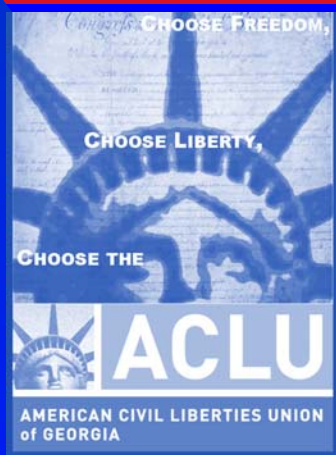


# American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia



2009-10 Program Priorities  
And Case for Support

For over half a century the ACLU of Georgia has been the state's premier guardian of liberty. Each year, hundreds of Georgia residents turn to us when they are discriminated against due to their race, gender or sexual orientation, when government agencies force religious values upon them, when they are prevented from being allowed to speak freely, or when they are abused by law enforcement.

Through the courts, the legislature and community outreach, we work to protect the freedom and dignity of all Georgians.

### **Our simple goal: liberty and justice for all.**

Now more than ever the ACLU is needed to be the courageous voice to protect our Constitution and the rights that we hold dear as a country. You can count on us to stand firm and protect what American stands for:

#### **Restoring America's Constitution.**

You can count on the ACLU to continue to put pressure on the government to take action and reverse policies that have stripped us of our privacy and the ability to live the life and ideals that we care so much about.

We are righting the wrongs of the civil liberties denied us with the creation of the Patriot Act: eavesdropping on phone calls without having to obtain a warrant, stopping the government from spying into the lives of innocent Americans, and indefinite detention without any reason.

#### **Civil liberties abuses related to fighting terrorism.**

We are working just as hard on making America the kind of country we want to live in – a country we can be proud of. To this end we are working on issues of fair trials for Guantanamo detainees, military commissions, keeping evidence obtained through torture from being used in terror suspect trials, and prosecuting Bush officials who authorized torture.

#### **Government intrusion on issues of personal moral decisions.**

We are working diligently to keep the government from imposing one view of morality or a particular religious belief on everyone; not allowing religious views to interfere with laws concerning adoptive parenting or guardianship; and working to protect the right to personal decisions about our reproductive health.

#### **Building a strong organization from coast to coast.**

We are building a nationwide organization that has the ability to answer to the civil liberties challenges that plague this nation, regardless of where they emerge. We are investing in key states where the need is greatest and where local resources for civil liberties are scarce; defending rights where they are most denied in order to envision an ACLU that is as effective in supportive, progressive communities as it is in communities with less than optimal resources, but where civil liberties challenges are often the greatest.

**In Georgia, we plan to step up our statewide efforts to protect and enhance our core rights and freedoms, knowing that our success here will impact civil liberties across the country. The key priority areas we will focus on in Georgia are:**

### **Racial Profiling/Racial Justice**

Equal justice, as guaranteed by the US Constitution and the Georgia Constitution is a high ideal and one of the highest priorities of the ACLU of Georgia. Racial profiling is a problem as old as our country, and with the changing demographics of Georgia, is becoming even more pervasive. A recent ACLU of Georgia report on the human impact of 287(g) in Cobb County found that the implementation of new agreements between local law enforcement and Homeland Security has led to rampant racial profiling and targeting of communities of color, specifically in Latino communities.

Meanwhile, the crackdown on Muslim and Middle Eastern communities continues, as shown by several incidents in 2008, where Muslim women were prevented access to Georgia courts because they were wearing headscarves. The ACLU of Georgia acted proactively in response to these instances of egregious discrimination by approaching the Georgia Commission on Fairness and Equal Access to

the Courts and presenting a model policy that would allow the wearing of religious headgear in Georgia courts. Our policy was adopted earlier this year by the Judicial Council of Georgia.

***Looking forward, in 2010 the ACLU of Georgia will work to close the racial divide and help all people live without fear of racial discrimination. We will:***

- Prevent the introduction of any new 287(g) agreements and work to rescind any existing 287(g) agreements between Georgia counties and the Department of Homeland Security;
- Work with legislators to pass legislation requiring the collection of race data for traffic violations to track and disclose evidence of racial profiling;
- Continue our very successful series of community forums, “Know Your Rights, Tell Your Story,” to raise community awareness of police and immigration enforcement practices and document incidents of racial profiling;
- Continue to hold weekly “By the People Days” at the state legislature to bring the evidence of unequal treatment based on race to decision makers;
- Work in courts and communities to dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline, a growing trend that pushes students of color out of schools and into the criminal justice system;
- Continue our annual CLE seminar to train attorneys on how to represent Muslim and Middle Eastern community members facing racial profiling and discrimination; and
- Work with legislators to pass a resolution calling on the Department of Education and Georgia schools to prevent military recruitment practices targeting children under the age of 17.

## **Immigrant Detention/Prison Reform**

As a result of many years of over incarceration and minimum mandatory sentencing, our state finds that we can no longer afford the huge prison industrial complex we have developed. Instead of doing a policy analysis that would reduce the prison population, our state and local decision makers have turned to private prisons. Many of the for-profit prisons in Georgia were set up to house immigrants, both those convicted of crimes and those whose immigration status is in question.

- Secrecy and privacy of records in private prisons lends itself to abuses that are difficult or impossible to detect.
- The system of paying per diems for each inmate lends itself to keeping people longer than is necessary, even though anything over 90 days is considered indefinite detention.
- The profit motive results in less food, less care, and inhumane conditions.

***Looking forward, in 2010 the ACLU of Georgia will work to insure that imprisoned and detained people are not denied the basic Constitutional rights guaranteed to them under the law. We will:***

- Work to pass legislation that would establish an inspection system for all correctional facilities in Georgia;
- Continue our public education campaign to bring the inherent problems of private prisons to the attention of Georgians, and organize to discourage new private prisons;
- Work to stop the inhumane practice of shackling women prisoners during childbirth;
- Work to end human rights abuses in Georgia’s prisons and immigrant detention centers, including ensuring an adequate daily allowance of food, reasonable medical care, safe facilities, and freedom of worship;
- Encourage the use of humane alternatives to detention; and
- Continue our annual CLE seminar to train attorneys on the most pressing issues in immigrant detention and to encourage representation of immigrants facing indefinite detention.

## **Voting Rights**

The Georgia Constitution guarantees the right to vote to all citizens, and requires that even those who have been convicted of a crime have their right restored after they have served their sentence. In practice, however, our legislature and Secretary of State have aggressively worked to make it more and more difficult for certain people to vote by:

- Denying absentee ballots to jail inmates, even those not convicted of a felony;
- Interpreting “moral turpitude” as any felony conviction;

- Purging voting roles based on drivers' license information or suspected felony conviction, without giving notification;
- Requiring proof of citizenship at registration; and
- Requiring state issued photo identification at the polls.

This year, the ACLU of Georgia filed a lawsuit in a federal court challenging the illegal disfranchisement of two Georgia voters who were refused absentee ballots in the November 2008, election while incarcerated in DeKalb County Jail for minor offenses.

*Looking forward, in 2010 the ACLU of Georgia will work to insure that the voting rights of every individual are protected. We will:*

- Continue litigation to ensure the right to vote is not denied for administrative convenience;
- Continue to push for a clearer legislative definition of "moral turpitude";
- Challenge any further attempts at restrictions on voting rights by being a constant presence at the Georgia General Assembly.

## **Religious Freedom**

The Constitution provides that every individual has the right to practice the religious beliefs of their choosing without government influence or interference. It is against the law for any government agency – in town halls or public schools or through taxpayer dollars – to impose religious beliefs on anyone. The ACLU of Georgia is the leading organization taking on the government agencies that put these rights in jeopardy.

This summer the ACLU filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the Kosher Food Labeling Act. The challenged statute mandates that any food sold in the State of Georgia as kosher must be certified in accordance with "orthodox Hebrew religious rules and requirements," and officially delegitimizes different interpretations of kosher adhered to in other Jewish communities.

We recently represented a small Baptist Church in their attempts to challenge zoning regulations in the City of East Point that discriminated against houses of worship.

*Looking forward, in 2010 the ACLU of Georgia will work to insure the religious rights of every individual are protected. We will:*

- Continue to fight ongoing attempts to amend the Georgia Constitution to allow state money for religious organizations;
- Offer ongoing support for school officials who refuse to bow to public pressure to impose religious practice in public schools; and
- Monitor and investigate attempts by counties and cities to implement religious practice in the public square.

**This important work cannot continue without your support. Join us in assuring that the liberties and freedoms of everyone in Georgia and across this country are protected.**

**Choose freedom, choose liberty, choose the ACLU.**

**To learn more, visit our website at [www.acluga.org](http://www.acluga.org).**