

## Protecting Our Communities Advancing Immigrant Justice



Pictured Sammy Salkin, Senior Policy Strategist, at ICE Detention Centers Out of NC Rally, May 26, 2026 in front of North Carolina General Assembly

Since the start of the second Trump administration, we have witnessed a sharp escalation in abuse of power by federal immigration agencies, including ICE and Border Patrol. For many people, the scale of these actions can be difficult to comprehend, but their impact is deeply felt in North Carolina communities.

In November 2025, CBP agents surged into Charlotte and surrounding areas without transparency or meaningful oversight from state and local leaders. What followed was a rapid expansion of reckless agent activity throughout the state, including unlawful warrantless arrests and aggressive tactics that destabilized communities and created widespread fear.

While the visible presence of these agencies has decreased in recent months, the consequences of their actions remain, and the demand for accountability has only intensified.

On February 24, 2026, ACLU-NC — alongside the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Democracy Forward, and the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project — filed a class action lawsuit against DHS and its agencies on behalf of five North Carolinians challenging warrantless immigration arrests. Each plaintiff experienced unlawful arrests, often violently carried out by armed, masked federal agents without legal justification.

Their experiences reflect a broader pattern of reckless "enforcement" that raises urgent constitutional concerns. These warrantless arrests are not only unlawful — they are violent. They are destructive to personal property and leave behind lasting trauma. As one plaintiff, Willy Wender Aceituno, said, "I am a U.S. citizen, but my papers did not protect me." Another, Ruben Arguera Lopez, said "This incident left me with a lot of psychological issues because I saw how quickly and easily my liberty can be taken away."

Their experiences are part of a larger reality unfolding in our state. When the Department of Homeland Security was created, concerns were raised

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## From the Executive Director



## The South as a Battleground and Blueprint

In 1898, white supremacists committed a violent coup, known as the Wilmington Massacre, against a legitimately elected biracial government in Wilmington because they could not accept Black political power. Black communities were

terrorized, Black businesses were destroyed, and democratic institutions were manipulated to entrench undemocratic rule through voter suppression, control of the courts, and restrictions on local governance.

The threats we face today are not new. While generally bloodless these days, they're part of a long history of efforts to consolidate power in the hands of a privileged few by excluding people from full participation in our democracy.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to further weaken the Voting Rights Act in *Callais v. Louisiana* and the immediate attacks on fair representation that followed throughout the South are rooted in the same fear from 1898: fear of historically marginalized communities building political power and demanding a democracy that works for everyone.

As we move toward midterm elections — again framed as the most important in our lifetimes — accountability must be loud at the ballot box. This means rejecting anti-civil rights and anti-civil liberties politicians who enable, or quietly accept, the erosion of our democracy in service of personal political gain or to uphold ways of life that rely on the exploitation of others. We must remain steadfast, even as fatigue sets in, knowing our opposition is counting on our exhaustion.

The South has always been both a battleground and a blueprint. It has produced systems of exclusion, but also powerful generations who organize and refuse to be erased. A multiracial democracy isn't a distant vision. It's actively being built here through coalition formation and collective action.

We're already seeing the impact of this work in communities across our state, yet it remains unfinished and will take all of us. In this newsletter, you'll see how we are advancing a North Carolina where power and opportunity are equitably distributed, rights are protected, and people of every identity can live with freedom and dignity.

In solidarity,

Chantal Stevens  
Executive Director  
American Civil Liberties of North Carolina



# Protecting Gender Affirming Care for Incarcerated People



From left to right: Dan Siegel, Deputy Legal Director, ACLU-NC; Li Nowlin-Sohl, Senior Staff Attorney, ACLU National LGBTQ and HIV Project; Kanautica Zayre, Plaintiff; Jaclyn Maffetore, Senior Staff Attorney, ACLU-NC; Michele Delgado, Staff Attorney, ACLU-NC

**T**he General Assembly has once again passed a bill targeting transgender North Carolinians and limiting access to gender-affirming care, this time for those who are incarcerated, but we have legal precedent on our side, and we will not back down.

House Bill 805 bans the use of state funds to provide gender-affirming care for people who are incarcerated in North Carolina prisons unless they will experience “imminent physical harm” without it. This provision creates a dangerous and medically unjustified standard for providing gender-affirming care to those who are incarcerated.

The bill was passed into law by the North Carolina General Assembly despite Gov. Stein’s veto in 2025. Once it went into effect, the ACLU of North Carolina filed a lawsuit in partnership with Emancipate NC to challenge it.

Our clients in the case are incarcerated in North Carolina state prisons and are currently prescribed hormone therapy but have faced abrupt stoppages in their care since the law’s

passage, resulting in painful and dangerous side effects. Some clients are also candidates for gender-affirming surgery, all requests for which are being categorically denied under the new law.

In our previous case (*Zayre-Brown v. NC Department of Adult Correction*) we represented Kanautica Zayre-Brown, a trans woman who sought gender-affirming surgery while incarcerated. The court held that the state prison system had violated the Eighth Amendment by imposing a blanket ban on that treatment, regardless of a patient’s individual medical needs. Our legal team is now arguing that HB805 also violates the Eighth Amendment by imposing a medically unjustified barrier to gender-affirming care.

With this case, we hope to bring meaningful relief to our clients and put a stop to this harmful and unjust denial of care for incarcerated trans people. Everyone deserves access to medically necessary care, including gender-affirming care. ■



# Defending Free Speech in North Carolina

**T**he current political climate has contributed to growing concerns about censorship and First Amendment violations across the country, including North Carolina. In response to some of these concerns, the ACLU of North Carolina has secured important victories in defense of free speech and public expression.

In 2024, UNC Chapel Hill forcibly cleared an encampment of peaceful protesters on campus, violently arresting protesters and issuing indefinite bans from campus for some individuals without hearings. We filed a lawsuit in partnership with Emancipate NC and Muslim Advocates challenging the campus bans and seeking damages for a protester who was injured during the arrests. A federal district court judge later ordered the university to lift the bans, allowing students and community members to return to campus, while claims for damages continue.

**The right to free speech is the foundation on which all our other rights rest.**



From left to right: Dwayne Dixon, UNC Chapel Hill Professor; Belle Boggs, President, NC Conference of the AAUP; Dan Siegel, Deputy Legal Director, ACLU-NC; Michael Palm, President, UNC Chapel Hill Chapter of AAUP

In a separate matter, UNC Chapel Hill officials placed Professor Dwayne Dixon on administrative leave following public allegations about his political associations — allegations which were tenuous and later disproven. We sent a formal letter to the university demanding the professor's reinstatement and the removal of

these restrictions on his employment. Thanks to the letter and widespread outcry from the community, Professor Dixon was quickly reinstated.



We also continue to defend the First Amendment against the City of Asheville's attempts to suppress speech. We filed a lawsuit against the City of Asheville on behalf of two journalists who were arrested while observing police activity in a public park. The journalists identified themselves as members of the press and were not interfering with police operations. These arrests violated the journalists' First Amendment rights by retaliating against them for observing and recording law enforcement. In May 2026, a district court judge held a hearing on the City's motion to dismiss; we currently await a decision.



In another Asheville matter, resident Virginia Harding received a violation notice under the City's graffiti ordinance for drawing political cartoons featuring her dog Auggie in erasable chalk on the public street in front of her home. After we sent a letter arguing that

the ordinance was applied in a way that discriminated based on message, the city updated its policy to clarify that temporary chalk markings on sidewalks and streets are not considered graffiti. As a result, Harding's sidewalk drawings of Auggie may continue.

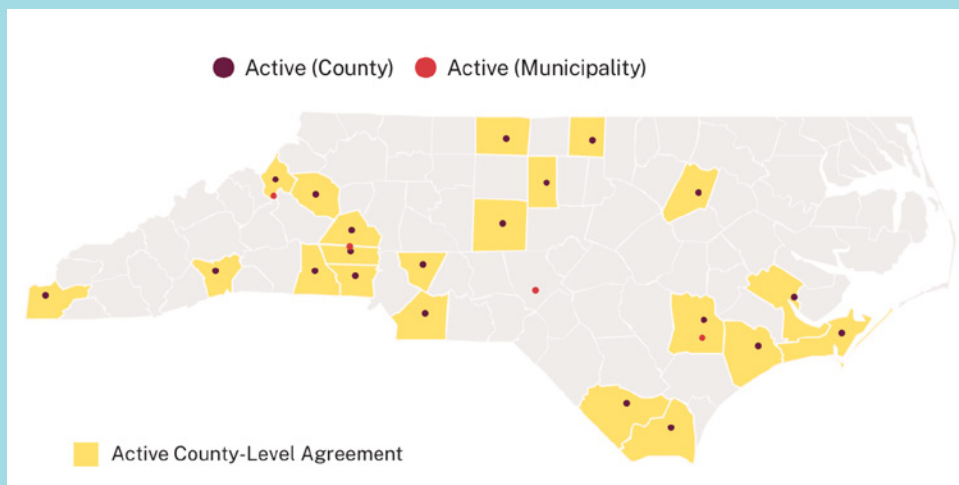
These are just a few examples of our recent work defending First Amendment rights across North Carolina. The right to free speech is the foundation on which all our other rights rest. We will continue to ensure that North Carolinians can exercise their rights freely without fear of persecution. ■

# Opposing Dangerous Cooperation Agreements Between ICE & North Carolina Law Enforcement

287(g) agreements give law enforcement the authority to enforce federal immigration law, a role they are not meant to fulfill and are ill-equipped to perform. These agreements effectively turn state and local officers into ICE agents, fueling deportations, racial profiling, and fear in immigrant communities.

As the federal administration escalates deportations and detention, ICE increasingly relies on 287(g) agreements as a force multiplier. While this program has long existed, it is spreading rapidly throughout the country, including 28 agreements in North Carolina as of June 10, 2026.

In response, ACLU-NC developed a map tracking the location and type of each agreement. We also published a



toolkit with background information, model policies, organizing strategies, and messaging to support advocates working to stop the spread of these agreements.

North Carolina communities are raising awareness and pushing state and local leaders to reject the expansion of reckless immigration agencies' power. Explore our resources. ■



## Connecting with Communities & Mobilizing Support

This year, our strategic approach has expanded organizing efforts across North Carolina.

During the primary election, we supported voter engagement efforts in a key race where civil rights issues were at stake. Through voter outreach, digital ad campaigns, and volunteer mobilization, we helped ensure voters had information about candidates' records and the issues impacting their communities.

In March, we partnered with Carolina Migrant Network for a statewide virtual town hall discussing immigrants' rights and our litigation challenging unlawful arrests by federal immigration agencies. This event responded to the groundswell of outrage over ICE conduct in North Carolina

and helped inform and direct those interested in advocacy efforts.

In May, we welcomed two new Organizers, Anna Hernandez Mejia and Nick Oviedo-Torres, who will help lead our work into the 2026 midterm election cycle. Our voter education efforts are strategically focused on priority districts while also reaching communities state-wide through phone and text banking, digital house parties, and town halls.

We're at our strongest when we work together to share reliable voting information and prevent voter intimidation, so we're counting on people across the state to join us and help educate voters on the civil rights issues at stake in this election. Sign up to Volunteer at QR code on pg 2. ■





# Behind Bars, Not Beyond Care

## Health and Dignity for Incarcerated People



**P**eople who are incarcerated face extreme barriers to accessing health care services and often have little recourse to advocate for themselves while in custody. This is especially true of individuals with disabilities who are incarcerated. Our work helps ensure that their suffering is not overlooked and that the state is fulfilling its legal and constitutional obligation to care for the people in its custody.

### Education in Durham County Youth Home

During a lockdown last year, the Durham County Youth Home reportedly kept students confined to their rooms for 22 to 23 hours with very limited opportunities for education. Under the law, students with disabilities are entitled to individualized education services which were not being provided.

We partnered with the Duke Children's Law Clinic to file a systemic complaint with the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI). In its investigation, DPI confirmed that these reports were accurate and began working with the Youth Home and the school system to develop new policies to ensure that educational services are maintained during lockdowns or similar disruptions.

### Wait Times for Pre-trial Detainees

In North Carolina, people with mental health disabilities are often held in jail for months while awaiting evaluation to determine if they can stand trial, usually without adequate treatment, which can worsen their conditions.

After the evaluation, if it's determined that they cannot proceed to trial due to a mental health condition, they often wait more than five months for a bed at a state-operated psychiatric hospital so they can receive services to "restore" their capacity to stand trial.

We partnered with Disability Rights North Carolina and the law firm of Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer to file a lawsuit seeking relief for pretrial detainees. We filed a motion to proceed as a class action, meaning our clients would represent everyone who has been

impacted by these prolonged wait times. The case is being led by four mothers who are filing on behalf of their sons. Each of these mothers have fought, often for years, to help their sons access services for mental health disabilities. Our goal is to not only provide relief for these clients, but ensure shorter wait times for all future detainees.

### Cataract Surgery for Incarcerated Woman

Pamela Chambers is an incarcerated woman with diagnosed cataracts who was denied medically necessary care.

A cataract is a clouding of the eye that causes progressive vision loss and eventually blindness. It is typically treatable with a quick, safe, and routine surgical procedure. Chambers was scheduled to have cataracts removed from both of her eyes, but after the first eye was corrected, her second eye surgery was denied by the prison's medical director, who cited prison policy as the reason for the denial.

We filed a lawsuit against the Department of Adult Correction arguing that this policy violates the Eighth Amendment, which requires adequate medical care for people in state custody. Following our complaint, the medical director approved Chambers' second cataract surgery, correcting her vision and providing her with relief from her symptoms; however, the delay in her care led to permanent vision impairment. The case is ongoing as we seek to ensure future patients will receive necessary care and pursue damages for our client. ■

# Protecting Our Communities Advancing Immigrant Justice

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across the political spectrum about its scale, scope, and lack of accountability. Today, federal immigration agencies operate with an increasingly broad reach and a budget larger than that of many countries' militaries.

Federal agents should not arrest people indiscriminately in our neighborhoods. They should not target people based on race, perceived immigration status, or in service of a political agenda. And yet, that is what communities in North Carolina are experiencing.

ICE was actively considering proposals to expand ICE detention facilities in North Carolina. After ACLU-NC published this information, North Carolinians sprang into action to push lawmakers at the local, state, and federal levels to halt ICE detention facility expansion, especially during a time when deaths in detention are at an all-time high. Building on this community power, ACLU-NC launched a petition in February 2026 calling on North Carolina elected officials to

damages claims to the federal government in an effort to hold ICE accountable.

On March 5, our legal team submitted another FOIA request to ICE and CBP demanding transparency on the immigration crackdown that has escalated across North Carolina. More than 40 Charlotte-based faith leaders, business owners, public interest groups, Charlotte-Mecklenburg elected officials, and statewide allied organizations signed a letter supporting this request.

And we're not done. People often ask us: what comes next? What comes next is continued action. The warrantless arrest class action lawsuit will take time, and there will be many more lawsuits to file. Every North Carolinian has a role to play in pushing back against the reckless and dangerous federal overreach we are witnessing.

North Carolinians are fed up with the disruption to their daily lives — on the way to work, taking their kids to school, attending places of worship.

That frustration is turning into action, from the brave plaintiffs in our warrantless arrest lawsuit, to residents speaking out against detention expansion, to people organizing their neighbors. We need sustained pressure from all angles — legal, political, and community-driven — to ensure that constitutional rights are protected in North Carolina. That includes using our voices at the ballot box to elect candidates who will defend immigrant communities, uphold constitutional rights, and reject policies that expand harmful enforcement practices.

When the government ignores the law, it does not just harm immigrants — it harms entire communities. North Carolinians across this state are making clear that they will not accept that quietly. ■



In response, ACLU-NC is scaling up our work alongside immigrant rights organizations, advocates, and community leaders across the state to demand accountability from federal agencies and elected officials.

In January 2026, our legal team, in partnership with ACLU and ACLU-VA, obtained records through litigation after ICE failed to respond to a FOIA request seeking details about plans to expand immigration detention capacity nationwide. The records revealed that

do everything within their power to end ICE and CBP abuses in our cities. It has since garnered nearly 4,000 signatures.

The following month, ACLU-NC, the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, and Tin Fulton Walker & Owen, PLLC submitted federal damages claims on behalf of Willy Aceituno against federal agencies involved in his unlawful, violent arrest in November 2025. ACLU-NC will support other North Carolinians in submitting





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## BUILDING THE WORLD WE WANT TO SEE

The ACLU of North Carolina uses an integrated advocacy approach to defend and advance civil rights and civil liberties in our state. Our team of litigation, lobbying, organizing, communications, and administrative professionals work across teams and with community partners to earn victories on some of today's most vital issues.

Learn more and support our work at  
[acluofnc.org/donate](https://acluofnc.org/donate).

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