



## Saying Goodbye to Leah

As she departs for New York, Senior Staff Attorney Leah Farrell recalls some of her most memorable ACLU of Utah cases

For the last nine years, Leah Farrell has guided numerous legal challenges to success as the ACLU of Utah's unflappable Staff Attorney and Senior Staff Attorney. But her connection to our affiliate goes back two decades more to when, as a high school senior, she became a plaintiff in the famous East High GSA case challenging the Salt Lake City School District's total ban on student clubs to stop a gay-straight alliance from meeting.

Leah was attending college in New York City when that case ended two years later with the school board reversing the ban and allowing all student clubs to meet. But the case likely served as an introduction to the lengthy timeframe that lawsuits would take in her future legal career.

This month, Leah is leaving the ACLU of Utah to return to New York, which she finds just as exciting as she did as a college student. "I'm not technically taking a sabbatical," she explained. "But I'm leaving Utah to figure out what the next ten years of my life should



*From the State Capitol, to the courtroom, to San Juan County, Leah's positive impact has been felt across Utah.*

be like." She plans to stay active in the legal field, whether through more litigation, or by exploring public policy.

Leah joined the ACLU of Utah in August 2011 as the affiliate's first staff attorney and seventh staff member after graduating from

the University of Texas School of Law in Austin. Raised in Salt Lake City, Leah was astounded she could land a public interest job in her hometown.

As a full-time litigator at the ACLU, Leah led several high-profile legal efforts, starting with a lawsuit challenging a controversial police sweep targeting students of color at West High School, her alma mater. That case, *Winston v. Salt Lake City Police Department*, made a big impression on her. "The Winston family were these amazing plaintiffs who introduced me to the racial inequities that were a part of the city I grew up in, but never had to face myself," she explained. "Even though I had sued my school for discrimination before, here I was doing it again because the struggle always continues."

A second case she recalls is *Roe v. Patton*, in which Leah and attorneys from the National ACLU's LGBT Project successfully applied the U.S. Supreme Court's 2015 marriage

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equality ruling to overturn Utah's adoption laws that barred same-sex couples from automatically adding both spouses to a child's birth certificate. She remembers the joy this decision brought to Angie and Kami Roe as they sought to have their daughter legally recognized as the child of both of them, and how it would help thousands of same-sex couples going forward.

Leah didn't win the last case on her list, but she said it is just as important as the ones she did. In *Redmond v. Utah State Prison*, the ACLU of Utah filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of a group of prisoners who were exposed to tear gas that entered the facility's ventilation system. "Although we didn't achieve a clear victory in the court, we did get the prison to validate their experience and change their policies," she said. "There are so many barriers to representing incarcerated people, but it's often some of our best and most important work," she added, recalling how the prisoners handwrote a letter to the ACLU asking for help. Leah's impact at the ACLU of Utah extends beyond her legal work to include the careers of the dozens of law school interns she hired and mentored each summer. She also strengthened and expanded the affiliate's judicial bypass project, which provides free legal help to minors seeking abortion healthcare.

Most of all, however, her friends and colleagues at the ACLU of Utah will miss Leah's unwavering friendliness, wisdom, and calm approach to the thorniest issues. We wish her well over the next ten years and beyond.