC Plan** put forward by Councilmember Brooke Pinto puts both at risk. This haphazard assortment of bills and initiatives is not the comprehensive public safety plan the District deserves. Several bills included in the plan would not make D.C. any safer; and in practice, they could make the District less safe.

For example, the ACTIVE Act (B25-0479) is more of an “abuse of power” bill than a true “public safety” bill. **The Active Act puts our safety and rights at risk by subjecting certain people to warrantless searches.** If passed, the ACTIVE Act would allow police to search certain people without a warrant, and without cause, any time they are out in public – or even at a friend’s or family member’s house.

The search provisions could open the floodgates for dangerous and ineffective police stops that violate people’s rights. The Courts released a letter raising concerns about whether the legislation violates the 4th Amendment. In practice, we know that Black people in the District will most likely bear the brunt of accelerated searches.

Warrantless searches also waste police resources and undermine trust. An ACLU-D.C. report showed that only 1% of all stops in 2020 and 0.6% of all stops in a five-month period in 2019 recovered firearms, suggesting that most stops were not effective. Ineffective stops can further erode community trust in police, and the public can understandably grow reluctant to interact with officers at all.

The ACTIVE Act also puts our safety and rights at risk by expanding pretrial detention. If passed, the ACTIVE Act makes it harder for judges to release people accused of certain crimes before their trial.

Pretrial detention is a severe restriction and should be used very rarely in a free society. Just three days in jail can upend a person’s life. They can lose their job, their housing, even custody of their children, just for being accused of a crime. The tragic truth is that nobody comes out of jail in a better position to take care of themselves or their families.

If preventing crime and violence is the goal, pretrial detention is not the way. Pretrial releases in the District are not driving crime: 92% of people released from pretrial are not rearrested. Locking more people up pretrial can negatively affect public safety because even short periods of unnecessary detention increase a person’s risk of re-arrest.

These concerns are why we showed up at the Wilson Building on November 8 to join the D.C. Council’s Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary’s hearing on the bill. ACLU-D.C. Executive Director Monica Hopkins testified, and our staff and community showed up to the hearing room to let the Council know that our safety and our civil rights matter.

We are also opposing measures in other bills in the Secure DC Plan. Learn more and get involved at www.acludc.org/abusepowerbill





August 9 is always a heavy day for D.C. native Artecka Brown. On that day in 2020, her oldest son, 17-year-old Christopher Brown, lost his life in a mass shooting at a block party. With this shattering loss, Artecka and her kids found themselves among the D.C. residents who wake up every day mourning an incomprehensible loss. “All over, there is just so much pain, so much hurt. The youth, women, men – we just need some type of help, some healing,” said Artecka.

Artecka realized that she, her kids, and her community needed to heal from the trauma of their immense and violent loss. Artecka’s boys found some healing at summer camp after their brother passed. Camp “helped my kids go through what they was going through in a lighter way,” she explained. “Healing helps us deal. It helps us fight, sometimes to just get out of the bed.” To provide community healing, Artecka started to host a Christopher Brown Community Day every August. There, kids get backpacks filled with school supplies, jump in a moon bounce, and play video games. Tables line the event with free clothing, food, and District resources.



Inspired in part by people like Artecka, we at ACLU-D.C. believe that real justice means that people heal from the harm they’ve experienced and that systems change so that those harms are not repeated.

But much of our legal system is not set up to provide healing. And Artecka is not alone in her desire to create healing beyond the system. The Alliance for Safety and Justice found that, by a 3 to 1 margin, crime survivors would prefer to hold the people who harmed them accountable through restorative options beyond prison.

To move toward a more holistic sense of justice, ACLU-D.C. partnered with the Network for Victim Recovery of DC (NVRDC) to provide healing support to certain ACLU-D.C. clients and partners who have experienced traumatic violations of their civil rights and liberties.

NVRDC seeks to empower survivors of violence and crime to pursue the kind of healing that is important to them.

Throughout 2023, NVRDC Therapeutic Services Manager Reesie Sims has provided certain clients and partners with emotional support and crisis therapy. Reesie has said that empowerment is a key component of healing because survivors often experience a deep lack of control. Empowerment is often difficult to cultivate, though, because there are so many systemic barriers to healing. “When you’re concerned about making rent or finding your next meal, it can feel impossible to know where to start,” Reesie said.



nvrdc
Network for Victim Recovery of DC

We partnered with NVRDC to eliminate such barriers for certain clients and partners, as they work with us to change the systems that harmed them. We are proud to provide emotional processing support to those fighting for the kind of systemic change that can prevent people in D.C. from being harmed in the future.



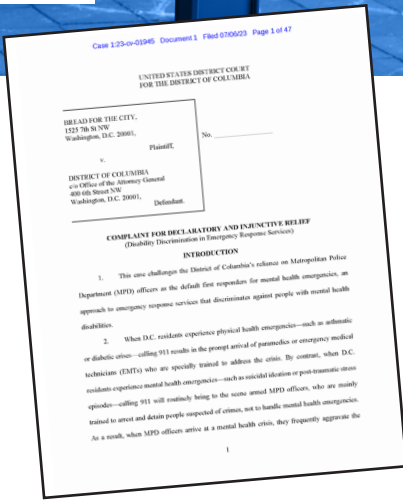


LAWSUIT CHALLENGES UNEQUAL RESPONSE TO MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES



Our client Bread for the City, a local nonprofit that supports underserved communities, filed a lawsuit on July 6th that challenges the way D.C. responds to mental health crises.

The District currently relies heavily on police to respond to mental health emergencies, and this response has been ineffective and unsafe for people with mental health disabilities. Our lawsuit argues that the District discriminates against people with mental health disabilities by failing to ensure that mental health providers, instead of police officers, respond to mental health emergencies. In our view, the disparity between D.C.'s response to physical health emergencies and its response to mental health emergencies violates the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act.



“If I had a heart attack, I would want someone to call a trained medic, not a police officer. In the same way, if I had a mental health crisis, I would want a mental health provider to provide appropriate care. But that’s not what happens in the District,” said ACLU-D.C. Staff Attorney Michael Perloff. **“Long wait times, a lack of mental health providers, and a police-first response puts people with mental health disabilities in the District at unacceptable risk. The District can and must do better.”**

National and local experts have concluded that relying on police to address mental health crises is more likely to worsen than to improve the situation. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration — the federal agency responsible for mental health — concluded in its national guidelines for behavioral health crisis care that it is **“unacceptable and unsafe”** for local law enforcement to serve as a community’s default mental health crisis first responders. That’s why experts recommend that communities invest in mental health providers to handle such emergencies.

In D.C., between October 2021 and September 2022, 911 operators routed less than 1 percent of calls classified as mental health emergencies to mental health providers. In contrast, over the same period, 911 operators routed approximately 90 percent of calls related to physical health emergencies to an EMT or paramedic. And while D.C. has hired 1,600 EMTs, it has only 44 staff on its Community Response Team (CRT) for mental health emergencies.

This understaffing has resulted in response times for CRTs ranging from 1 to 3 hours, whereas D.C. expects its EMTs and paramedics to address emergencies within 5-9 minutes.

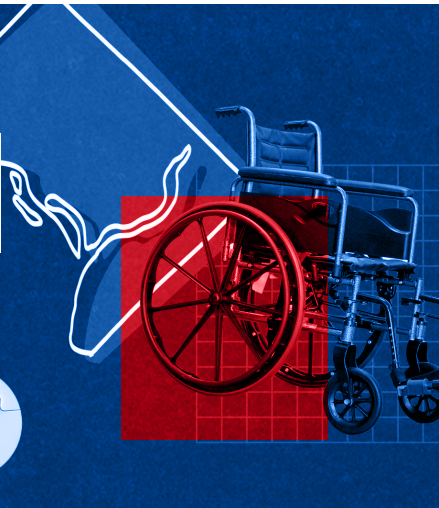
“The most effective response to a mental health crisis is to provide empathy, support, and a calm, safe environment,” said Tracy Knight with Bread for the City. **“Although the District employs some mental health providers to respond to crises, it has not invested the resources needed or provided them the support necessary to be effective and widely deployed.”**

Our lawsuit echoes the concerns we have raised as part of the D.C. Crisis Response Coalition. Between this lawsuit and the coalition’s policy platform, we are actively changing the face of crisis response in D.C.

Learn more about the lawsuit at acludc.org and more about the coalition at dccrisisresponse.org



4 FACTS ABOUT DISABILITY RIGHTS IN D.C.



When the D.C. Department of Public Works (DPW) forced Doretha Barber to choose between her medication and her job, Ms. Barber sued to enforce her rights.

When Ms. Barber told DPW that she used medical marijuana to deal with her chronic back spasms, her employer placed her on forced leave. After a lawsuit filed by ACLU-D.C. and Ms. Barber, DPW assigned her to a new position where she could continue her care, and they eventually agreed to compensate Ms. Barber for the hardship of her time on forced leave.

Ms. Barber sued under the DC Human Rights Act—one of four laws that protect people with disabilities in the District. The other laws are federal—the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Fair Housing Act. Taken together, these laws provide significant protection against discrimination.

Here's what you need to know about disability rights in the District:

- 1 Employers, housing providers, and public businesses in the District have to follow disability rights laws.

Almost all employers, housing providers, and businesses that serve the public in D.C. must follow the D.C. Human Rights Act, and most of these entities must follow federal disability laws as well.

- 2 Employers, housing providers, and public businesses cannot treat people with disabilities less favorably than they do other people.

Disability rights laws protect people with disabilities from intentional discrimination and from practices that have discriminatory effects, regardless of intention.

- 3 Employers, housing providers, and public businesses have to provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities.

These entities must generally make reasonable changes to policies and practices that hold people with disabilities back from doing their job, accessing housing, or using a service.

- 4 If you want a reasonable accommodation, a good first step is to make clear that you need an accommodation for your disability.

This verbal or written request simply needs to make clear that you have a disability and that you need a change to how a policy or program operates so that you can participate.

Learn more on our blog at acludc.org/news



NEED LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR A CIVIL RIGHTS OR CIVIL LIBERTIES VIOLATION?



If your civil liberties or civil rights were violated, the best way to request help from the ACLU-D.C. is online at www.acludc.org/help. You may also leave a voicemail at 202-601-4269, although response times are slower for voicemails.

Unfortunately, our office has limited resources, so we cannot take every case we are contacted about, even if a grave injustice has occurred. We take cases that we think will help clarify the law, so that civil liberties are better protected across the board. For examples of cases we do not take, please visit www.acludc.org/help.



SCAN TO SEEK LEGAL HELP

If we cannot help you, we will do our best to suggest a different organization or law firm that might be able to assist. *(Note that we cannot guarantee that they will be able to take your case.)*

If you have a case not involving civil liberties or civil rights, please see our resource guide for help with other legal problems in the D.C. area: www.acludc.org/resource-guide.

Also, visit our website to learn more about your constitutional rights! Check out ACLU-D.C.'s easy-to-use resources: www.acludc.org/kyr.

“WE HAVE THE AGENCY TO CHANGE THE CONDITIONS WE LIVE IN.”



2023 marks the 50th anniversary of Home Rule for D.C. The Home Rule Act, which was enacted by Congress and ratified by District residents in 1973, expanded our self-governance and established our local government. It was a monumental democratic shift for the District and came after decades of District residents consistently pushing for the autonomy to shape what happens in our communities.

This anniversary reminds me of two important truths: we have the agency to change the conditions we live in. And, in the words of nineteenth-century abolitionist Wendell Phillips, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”

There is no doubt we face many challenges. Today’s Congress has taken aim at the District’s Home Rule, and some District leaders have turned to “tough-on-crime” rhetoric that strips us of our fundamental rights and liberties. Amid rising antisemitism, anti-Muslim, and anti-Palestinian sentiment, our commitment to defending civil liberties for all, especially vulnerable communities, is more crucial than ever.

At the ACLU-D.C., we remain both vigilant and hopeful. In this spirit, we have adopted our new strategic framework. With it, we’ve committed to taking visionary steps toward a more just and free D.C. We have pledged ourselves to four main priorities that will guide our work: **1)** building a criminal justice system that respects human dignity; **2)** securing self-governance for the people of D.C. through statehood; **3)** empowering people to use their full First Amendment rights; and **4)** ensuring freedom from discrimination.

Our framework allows us to grow from our roots as a legal organization into one that uses all the tools available to us – litigation, education, legislative advocacy, and organizing – to make lasting change in the District.

I warmly invite you to embrace our hopefulness and vigilance, and to join us -- in the Courts, in the D.C. Council, and in the streets. Together, we can create a future where everyone, and particularly historically oppressed communities, lives free from systemic governmental oppression.

Monica Hopkins
Executive Director

ACLU

District of Columbia

STAFF

Monica Hopkins, Executive Director
Ahoefa Ananouko, Policy Associate
KT Beckman-Gotrich, Community Engagement Associate
Maxine Davis, Organizing Director
Joy Holden, Dunn Fellow
Natacia Knapper, Senior Organizer
Scott Michelman, Legal Director
Veronica Mosqueda, Campaign Organizer
Michael Perloff, Staff Attorney
Loren Rahming-Curtis, Human Resources Manager
Brigid Slipka, Director of Philanthropy
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We accept contributions the following ways:



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Choose “American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of the District of Columbia” and EIN 52-6070446 with your DAF provider.



With a gift of stock or for wiring instructions.

Please contact development@acludc.org for our account and DTC number.



By phone.

Call our Donor Services at (212) 549-2543.



With a gift through a bequest or charitable trust.

Visit www.aclu.org/legacy to see how gifts through your will, retirement plan, life insurance, or trust can provide for both your loved ones and ensure our ability to fight for civil liberties in the future.



Through the mail. Please note that mail is delayed by at least 4 weeks and receipt may be delayed. Mail may be sent to:

Monica Hopkins
ACLU of the District of Columbia
PO Box 96503 PMB 85739
Washington, D.C. 20090-6503



Via mobile device.

Access our donation page here via QR code or at acludc.org/give

