

LIBERTY REPORTER

Spring 2021

ACLU
Utah

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About the Liberty Reporter

This website (<https://www.aclulibertyreporter.org/>) formerly hosted the Liberty Reporter, the new e-newsletter for the ACLU of Utah. The Liberty Reporter transitioned to an online format in Spring 2021 for two issues, Spring & Fall 2021. For prior issues, go here: <https://www.acluutah.org>

To visit the ACLU of Utah's main website, go to www.acluutah.org



Brittney Nystrom, ACLU of Utah Executive Director

From the Executive Director's Chair

Welcome to the new format of the Liberty Reporter! We hope you are enjoying the update to a sleeker and more environmentally friendly electronic edition of our newsletter.

When COVID-19 upended our ability to work from a shared office, we also took the opportunity to reexamine nearly all our work tools, traditions, and tactics. Over the past several months, we have overhauled our accounting software, implemented case management and volunteer management systems, and tried out several platforms that allow our team to stay in touch while we all continue working from home. This e-newsletter is the latest shift and one we hope you enjoy.

In addition to changing our technological landscape, our staffing has shifted in some exciting new ways. On the heels of a phenomenal 2020 Voting Rights Campaign, Nikila Venugopal has agreed to stay with our team for an additional year as our inaugural Director of Campaigns. We are certain that Niki will lead our community outreach and organizing work to exciting new levels. Additionally, we are thrilled that Valentina De Fex has assumed the role of Staff Attorney after completing a successful year as our first Immigrants' Rights Legal Fellow. To continue advancing immigrants' and refugees' civil rights and liberties in Utah, we anticipate adding an Immigrants' Rights Policy Fellow to the staff. Thirdly, we are pleased to announce Malysa Egge as the affiliate's Indigenous Justice Coordinator in charge of a new project to understand

the opportunities and challenges Indigenous Utahns face in exercising their constitutional rights and liberties. Our team also greatly benefitted from the contributions and insights of Smart Justice Legislative Fellow Nickelis DeJong throughout his fellowship this winter.

Finally, as the academic year wraps up, we eagerly await the arrival of our 2021 summer intern class. Many of you know that our legal and policy work receives a huge boost in the summer months thanks to the amazing talent of our interns. What you may not know is that the ACLU of Utah is committed to expanding our paid internships for both summer and semester interns so that financial barriers cannot stop a brilliant student intern from joining our team.

If you would like to financially support our ongoing programs and campaigns, we would welcome [your online donation](#) in any amount. You can also contact Erin Hurtado, our Development Director, at ehurtado@acluutah.org or 801-871-0331, to discover how your gift can extend the ACLU of Utah's impact in our state.

Finally, we seek your feedback to boost our goal of continuous improvement. Please complete this [five-question survey](#) about this new format for the Liberty Reporter newsletter.

Program Updates



ACLU of Utah Legal Docket

[Planned Parenthood Association of Utah (PPAU) v. Miner]

Issue: Reproductive rights (14th Amendment)

Filed: April 2019

ACLU lead: Valentina De Fex, Staff Attorney

Co-counsel: Planned Parenthood

Background: In 2019 we filed a federal lawsuit against Utah's 18-week abortion ban on behalf of Planned Parenthood of Utah and were able

to immediately block that law from taking effect while the litigation proceeds.

Update: Both sides have asked the Court for summary judgment, which means judgment in one party's favor without a trial. The Court has scheduled a hearing on those motions for November 2021.

[Disability Law Center v. Davis County]

Issue: Transparency of Jail Standards and Records (1st and 8th Amendments)

Filed: May 2019

ACLU lead: John Mejia, Legal Director

Co-counsel: Parr, Brown, Gee & Loveless, P.C.

Background: In response to a spike of troubling deaths in jails, we made public records requests in 2017 to Davis County seeking their jail standards and audits. When the county refused to provide them, we sued in state court along with the Disability Law Center ("DLC").

Update: After an initial ruling that required the County release a certain portion of the standards to the ACLU and the DLC, a trial took place around whether the remainder of the standards were protected from disclosure by copyright law. In a first-of-its-kind in Utah ruling, in March 2021 the Court decided that government entities must provide copyrighted records

upon request subject to fair use rules. The Court then ordered Davis County to provide records to the ACLU and the DLC subject to a review for safety-related information.

[Miller v. Murray City]

Issue: Racial profiling (4th and 14th Amendments)

Filed: May 2020

ACLU lead: Jason Groth, Smart Justice Attorney

Co-counsel: Holland & Hart

Background: We sued Murray police on behalf of Donna Miller, a 59-year-old Black woman and nursing student, alleging that racial profiling was behind a traffic stop and charge of driving under the influence of an illegal substance. After being stopped in her car, Ms. Miller passed four sobriety tests, two breathalyzer exams, and a battery of drug tests. Nonetheless, she was detained, handcuffed, and charged with a DUI, all based on the arresting officer's "sixth sense" that she "uses cannabis regularly."

Update: The case is currently in fact discovery.

Ramirez v. Reddish

Issue: Illegal entry (4th Amendment)

Filed: February 2018

ACLU lead: John Mejia, Legal Director

Co-counsel: Covington & Burling LLP, Crowell & Moring LLP, and Horvitz & Levy LLP

Background: We sued members of a joint state-federal task force (including U.S. Marshals, an ICE agent, and local law enforcement officers) and the U.S. on behalf of the Ramirez family after agents carried out back-to-back home raids and engaged in other behavior that we alleged were grave violations of their rights.

Update: Trial is set for February 2022.

McCubbin v. Weber County

Issue: Gang injunction (1st and 14th Amendments)

Filed: 2015

ACLU lead: John Mejia, Legal Director

Co-counsel: Richards Brown P.C.

Background: We sued Weber County and others on behalf of plaintiffs Leland McCubbin and Daniel Lucero in federal court, alleging that the County violated plaintiffs' rights by serving plaintiffs with a so-called "gang injunction" that immediately criminalized many protected activities. The district court ruled that the County violated plaintiffs' due process rights and allowed other claims to go to trial.

Update: The case is awaiting trial.

Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission v. San Juan County

Issue: Voting Rights

Filed: 2016

ACLU lead: John Mejia, Legal Director

Co-counsel: DLA Piper and Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Background: After San Juan County switched to primarily mail-in ballots in 2016, the ACLU sued to reverse the decision based on adverse impacts on Navajo voters. A 2018 settlement

agreement ended the lawsuit and required the county to provide meaningful and effective language assistance and expand in-person voting access for Navajo voters.

Update: The Court approved the ACLU of Utah’s request to extend the settlement agreement to provide equal access and language services to San Juan County voters through 2024.

Track current lawsuits on our website: www.acluutah.org/legal-work

Policy



What Happened to the Push for Police Reform in Utah?

When the marching paused, the legislating began

By our count, the Utah Legislature considered 34 bills related to law enforcement practices and reform during the 2021 session. 21 of those bills became law, with 18 of that subset making a “positive” contribution to police reform according to our analysis.

Pretty good results, right?

So why does the aftermath of the 2021 Utah Legislative Session seem like a failure when it comes to holding law enforcement accountable?

Probably because the clamor from last summer’s marches and rallies for substantial police reform, which echoed from city streets to corporate boardrooms to celebrity tweets, resulted in only modest changes by Utah lawmakers. The quantity of the bills, it turns out, is less important than the quality of the reforms they contain.

Equally important is the continuing trend of Black, Indigenous people of color being killed by law enforcement across the county in 2021, adding more outrage and sorrow to the 2020 deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks, as well as the near-record 19 individuals killed by police in Utah last year. As we said after the April 20 guilty verdict against Derek Chauvin for killing George Floyd, “Justice is More than One Verdict.” We believe justice requires significant changes to law enforcement policies, training, and accountability that is best realized through comprehensive and effective legislation. Continue reading for our explanation on how Utah lawmakers have started on the pathway to police reform, but still have much distance to travel before claiming real progress.

Legislative Pass/Fail

Some of the most promising bills introduced this year at the Utah Legislature failed to advance, such as [H.B. 74](#) (reestablish local control over civilian review boards), [H.B. 245](#) (restrict no-knock warrants), and [H.B. 367](#) (allow lawsuits against police agencies that violate a person's constitutional rights).

Bills that passed and became law, such as [H.B. 345](#) (places limits on contracts for school resource officers), were altered through multiple amendments that made their eventual impact far less than their initial promise. While amendments are often necessary to craft better legislation and gain crucial votes,

they can also gut bills with too many compromises. That's what happened with two police reform bills that were amended so heavily they shifted 180-degrees from being positive legislation to being bills that we might have opposed if they had advanced further in the legislature (note: neither bill passed).



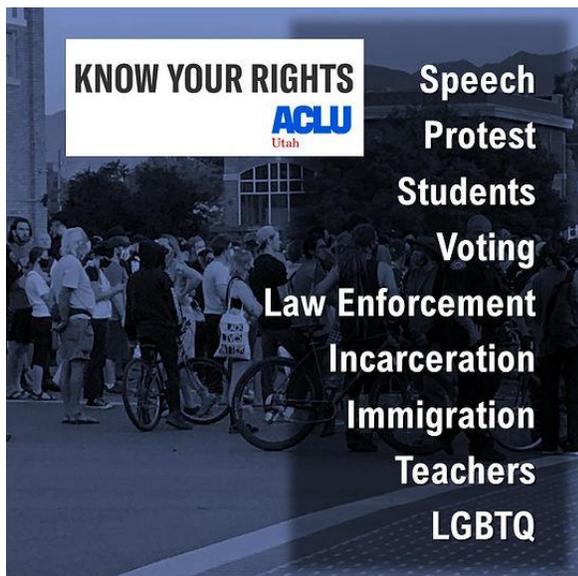
Other successful bills were designed to set the groundwork for future reform efforts, such as [H.B. 84's](#) requirement for statewide data collection on use of force incidents, or [H.B. 290's](#) framework for reforming the state's probation and parole system. Another bill, [H.B. 62](#), made administrative reforms to the discipline measures the state's law enforcement certification agency can issue against officers under investigation.

Stopping Bad Bills

It is also important to remember that not all law enforcement bills being considered in 2021 were positive. Last summer's protests and rallies also encouraged some conservative lawmakers to propose

bills that sought to chill free speech activities by enhancing penalties for "rioting" and other crimes. Utah was not immune from this pushback against police reform, and the ACLU of Utah and our allies expended considerable energy to block these bills during this year's session. But while Utah lawmakers introduced a half-dozen anti-protest bills, only one of them became law: [H.B. 58](#). Under this new law, a person arrested for rioting must appear before a judge before being released and pay restitution if convicted. The worst of Utah's anti-protest bills, which fortunately did not pass, was [S.B. 138](#). We dubbed this proposal the "license to kill" bill as early versions of the text shielded drivers from civil or criminal penalties for killing or injuring protestors with a motor vehicle.

Looking back, the Utah Legislature made small but promising advances towards police reform in 2021. While the high-profile reforms we championed, like restoring civilian review boards or limiting qualified immunity, failed to pass out of a single committee, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle were able to convince their colleagues to make moderate changes in areas like data collection on use of force incidents, increased training, and administrative discipline. We can hope, and will demand, that these initial changes lay the groundwork for more and deeper reforms in future years.



Do You Know Your Rights?

We designed this resource to inform and empower civil rights activists in Utah

Quiz time: Can you answer these questions?

- Can I protest on a public sidewalk?
- Can a public school principal stop an LGBTQ student club from meeting on school grounds?
- Do I have to answer a police officer's questions if they stop me on the street?

With more and more people engaging in protests and activism during the last year, questions about the scope and limits of civil rights and civil liberties are growing in importance.

To empower Utahns to exercise their rights the ACLU of Utah has organized a ["Know Your Rights" Library](#) with more than a dozen guides that explain your rights in certain situations.

From your right to vote, to free speech for students and teachers in public schools, to whether you can remain silent if you are stopped by the police, these guides empower you to understand and use your Constitutional rights.

We created these guides because we believe everyone in Utah should be aware of their rights, and confident enough to exercise them. And by everyone, we mean anyone living in or traveling through our state. We continuously update and share these ["Know Your Rights"](#) guides because helping people understand and employ their rights is crucial to the ACLU of Utah's mission.

And in case you were wondering, the answers to the three questions above are 1) Yes, 2) No, and 3) It depends.

[Index of ACLU of Utah "Know Your Right's Guides](#)

LGBTQ Rights

Your Right to Form Gay-Straight Alliances in School

Your Right to Protest and Engage in Other Free Speech Activities in Utah

Utah Voter Empowerment Guide (English)

Utah Voter Empowerment Guide (Spanish)

Students Rights: Suspended or Expelled

Know Your Rights: A Guide for Public High School Students

Free Speech Rights of Public and Charter School Teachers and Staff in Utah

Social Media Blocking Toolkit

What to Do If You Are Stopped by Police, Immigration Agents, or the FBI

What to Do If You Are A Victim of Police Misconduct

Inmate Rights & Complaints Regarding Utah's Jails and Prison

Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Resources



Inside This Year's Pandemic Legislature

Learn how our virtual lobbying yielded substantial results on Capitol Hill

No matter how much planning the staff at the ACLU of Utah does, the annual Utah Legislative Session always surprises us. For instance, none of us predicted that lawmakers would fail to pass new abortion restrictions in 2021, but that's what happened. Likewise, our hopes for securing significant police reforms did not materialize. We also assumed that a COVID-19 outbreak might shut down the session early, but lawmakers and staff soldiered through to the end.

Fortunately, there is no better person to manage this unpredictability than Marina Lowe, the ACLU's Legislative & Policy Counsel, who led our largest-ever team of attorneys, community organizers, and policy experts during the 45-day session. Working remotely to follow public health guidelines, our staff reviewed more than 150 bills, ultimately tracking 110 pieces of legislation, and either amending or testifying (virtually and in-person) on 67 bills. We also published 85 social media alerts and [produced 14 videos](#) that attracted over 6,000 views. This year we also launched a text message notification service called Legislative Action Alerts so that we could advise supports about critical bills and how to contact legislators.

Real Impact

Looking back from the perspective of two months, we consider 2021 as one of the most productive legislative sessions in recent years. Working across multiple issue areas from LGBTQ equality to the First Amendment, we successfully defended civil liberties and advanced the cause of equality against discriminatory and unjust policies. In January we began the session with [15 priorities](#), including blocking new abortion restrictions (which we did), protecting transgender minors (another win), and starting reform of the state's probation and parole system (accomplished by passing H.B. 290 to reduce the change of simple mistakes sending Utahns back to jail).

While we faced some setbacks in our efforts to 1) protect recent advances in bail reform, 2) increase limits on the use of no-knock warrants by law enforcement, and 3) enhance protections for digital privacy, we also made progress in new arenas. For example, we advocated for the successful repeal of the core of Utah's two-decade-old "English-Only" law by passing S.B. 214 (Official Language Amendments). This important bill eliminates restrictions on state funding for translation services and prohibitions against using other languages in government communications, a crucial change for state agencies trying to assist immigrant and underserved communities during a pandemic.



In another first, Smart Justice Attorney Jason Groth produced three 30-second television commercials to build support for the probation and parole reforms proposed in H.B. 290. By partnering with allied organizations, Groth crafted compelling messages spoken by Utahns personally impacted by the criminal legal system that were broadcast on local stations KUTV and KMYU. These ads, along with other lobbying efforts, help secure the passage of H.B. 290 during the legislative session. The ACLU of Utah's Campaign for Smart Justice also pushed H.B. 143 (Driver's License Suspension Amendments) over the finish line this year after running out of time 2020. This bill will prevent 30,000 Utahns from losing their driver's licenses each year for being unable to pay fines or missing a court a date, continuing our legacy of securing policy victories that create broad impacts across the state.

This summary is a snapshot of the legislation we influenced on the Hill this year. For the full report, read our [2021 Legislative Wrap-up](#).

Plus, you can find full coverage of the 2021 Legislative Session, including daily updates and episodes of "ACLU of Utah (Virtually) on the Hill," at our [Legislative Work webpage](#).

Marina Lowe Recaps the 2021 Legislative Session

Learn what happened on Capitol Hill from the ACLU of Utah's chief lobbyist

Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-tDtIgx2ao>



With hundreds of bills debated and voted on during a frenzied 45 days, the Utah Legislative Session can generate more confusion than clarity. Our guide to make sense of it is Marina Lowe, the ACLU of Utah's Legislative & Policy Counsel who led our largest-ever team of attorneys, community organizers, and policy experts during this year's session. Together, our team reviewed more than 150 bills, tracked 110 pieces of legislation, and either amended or testified (virtually and in-person) on 67 bills. Watch the video below to which bills and issues mattered the most to the ACLU of Utah and our supporters.

Feature Articles



How My Bill (Almost) Became a Law

I might not be allowed to vote, but I can still change our political system

By: Arundhati Oommen

As I waited for the committee members to decide the fate of my bill, a Republican lawmaker looked down at me and said, “If all 16- and 17-year-olds were like you... this would be a much easier decision.” A few minutes later he voted against my bill, H.B. 338 (School District Voter Eligibility Amendments), which would let local school districts extend voting rights to older teens for school board elections.

I had arrived for the February 24 hearing before the House Political Subdivisions Committee prepared with a 10-page slide presentation, support from dozens of student leaders across the state, and a list of facts and arguments to counter any critique. Looking up at the ten legislators sitting behind the imposing dais, I explained why letting high school students vote in local elections would help reduce apathy among younger voters. When they asked questions like whether older teens were mature enough to cast a vote, I responded that 17-year-olds in Utah can work, start a business, run a political campaign, and sign up for the Armed Forces. I didn’t tell them that I had to get permission from my high school principal to skip class to attend the hearing, but that was true, too.

My bill passed out of the committee in a 6-4 vote, but a week later it was defeated on the House floor. Although I could look at my efforts at the Utah Legislature as a failure, I choose to consider them a minor setback on the road to eventual success.

As the youngest serving student board member for the largest urban school district in the state during an unprecedented year for public education, I decided I wanted to accomplish something during my tenure. In July 2020, I read an article about a Los Angeles research measure to grant teens voting rights in local elections. I contacted the student behind the measure via Instagram (it’s how high school students communicate, after all) to ask him about the initiative and to learn how I could launch a similar effort in Salt Lake City. Our conversation made me hopeful that Utah teens could gain limited voting rights through legislation passed by local city councils. However, additional research and conversations made it clear that the only pathway forward to give 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote was statewide legislation. And then meant going to the Utah Legislature.

I soon connected with Rep. Joel Briscoe (D-Salt Lake City), who had run similar legislation in the past, including a successful bill in 2018 that allows 17-year-olds who will turn age 18 by the general election to vote in the primary election. Rep. Briscoe confirmed that lowering the voting age for school board elections could only be accomplished with a change in state laws. He then told me that he would gladly sponsor a bill to do that.

The next step was organizing and building support for the bill concept. I immediately reached out to other student leaders, community members, and school board members to create a coalition to support expanded voting access for older teens. Instead of allowing all 16- and 17-year-olds in Utah to vote in local elections, we decided this legislation should grant local school boards the choice to lower the voting age for students in their districts. While the bill we crafted had a narrower impact than similar legislation in other states and cities, we decided these compromises would give it the greatest chance

for success on Utah’s Capitol Hill. Once we decided on the scope of the bill, I worked with Rep. Briscoe and the Office of Legislative Research and Counsel to draft what became H.B. 338.

Once the bill was drafted and finalized, we faced a new challenge: Time. Lasting only 45 days, the legislative session in Utah is one of the shortest in the nation. By now it was already mid-February, and the 2021 session was in full swing. I had to stay in communication with my coalition, bill sponsors, and supportive groups like the ACLU of Utah to keep the process on track. Without constant prodding, a bill could get stuck in the Rules Committee, a group of lawmakers who act as gatekeepers deciding which bills are assigned to specific committees for hearings.

Within a week of being released, my bill made it out of the Rules Committee and was assigned to the House committee where I delivered my presentation. In addition to my testimony, I included pre-recorded videos of other high school students from across the state voicing their support for the measure. Several committee members told me that my presentation changed their vote from No to Yes, and the bill cleared the committee in a 6 to 4 vote.

A week after clearing the House committee, H.B. 338 failed on the House floor. Although lawmakers engaged in a comprehensive debate on the issue, many legislators expressed concern about the ability of 16-year-olds to make rational decisions about a ballot choice. I was disappointed that many lawmakers did not listen to my arguments and supporting evidence that young people can make mature decisions if adults give them the chance.

Other factors that defeated my bill were persistent attacks by conservative education advocates who oppose giving students more independence and choices, as well as special interest lobbyists in the education field. And despite our repeated attempts to explain the opt-in feature of the bill, some opponents to H.B. 338 still claimed it would require all school districts to expand voting to include teens. Lastly, when I heard opponents stating the false claim that “under H.B. 338 all 16-year old’s get to vote for president,” I learned that spreading obvious misinformation about bills is not only common at the Utah Legislature, but also effective.

I believe my status as a high school student best positioned me to advocate on behalf of other youth to expand our right to vote in local elections. But I also realized my youth made my work more difficult. Some lawmakers praised me as an “exception” to the general population of Utah students before voting against my bill, while others subjected me to patronizing comments that adults would never receive. At the end of the day, however, I believe that H.B.338 would not have attracted the attention it did nor move forward in the legislature without a student at its helm.

While H.B. 338 may have failed this year, I believe this bill is well positioned to return next year and become law. During my next attempt in 2022, I plan to counter misinformation campaigns early, address the specific concerns of legislators, and build widespread community support. I am also extremely grateful for the many mentors who guided me through the legislative process, and I plan to seek out even more guidance and advice next year.

Even without becoming law this year, H.B. 338 has already changed the political landscape for all Utah teens. Plus, it has moved the farthest through the legislative process of any statewide bill to lower the voting age in the nation.

Dhati Oommen is a junior at West High School in Salt Lake City and a communications intern at the ACLU of Utah.



How to Be a Year-Round Legislative Activist

Lawmaking doesn't stop during the Utah Legislature's off-season, neither should you.

Written by: Cash Mendenhall

From January to March every year, the 104 members of the Utah Legislature review, debate, nix, and pass hundreds of bills inside a Diet Coke-fueled bubble of lobbyists, advocates, and community activists. The hyperactive 7-week session is also the most popular time for Utahns to connect to their representatives.

But it shouldn't be the only time. Just like it is unwise to run errands during rush hour, or fly the day before Thanksgiving, trying to raise issues and build relationships with lawmakers during the session is challenging. During the 45 days of the session, lawmakers face constant demands on their time. Fortunately, the calendar contains nine other, calmer months when you can make an impression on Utah lawmakers. Follow this guide to build connections and lay the groundwork for success now instead of waiting until next January.

Make Contact

First, find out who represents you in the Utah House and Senate. The Utah Legislature website contains an easy-to-use map-based tool to identify your lawmakers—and displays their contact info. Sending an email is always a good way to connect, especially if you don't know your lawmaker already. Keep your email confined to a single issue and about 3 to 4 paragraphs long to ensure they read it. Begin by mentioning you are a constituent (include your address or neighborhood for proof). Next, thank them for how they voted on a specific bill, or a comment they made about an issue you care about.

Introduce the Issue

The core of your message should address a specific issue that 1) you care about, 2) the legislature can address, 3) needs change or reform. Fortunately, the Utah legislature deals with a wide range issues, including many civil liberties concerns ranging from police reform to digital privacy to the legal system. Be sure to mention any personal experience you have with the issue or impact it has had on you, such as your education, training, or career. Smart lawmakers are always looking for constituents with special knowledge they can learn from. Next, explain why the issue matters to the wider community. The more people you can connect to this issue, the more appealing it will appear to the legislator. Make your tone courteous, persuasive, and direct. Even if you know more about the specific issue than your Representative or Senator, don't make them feel uneducated. Make them want to learn more.

Set up a Meeting

Lawmakers have more time to meet outside of the session, so conclude your email with a request for an in-person or virtual meeting. Even better, suggest that you can assemble a diverse group of stakeholders on this issue for a meeting. This extra effort allows lawmakers to hear multiple perspectives at one event. Prepare yourself before the meeting with relevant data and arguments and establish a clear goal that can be reached with a bill, funding request, or a regulatory change. If other states have passed similar legislation, bring those case studies, as well as specific information about the benefits of taking such action. Also, be aware that a lawmaker might invite a colleague to the meeting, especially if that other elected official has specific expertise in the issue you want to discuss.

Follow-up

A successful meeting ends with a list of next steps for both you and the lawmaker to pursue. Send the lawmaker a follow-up card or email or leave a voicemail thanking them for their time—and remind them of the tasks you agreed to complete. Stay in persistent but polite communication as you work through

your assigned roles. Follow the lawmaker’s social media pages. Say hello at community and neighborhood events. Without the constant pressure of the legislative session, you might need to work harder and smarter to keep your lawmaker’s focus on your priorities.

Beyond meeting with elected officials, there are numerous ways you can advocate for your issue. You can join an issue-based group or nonprofit that holds events or rallies for an issue. You can write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, build a network with other people who care about the issue on social media, and organize a rally or attend a town hall meeting. You can also educate yourself on the legislative process to prepare for the next legislative session.



Get Engaged

Use these resources to become a better community lobbyist.

Make Your Voice Heard: A Guide to Legislative Advocacy in Utah [\(PDF\)](#) [\(Video\)](#)

Check out this six-page "how to" infographic to starting up, or stepping up, your community lobbying game at the Utah Capitol

[How a Bill Becomes a Law](#) - our handy 1-pager that adapts the Schoolhouse Rock icon for the Utah Legislature [\(PDF\)](#)

[How to Give Public Comment Virtually at the Utah Legislature](#) -

our new guide to testifying online during committee hearings [\(PDF\)](#)

Learn how to [track and follow bills](#) during the 2021 Legislative Session with our new [Bill Tracking Guide](#) [\(PDF\)](#)

[Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials](#)

[Tips for Meeting with Your Elected Officials](#)

Staff Updates

Valentina De Fex is New Staff Attorney

She brings broad immigration expertise to legal team



In March, Valentina De Fex became the ACLU of Utah's Staff Attorney after serving for a year as the affiliate’s first Immigrants’ Rights Legal Fellow. In her new position, Valentina will help manage the ACLU of Utah's legal docket and engagement across a wide range of civil rights and civil liberties issues.

She also plans to continue her work on equity issues for Utah’s minority and underserved communities, while also leading a redesign of legal and outreach approach to K-12 education issues.

“I am glad to extend my involvement with the ACLU of Utah team in this new role and look forward to working with my colleagues to use all the legal, policy, and community empowerment tools available to advance justice issues,” Valentina said. “With our current legal docket, we have opportunities to make significant progress both inside and outside of the courtroom.”

As a Legal Fellow, her work has focused on the civil rights and liberties as they affect immigrant communities, ensuring that immigrants' rights are both recognized and protected. Working on topics ranging from immigration detention to vaccine distribution to combatting the effects of the English-Only law, she has identified and resolved legal and policy barriers and re-shaped government practices to better service immigrant communities in Utah.

Prior to joining the ACLU of Utah, Valentina was an immigration attorney for a non-profit in Portland, Ore. As a first-generation immigrant, Valentina's experiences provided her with first-hand insight into the systemic barriers that many immigrants face on a daily basis. Her personal experience and the cruel realities of the immigration system that she's witnessed have led her down a path devoted to the defense of Immigrants' constitutional rights and civil liberties.

Valentina earned her undergraduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania. She obtained her J.D. from Boston College Law School where she was awarded the Susan Grant Desmarais Award for Public Service Achievement and Leadership and named a Clough Center for Constitutional Democracy Law Fellow.

Nikila Venugopal Returns as ACLU of Utah's Director of Campaigns

Takes new role directing outreach after leading 2020's Voter Protection campaign



The first Director of Campaigns at the ACLU of Utah will be Nikila Venugopal, who most recently served as the affiliate's Voting Rights Manager. She assumes her new role after designing and leading the ACLU of Utah's ambitious Voter Protection campaign that trained 150 volunteers to monitor 75 polling places in fourteen counties during the November 2020 election.

"I am excited to accept this position and continue the rapid growth of the affiliate's community outreach efforts and grassroots organizing," she said. "Our success monitoring the 2020 election highlighted the importance of working directly with communities as part of our integrated advocacy style. I look forward to engaging with our dedicated volunteers to make a positive impact on civil rights and liberties across the state."

Niki also previously worked as the Development and Finance Assistant at the ACLU of Utah. In 2014 she moved from the Seattle area to Salt Lake City to study ballet and political science at the University of Utah. She holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science with a minor in Economics from the University of Utah.

About The ACLU of Utah

The ACLU of Utah, chartered in 1958, operates through public education, legal advocacy, litigation, and lobbying at both the state and local levels to ensure the constitutional rights and freedoms of everyone living in or visiting Utah. Our Mission is to defend and promote the fundamental principles and values embodied in the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution, including the freedom of speech and religion, and the right to privacy, equality, and due process for all Utahns.

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Maura Cheney
Arundhati Oommen
Andrew Wirkus
Natalie Weber
Jen Hyde
Wesley Winterhalter
Lauren Brown-Hulme
Claire Smith
Erin Tabish

ACLU of Utah Assemble... A typical Monday morning staff meeting on Zoom



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