

ACLU

Idaho

FALL / WINTER 2024

**IDAHO
LIBERTY**

2024 ACLU OF IDAHO STAFF

Amy Collins DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Amy Dundon LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIST

Dina Flores-Brewer COMMUNITY INTAKE MANAGER

Emily Croston STAFF ATTORNEY

Jenna Damron ADVOCACY FELLOW

Kelsey Dillon DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY

Leo Morales EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Logan Self DONOR RELATIONS OFFICER

Nissa Nagel OFFICE COORDINATOR

Paul Carlos Southwick LEGAL DIRECTOR

Rebecca De León COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Rosseli Guerrero COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY FELLOW

Ruby Mendez-Mota CAMPAIGN STRATEGIST

Taylor Munson COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

2024 ACLU OF IDAHO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Casey Mattoon PRESIDENT

Liyah Babayan VICE PRESIDENT

Irene Ruiz EQUITY & INCLUSION OFFICER

Shaakirrah Sanders NATIONAL BOARD REPRESENTATIVE

Jennifer Vidales SECRETARY

Heidi Smith TREASURER

Dania Tolentino

Don Reading

Erika Birch

Sujata Gandhi

Tom Wheeler

Toni Belknap-Brinegar

Follow the ACLU of Idaho!



“X” + Instagram: [acluidaho](#)

Facebook: [ACLU of Idaho](#)

TikTok: [aclu_idaho](#)

Blue Sky: [acluidaho.bsky.social](#)

IDAHO LIBERTY FALL / WINTER 2024

2 2024 ACLU of Idaho Staff & Board

4 The Urgency of Now

Mobilizing for Justice in the Face of Rising Political Threats
Leo Morales | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

6 Love in Action

48,000 Paper Hearts Flood the Idaho Capitol in Protest
Jenna Damron | ADVOCACY FELLOW

10 2025 Board of Directors Elections

11 Stronger Together

How to Support the ACLU of Idaho
Kelsey Dillon | DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY

12 SOMOS Program

Fostering Latine Leadership & Shifting the Anti-Immigrant Narrative in Idaho
Rosseli Guerrero | ADVOCACY FELLOW

14 Protecting Civil Rights Through Litigation

Our Legal Work in 2024
Emily Croston | STAFF ATTORNEY

16 ACLU of Idaho Intake Unit

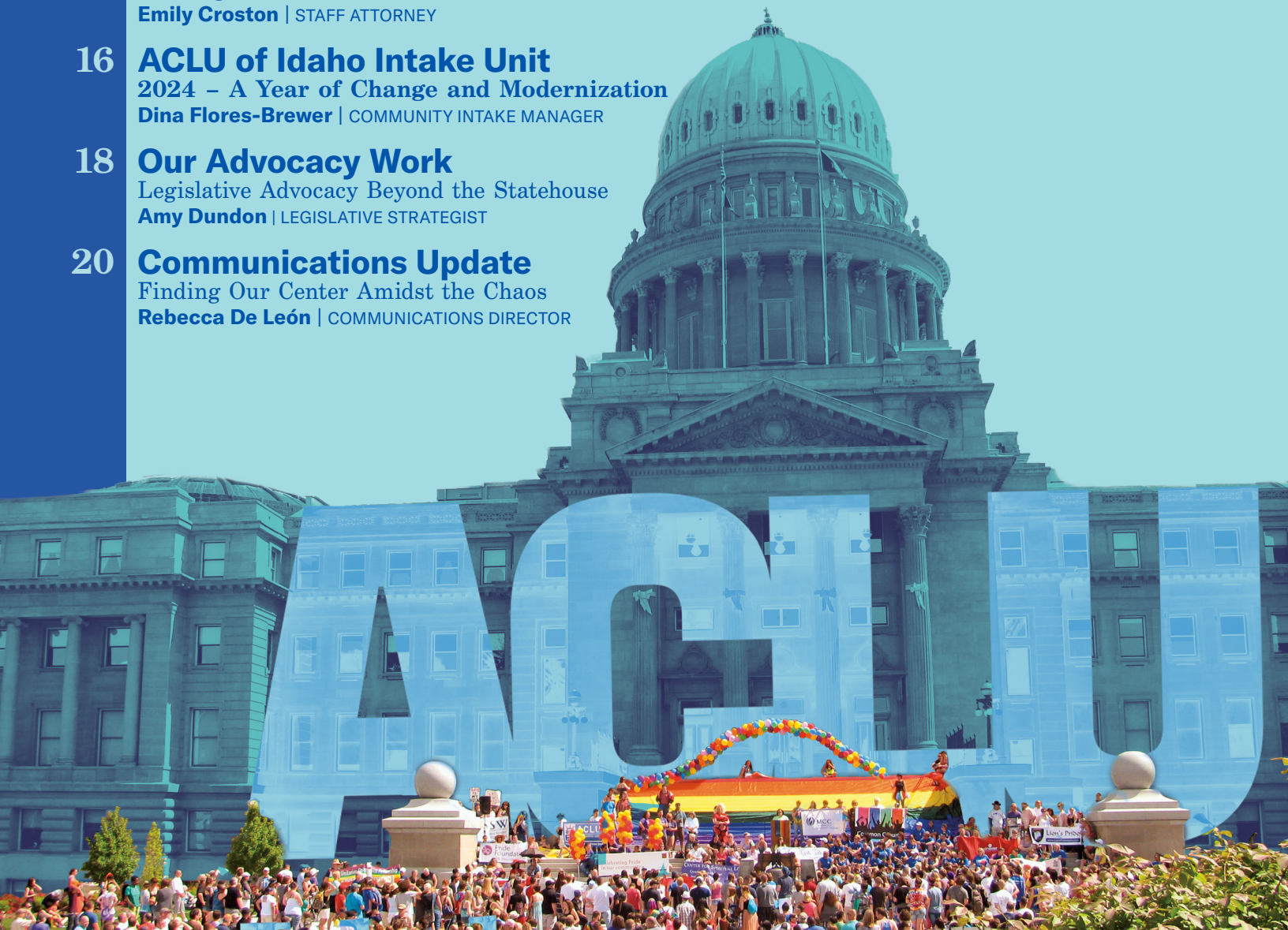
2024 – A Year of Change and Modernization
Dina Flores-Brewer | COMMUNITY INTAKE MANAGER

18 Our Advocacy Work

Legislative Advocacy Beyond the Statehouse
Amy Dundon | LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIST

20 Communications Update

Finding Our Center Amidst the Chaos
Rebecca De León | COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR





For more than a century, the ACLU has been the frontline defender of civil liberties and civil rights in the United States. We understand that unchecked government power — combined with the autocratic tendencies of certain leaders — poses a grave threat to our core ideals of freedom, liberty, and justice. That is why, through every political challenge, every administration, and every threat to our rights, we have remained steadfast.

We have never backed down. And we never will.

Now, with a second Trump presidency on the horizon, the stakes could not be higher. We must rise again, stronger and more resolute than ever before, to confront what could be one of the most dangerous periods in our nation's history. The scars of his first term — his Muslim ban, the caging of immigrant children, the attacks on the press — are still fresh in our collective memory. Trump's rhetoric and actions show a blatant disregard for the rights and dignity of countless Americans. But we won't stand by as history repeats itself.

Trump's appointment of over 230 federal judges, including three Supreme Court Justices, has already reshaped the judiciary to further his agenda. This summer, the Supreme Court granted him unprecedented immunity from criminal prosecution for actions taken during his presidency. During his campaign, he vowed to target his political enemies.

The ACLU will hold him accountable. We did so in his first term, filing 434 legal cases to protect the rights of all Americans, and we will do it again. But our work won't stop at the courthouse. We will take this fight to the streets, to Congress, and to state legislatures. We will organize, we will mobilize, and we will demand justice.

We will not be silent.

The Urgency of Now

Mobilizing for Justice in the Face of Rising Political Threats

Here in Idaho, the far-right agenda is emboldened, and the fight is even more urgent. In this deeply conservative state, extremist ideologies thrive, and we see the results in policies that strip away the rights of marginalized communities. Since 2016, Idaho's politicians and far-right activists have relentlessly attacked the rights of the LGBTQ community, women's reproductive rights, and voting rights. They've targeted immigrants, doctors, school counselors, and librarians.

Idaho has become a testing ground for Christian nationalists' extremist policies, a state where radical ideas are incubated and pushed as models for the rest of the country. National organizations like the Heritage Foundation and Project 2025 see Idaho as a fertile ground to advance their agenda. Their goal is extreme: Reshape our state — and our country — into a place where freedom, liberty, and justice are no longer guaranteed for all.

We cannot afford to stand idly by.

This political climate may feel daunting, but I refuse to lose hope. We will fight. We will fight with everything we have. We will fight with the strength of our 14 staff members, the support of our national office, and the growing network of allies across Idaho. We will organize communities, center the voices of those most affected, and empower them to lead the charge. We will take our fight to the courts — both state and federal — with novel cases to protect our constitutional rights. We will lobby our state legislature, challenge the governor's office, and hold state agencies accountable. We will use our communications platform to rally Idahoans around our shared values of freedom and justice — and we will also position our work within the broader human rights framework because, for many marginalized communities, the stakes are not just political — they are a matter of life and death.

Internally, by the end of this year, we will redefine our strategic priorities to reflect the urgency of this moment. We will sharpen our focus, refine our strategies, and ramp up our fundraising efforts to ensure we have the capacity to take on the challenges ahead. We will be bold. We will be visionary. We will be audacious. Our commitment to justice and civil rights will drive everything we do.

But we cannot do it alone. Now more than ever, we need your support. Your involvement — whether through political action or by funding our work — will make all the difference. The impact of our efforts is directly tied to the strength of our collective action. We need you to join us.

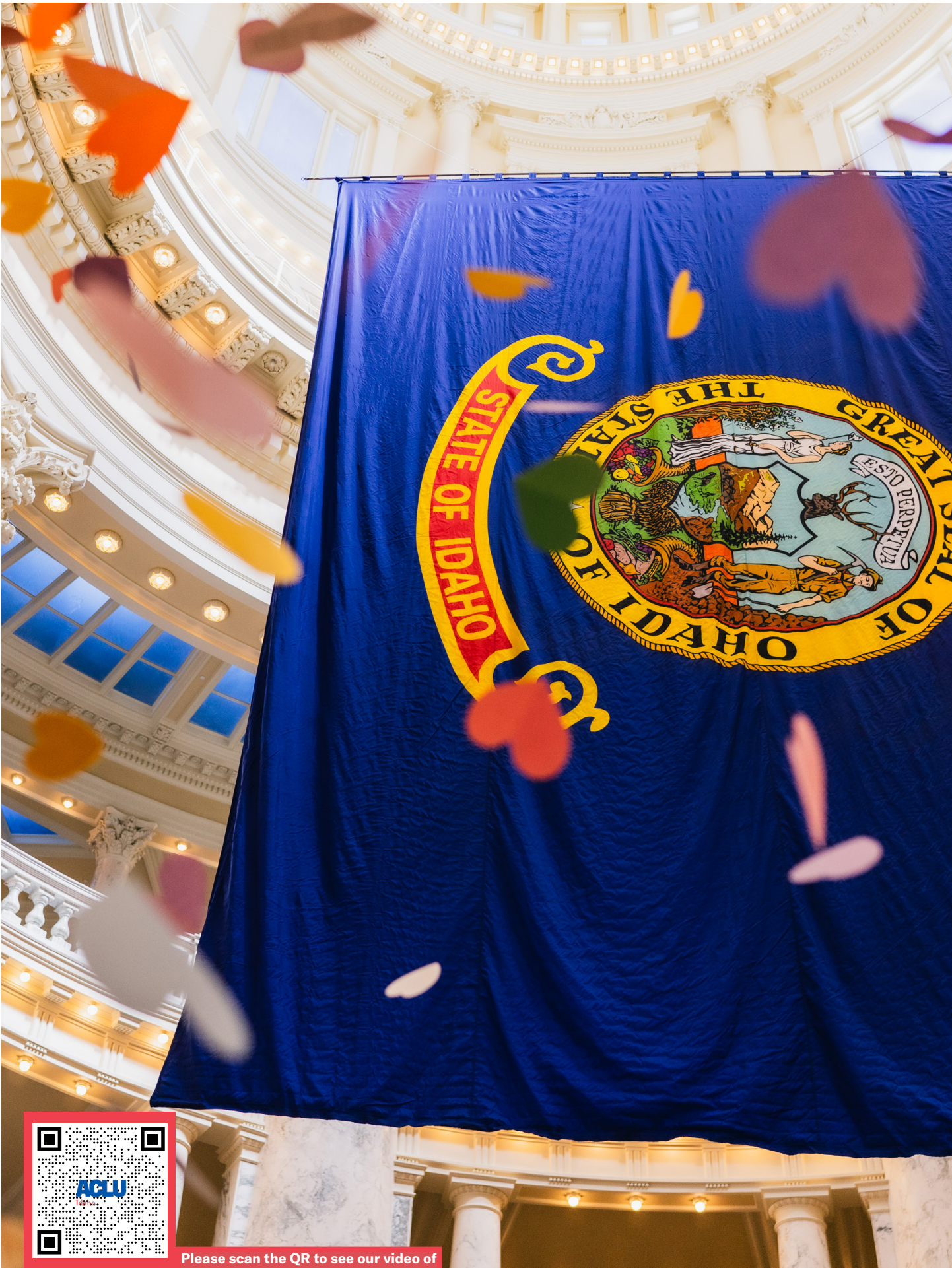
In closing, I am reminded of why we do this work. I am an immigrant. I belong to a community vilified by Trump and his supporters. We know that raids and deportations are coming. I think of the trans youth in Pocatello, Idaho, who must walk long distances to find a non-gendered bathroom. I think of the pregnant woman in northern Idaho who was denied medical care because her doctor feared prosecution.

This is not the Idaho we want. Idaho should be a place where everyone, regardless of their identity or political beliefs, feels that they belong. We will fight to make it so. We will fight to ensure that every person, no matter where they come from, can live with dignity, freedom, and justice.

And we need you to fight with us. Thank you for standing with us on this crucial journey.

Leo Morales | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





Please scan the QR to see our video of the hearts falling from the 4th floor

Love in Action

48,000 Paper Hearts Flood the Idaho Capitol in Protest

Jenna Damron | ADVOCACY FELLOW

On April 2, 2024, the ACLU of Idaho partnered with the LGBTQ+ community, allies, and advocates to organize a press conference in the Idaho State Capitol. While lawmakers debated two pieces of blatantly anti-trans legislation, I spoke to reporters gathered for our press conference about the impacts these bills would have on queer Idahoans. Simultaneously, advocates set aloft 48,000 paper and cloth hearts into the Capitol rotunda. These cascading hearts symbolize the 48,000 Idahoans who self-identified as LGBTQ+ on the 2020 U.S. Census and are keenly impacted by the rise of Christian nationalist-fueled ideology against their existence. This event served two purposes: an outpouring of love and solidarity for the LGBTQ+ community, and a symbolic act of care. Volunteers carefully picked up each of the 48,000 paper hearts and transported them out of the Capitol building that day, proudly proclaiming:

“We will not leave anyone behind.”

In the weeks prior to the protest, activists and LGBTQ+ community grew increasingly frustrated and hopeless. The private lives of LGBTQ+ Idahoans had been a constant topic of conversation at the statehouse, and a constant target of harmful legislation. What started roughly four years ago as a handful of laws seeking to restrict transgender well-being quickly escalated to hundreds of anti-trans bills introduced and over 50 million dollars spent on ads to vilify the trans community nationwide in 2024. In response, activists and allies put out a call for the community to come together to produce handmade hearts that would be later used in the heart drop. In just 14 days, 48,000 hearts were handcrafted by nearly 100 individuals and advocacy groups in 20 different places across Idaho. Many of the hearts contained messages of support for trans folks in Idaho or statements about their own experiences as a trans person in this state.

Today in Idaho, trans folks' basic rights, including access to health care, are threatened. At its core, attacks on gender-affirming medical care are best understood as government overreach in incredibly personal decisions about one's health and body. Attacks on personal autonomy in the realm of reproductive justice and access to gender-affirming medical care reflect a broader trend of the increased influence and sophistication of well-funded extremist, far-right, and increasingly dangerous activists. In Idaho, lawmakers openly describe close partnerships with these groups; many of the most harmful bills in 2024 were written by or co-written with extremist organizations.



What started roughly four years ago as a handful of laws seeking to restrict transgender well-being quickly escalated to **hundreds** of anti-trans bills introduced and over **50 million dollars** spent on ads to **vilify the trans community** nationwide in **2024**.

continued >

In stark contrast, 2024 has also seen a meaningful outpouring of love and support for trans and nonbinary Idahoans. Activists, allies, and key community leaders seem reinvigorated to build a countermovement to the far-right's weaponized hate. During the 2024 legislative session, we witnessed huge numbers of supporters turn out to testify against anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. When public hearings were held, committee rooms were filled with supporters, often necessitating multiple overflow rooms. Religious leaders testified that trans people are souls worthy of dignity and respect. Parents of trans youth fought hard to protect their children, meeting with lawmakers and pleading to be seen. Advocates in and out of the statehouse demanded lawmakers cease attacking their trans neighbors. New organizers and leaders got involved in the statehouse and beyond, organizing a Trans Day of Visibility event on the Capitol steps and eventually planning record-breaking inaugural Pride celebrations in their towns.



What's Next?

Idaho has not seen large-scale resistance to LGBTQ+ discrimination since 2015 when 25 members of the Add the 4 Words group were arrested in the statehouse while advocating for the addition of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to the Idaho Human Rights Act. Now, in 2024, advocates are no longer asking for the addition of LGBTQ+ protections. Unfortunately, our demands have shifted from “add protections” to “stop taking our fundamental rights away.” A new wave of activists is emerging, encouraged and often joined by those involved in the arrests nearly 10 years ago.



Since the 48,000 Heart Drop action, we've seen new vigor and momentum in the search for LGBTQ+ justice in Idaho. Activists involved in the protest have taken that momentum to new heights, organizing new opportunities like Canyon County's first Pride festival, which drew nearly 4,000 attendees, and Idaho's First Annual Trans March, where more than 1,500 people came out to support trans joy in their community. As we approach the 10th anniversary of the only public hearing that the Add the Words bill received, the community is experiencing increased interest and capacity for organized resistance.



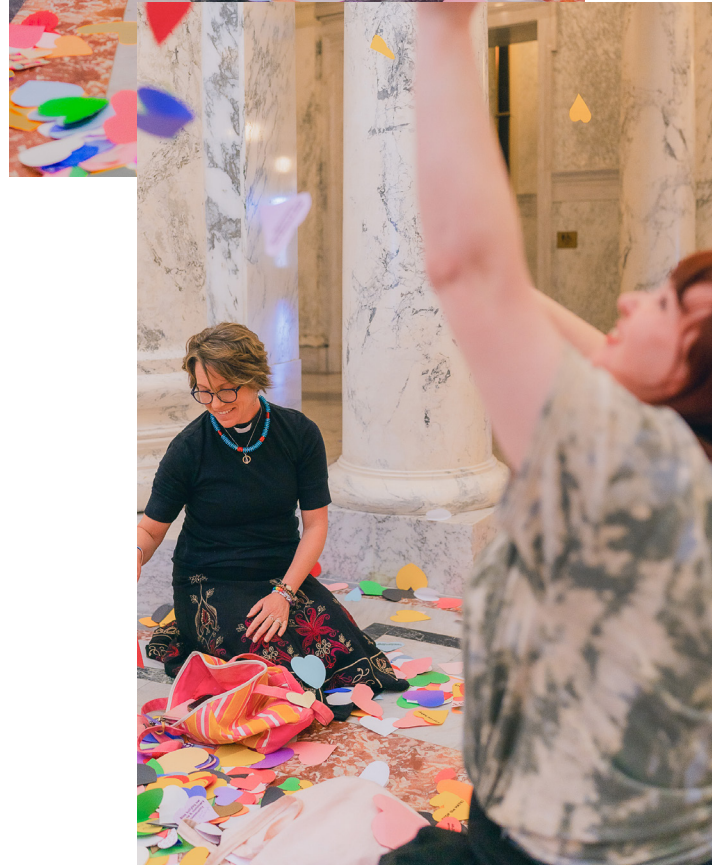


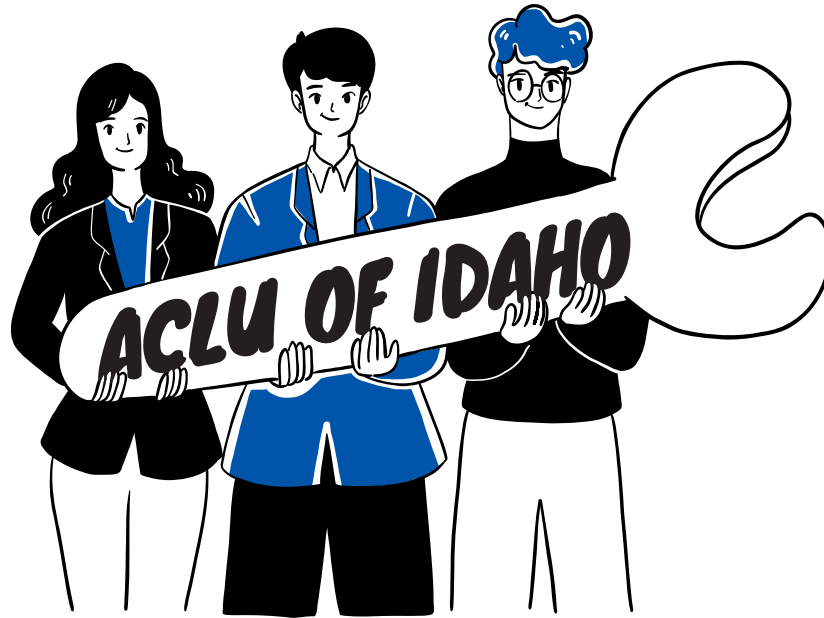
The 48,000 Heart Drop event signals what's possible through organizing, and the incredible impact of investing in, learning from, and thinking with communities directly impacted by harmful legislation. Although we grieve alongside the community in the aftermath of a harmful 2024 legislative session, we're heartened to witness a movement for justice grow in real-time. We look forward — in 2025 and beyond — to creating an Idaho where all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can thrive and receive equal protection under the law.

As an ally, you are an integral part of the movement. The transgender and nonbinary community has been highly engaged and showing up to fight for their rights, but we have seen their voices too frequently ignored or delegitimized by those in power. Imagine showing up and sharing your most intimate truths in front of a room full of strangers to people who are hostile to both your message and your very existence.

There are so many ways LGBTQ+ allies can show up for our transgender and nonbinary community; just being in the room to support testifiers can make a difference. What's more, our trans and nonbinary communities ask for allies to go further — write letters, op-eds, and even give testimony during a public hearing. Anyone can learn more about how to engage with the legislative process by attending ACLU of Idaho workshops and/or setting up a FastDemocracy account to remain informed and primed, ready to answer calls to action when needed.

If you are worried that it's not your place, keep in mind that our Idaho transgender and non-binary community just doesn't have the numbers to fight back against the system alone. If you are concerned that you don't know enough and worry about what you should say to make a difference, our education events, talking points and issue literature can help. Sadly, we exist in a time when the words and actions of cisgender, heterosexual allies can have a profoundly greater impact on the actions of our leaders.





2025 Board of Directors Elections

Each year our Board Development Committee carefully considers the applications of potential board members to join the group of people who govern and direct the Idaho affiliate of the ACLU. If you would like to be considered for nomination by the Board Development Committee, you must be a member in good standing and submit a brief statement of interest.

Nominations may also be submitted by petition. Nomination petitions must include a statement of interest with a short statement of petitioner's background and qualifications and be signed by ten (10) current ACLU of Idaho members that includes the name and address of the nominee.

All submissions must be received in the ACLU of Idaho office at **P.O. Box 1897, Boise, ID 83701, by January 13, 2025**. Members of the ACLU of Idaho Board of Directors serve three-year terms.

The election results will be announced at the **Annual Membership Meeting**, which will be held **in-person on February 12, 2025, at 6:00 pm** at The Linen Building in Boise.

If you have questions on the nomination or petition process, or the Annual Membership Meeting, please contact Nissa Nagel at (208) 344-9750 ext. 1209 or at admin@acluidaho.org.

Follow the ACLU of Idaho!



"X" + Instagram: **acluidaho**

Facebook: **ACLU of Idaho**

TikTok: **aclu_idaho**

Blue Sky: **acluidaho.bsky.social**



ACLU
Idaho

Stronger Together

How to Support the ACLU of Idaho

Dear Member,

2024 has been an active year in the fight for civil liberties and civil rights in Idaho. From the statehouse to the community, the ACLU of Idaho has shown up to defend the rights of all Idahoans. We are able to do the work because of dedicated members and supporters like you. We are thankful to have you alongside us because we are stronger together.

In this newsletter, we provide you with reasons to embrace hope. Throughout, you will find stories relating to our community education and organizing, updates on our current cases in the courts, a preview of 2025, and insights into how your contributions are making a difference in real people's lives across the state.

Thank you once again for joining us in this crucial fight.

Donation Opportunities

The ACLU of Idaho has two arms that support the various components of the organization. Union gifts (c4) are not tax-deductible, support advocacy work, and include an ACLU membership. Foundation gifts (c3) are tax-deductible gifts and support community organizing, education, and litigation.

The success of the ACLU of Idaho is driven by the support of folks like you across the state. There are multiple opportunities for you to support the ACLU. Some of those opportunities include one-time gifts, monthly giving, and tax-deductible gifts of appreciated stocks, mandatory minimum distributions, and donor-advised funds.

Legacy gifts are also offered as a way for you to support our work. These types of gifts are not just a one-time contribution but an impactful way to ensure our work of defending civil liberties and civil rights remains strong for generations to come. When you leave a gift in your will, trust, or through other planned giving options, you make a lasting contribution to the ACLU's mission and ensure your values live on past your lifetime. Legacy gifts are also a powerful statement of your values and commitment to a more just and equitable future.

If you have any questions about the various gift options offered by the ACLU, please email dev@acluidaho.org. We would love to help you identify the best option for continuing to support the ACLU of Idaho.

Kelsey Dillon | DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY





SOMOS Program

Fostering Latine Leadership & Shifting the Anti-Immigrant Narrative in Idaho

Rosseli Guerrero | ADVOCACY FELLOW

For more than 30 years, the ACLU of Idaho has led immigrant rights work in Idaho, whether through campaigns, proactive legislative efforts, or Know Your Rights trainings. But the recent onslaught of racist, anti-immigrant rhetoric and legislation prompted us to find new strategies to reverse the harmful impacts of this trend and protect the rights, freedom, and dignity of immigrants who call Idaho home.

This is why the ACLU of Idaho launched the SOMOS program this summer. SOMOS (“we are” in Spanish) is an initiative designed to interrupt and shift anti-immigrant sentiment by empowering members of the Latine community in Idaho through advocacy-related knowledge and skills training. SOMOS is about changing the narrative — participants work together to create and implement effective messaging that fosters awareness, acceptance, and understanding of immigrant communities.

The SOMOS program is rooted in community; participants are of Latino/a/e/x backgrounds, whether recent immigrants or individuals who celebrate their immigrant heritage. By working within the Latine community, SOMOS aims to develop the next generation of immigrant rights leaders and equip them with tools to advocate for themselves and others.

Our 63 registrants gathered in the community to create a safe space that embraces their Latinidad and sharpens their advocacy skills. We worked to ensure SOMOS was accessible for folks by providing dinner, travel stipends, stipends for participants’ time, and childcare.

The program kicked off with a five-week, in-person training series in Nampa and Twin Falls where we covered the roots of racism, power and oppression, as well as the power of storytelling. Our final training focused on messaging that will resonate with the broader public, shift perceptions, and deepen understanding of Idaho’s immigrant community.

We strengthened our SOMOS initiative by partnering with Rathbone Falvey Research, a research consultancy firm in Boise that conducted polling about SOMOS-crafted messages. This data-driven approach ensures the messages crafted by participants have a real impact on public opinion and are as effective and persuasive as possible.

After the SOMOS five-week training concluded, participants self-selected into two subgroups: SOMOS Activate and SOMOS Infórmate. Activate participants are actively furthering their advocacy learning journey by amplifying the pro-immigrant messaging created through personal storytelling. Infórmate participants are staying connected to the community by engaging with the events created by Activate, sharing content, and introducing the ACLU's work to a broader audience.

Recently, Activate participants partnered with the local nonprofit PODER of Idaho for their Hispanic Heritage Hangout event. Activate folks presented the SOMOS program and the importance of pro-immigrant messaging. They also displayed art pieces they created to challenge harmful rhetoric against immigrants. This exhibit aims to reach a broader audience and encourage more community members to engage in conversations about immigration and inclusion.

Testimonies from SOMOS participants

“Such a great learning experience from every workshop and hearing from others.”

“It was amazing being part of this.”

“Everything was well-planned. I’m a single mom, so it was so nice to be able to bring my children.”



In the first year of this two-year program, our primary objective was to share our knowledge about advocacy and co-create pro-immigrant messaging that challenges harmful stereotypes. It was inspiring to see the messages participants created and a gift to witness the joy folks felt by being part of an empowering endeavor. Participants highlighted immigrants' cultural diversity, economic contributions, and resilience to encourage a more inclusive environment for all.

In 2025, we plan on working alongside SOMOS participants to launch a storytelling campaign that humanizes the immigrant experience for those who have only received misinformation about the immigrants who live and work alongside them in Idaho. Participants are excited to share their stories, noting that SOMOS has been an amazing opportunity for them to learn about advocacy and increase their opportunities to showcase their leadership and passion. This program has laid a solid foundation for ongoing advocacy and community-building efforts, creating a more inclusive and supportive future for all Idahoans.

Protecting Civil Rights Through Litigation

Our Legal Work in 2024 **Emily Croston** | STAFF ATTORNEY

Throughout 2024, the legal department fought to empower Idahoans to live freely and authentically. From reproductive rights to the public defense system, our legal cases seek to ensure everyone has access to the civil liberties that make living diverse, authentic lives possible.

For nearly a decade, the ACLU of Idaho has worked to ensure **adults with developmental disabilities** can equally access and engage with the disability benefits process in Idaho through a legal case called *K.W. v. Armstrong*. The *K.W.* litigation began in 2014 when the legal department found that individuals who receive disability benefits from the state had their supportive services budgets cut significantly. Supportive services budgets are crucial to an individual's ability to live a fulfilling life by funding medical support and job and skills training programs.

After learning about budget discrepancies from impacted folks across the state, our lawyers dug into Idaho's supportive services budget process. Our research determined the opaque and arbitrary benefits system threatened thousands of Idahoans' rights, prompting us to sue the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW). Today, our *K.W.* litigation continues to be driven by a close partnership with disability rights self-advocates and family members through Community Now!, an organization that centers the voices and needs of self-advocates with disabilities.

We won a class-wide settlement in 2015 that required the State of Idaho to establish a new budget-setting process for IDHW supportive services. In the past year, however, we found the state's most recent budget-setting tool was plagued with the same lack of transparency present in the original system. Our legal team fought against the implementation of yet another opaque system that would make it difficult for affected people to engage with tools central to their ability to interact with the world.

We won that fight.

Since then, we have pushed the state to implement a special master — an expert in disability services who will help the state craft a new system that centers adults with disabilities. The chosen special master, Ruby Moore, has worked on behalf of adults with developmental disabilities for 30 years, leading multiple projects that helped adults considered “unemployable” find work. We are excited to begin the next phase of this project with her leadership and expertise.

Access to **reproductive health care** is essential to empowering individuals to direct the course of their own lives. In *Planned Parenthood Great Northwest, Hawai'i, Indiana, Kentucky v. Labrador*, the legal team argued at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals that Idaho's attorney general could not prosecute health care providers for referring patients out of state for abortion care under Idaho law. Idahoans deserve accurate, trustworthy information on the options for reproductive health care — including out-of-state abortion care. We are awaiting the Ninth Circuit's opinion in this case.

The legal team is fighting for **trans Idahoans'** right to live authentically and be free from discrimination in three cases. Team sports are a place of community-building and personal growth for many children, including Lindsay Hecox, Boise State University student who loves cross country and soccer. In 2020, Idaho passed House Bill 500, which aimed to ostracize trans girls by forcing them to participate on boys' teams or forgo team sports altogether. We successfully fought for Lindsay's right to participate in girls' sports in our case: *Hecox v. Little*. Over the past year, we have fought to maintain that victory, first in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and now in the U.S. Supreme Court.

The U.S. Supreme Court is also central to the fight for access to gender-affirming medical care. This type of standard medical care — including puberty blockers and hormone therapy — provides relief for gender dysphoria symptoms and allows trans folks to engage with the world as their truest selves.

Trans individuals repeatedly tell our legal team that access to gender-affirming care positively changed their lives. They convey how this health care freed them, diminished their social anxiety, afforded them the ability to hold a consistent job, and made their accomplishments finally feel real when achieved as their truest self.





We have two active cases that aim to protect the right to access gender-affirming medical care. The first, *Poe v. Labrador*, argues trans youth in Idaho have the right to access the kinds of health care they need and that trans teens, their families, and health care providers should be able to make personal medical decisions based on science, not politics. Our initial win from the District Court allowed trans youth to maintain access to care, but the U.S. Supreme Court narrowed our win to only the plaintiffs in the case. We are now waiting to see what the Court will do in a Tennessee case, *U.S. v. Skrmetti*, on the same issue. Meanwhile, our 2024 win in *Robinson v. Labrador* protects incarcerated adults' access to gender-affirming health care.

Finally, in *Tucker v. State of Idaho*, our attorneys are fighting for the rights of **criminal defendants unable to afford an attorney**. Being unable to afford a private attorney should not mean you are more likely to lose your freedom. Folks facing possible prison time who cannot afford a private lawyer — folks the court calls indigent defendants — have the same rights to be represented in criminal cases as everyone else.

For years, Idaho's defective public defense system has failed to provide adequate representation to individuals who can't afford a private attorney. Since the ACLU of Idaho and partners challenged the state's disastrous public defense system in 2015, we won on appeal to the Idaho Supreme Court twice and the state has passed multiple laws claiming to fix the flawed system.

In February 2024, the trial court dismissed our case in anticipation of the new State Public Defender system. However, after the state implemented that new system in October 2024, the consequences have been disastrous. Individuals are appearing in court proceedings without an attorney and contract defenders are leaving the system in droves. Individuals without an attorney are being held without bail while they await assignment of a public defender. We are headed back to the Idaho Supreme Court to show that the State of Idaho continues to fail in its duty to provide representation for all Idahoans.

No matter their economic status, gender identity, or disability status, all Idahoans should have the right and freedom to direct their path to happiness and fulfillment. That is what the legal team fights for each year, and we will continue to do so with your support.

K.W. v. Armstrong

Right: 14th Amendment - Due Process

Lawsuit against the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare to address deficiencies in the state's disabilities safety net system.

Status: Ensuring compliance with settlement agreement

Hecox v. Little

Right: 14th Amendment - Equal Protection

Lawsuit challenging new 2020 law that bans women and girls who are transgender or intersex from participating in girls' sports.

Status: Opposing petition for certiorari at Supreme Court of the United States

Poe v. Labrador

Right: 14th Amendment - Equal Protection

Lawsuit challenging the State of Idaho's 2023 law that criminalizes gender-affirming healthcare for transgender youth.

Status: Held in abeyance at 9th Circuit Court

Robinson v. Labrador

Right: 8th Amendment - Right to be Free from Cruel and Unusual Punishment

Lawsuit against the state on behalf of incarcerated individuals who would've been cut off from gender-affirming medical care following a new law in 2024.

Status: Discovery and data collection

Planned Parenthood v. Labrador

Right: 1st Amendment - Free Speech

Lawsuit to stop Idaho Attorney General Labrador from applying a legal opinion in which he claims health care providers cannot refer patients out of state for abortion care.

Status: On appeal at 9th Circuit Court

Tucker v. State of Idaho

Right: 6th Amendment - Right to Counsel

Lawsuit against the state demanding reformation of Idaho's defective public defense system.

Status: Appealing summary judgment at Idaho Supreme Court

ACLU of Idaho Intake Unit: 2024

A Year of Change and Modernization

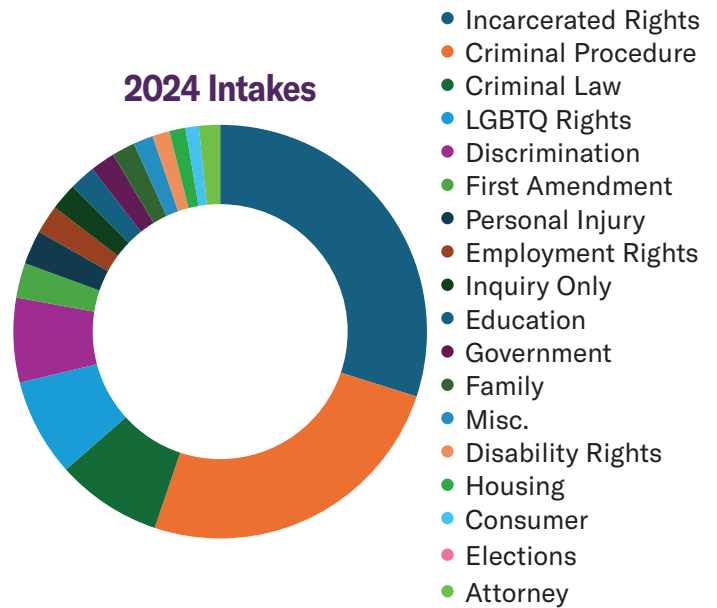
Dina Flores-Brewer | COMMUNITY INTAKE MANAGER

Although our affiliate's Intake Unit has been operating for decades, we have seen an increase in people reporting civil liberties violations in recent years, and 2024 saw some big upgrades, though much remained the same, such as overrepresentation of incarcerated people in the breakdown of complaints.

Anyone who thinks their civil liberties have been violated can fill out an intake form online at request.acluidaho.org. There, people provide their contact information, a brief description of their complaint and what they want the ACLU of Idaho to do. They select one of five subject/issue areas that most closely corresponds to their problem: Criminal Issues, Discrimination Complaints, LGBTQ+ Rights Issues, Prisoner Rights Issues and, if none of these fit, a Miscellaneous/General Complaint form. They will then receive an email providing important information about their rights based on the subject/issue area they selected, and what steps they can take to resolve their situation. Know Your Rights handouts, court forms, referrals etc. are attached, along with a statement that while we read every intake, this will likely be the only response they receive from the ACLU of Idaho.

2024 Intake Statistics

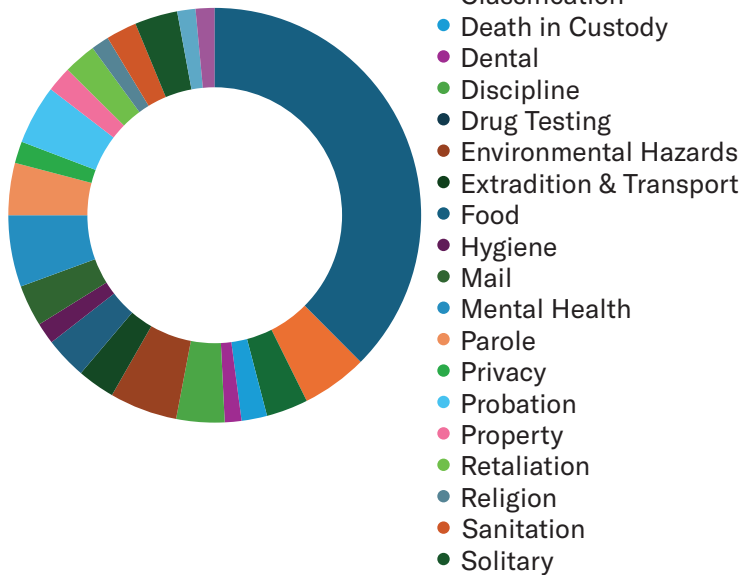
We are on track to receive more than 1,000 complaints from people in Idaho for 2024, just as we did in 2023. As of October 18, 2024, the ACLU of Idaho has received 852 intakes, with more than two months to go in this calendar year. Most of those complaints come from people who are incarcerated in Idaho jails or prisons.



The majority of complaints from incarcerated people are for denials of fundamental necessities things such as:

- > **Lack of medical and mental health care.**
- > **Insufficient amount of food or food that does not meet their individual medical and/or religious diets.**
- > **Jail/prison environmental conditions that challenge their basic humanity such as overcrowding, moldy mattresses, or lack of heating/cooling on living units.**

Complaints from Incarcerated Idahoans



We have received over 50 complaints so far this year from people struggling to get adequate legal representation from the Idaho Public Defense system. On October 1, 2024, Idaho switched from a county-based public defense system to a state public defender’s office in an attempt to address our complaints in the Tucker v. Idaho public defense lawsuit which outlined insufficient resources, high caseloads, lack of staff, etc. What we’ve seen since the transition to a statewide office is that the problems the state tried to solve have only increased. Media reports indicate experienced public defenders have left the system in droves, conflict public defenders canceled their contracts, and dozens of defendants (if not more) arrived in court only to find they no longer had an attorney.

New Automated Intake Process

As much as problems stay the same, we have also seen significant changes this year. This September, we rolled out our new automated Online Intake System (OIS). We realized several years ago that even with student interns and volunteers, it was unmanageable to have just one staff member respond to the 1,000+ complaints we receive each year, let alone provide advocacy in any meaningful way. To slow the flow, intakes received through the OIS now receive an automated response with general information that complainants can use until our staff reach out with more personalized information.

The Community Intake Manager still reads every intake, screening for complaints that relate to ongoing litigation and/or projects but does not respond further. It is our hope that people will still get helpful recommendations and resources to resolve their situation, and our Intake staff will now have more time to investigate complaints more fully and be able to provide more meaningful advocacy.

Projects

In August 2023, the ACLU of Idaho’s Legal Fellow, Erica Rodarte, filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) against the Nampa School District for applying its dress code in a discriminatory manner targeting Latine students for clothing and other items linked to their culture, and for disciplining Latine students for wearing items of clothing labeled as “gang” when other students were allowed to wear identical items without problems. When Erica completed her legal fellowship in September, I took over the project, reaching out to Latine families in Nampa and connecting them to the DOJ. I also coordinated a community listening session in April, where investigators from the DOJ were able to meet with families and other concerned community members to hear firsthand their experiences in Nampa schools. The DOJ has not issued its findings yet but indicated they will by year’s end. Follow us on our social media channels to find out more.

In December of 2024, the ACLU of Idaho will kick off another project led by Intake staff. For many years, the Intake Unit has received complaints about the treatment of Latine community members at the hands of police in the Treasure Valley, but due to lack of resources, has been unable to investigate thoroughly. The ACLU of Idaho will organize multiple community listening sessions in Nampa, Caldwell, and one other area to hear from Latine community members about their experiences with police. The goal is to determine if there is an actual systemic problem; if so, how pervasive it is; and what recommendations can be made to foster a better relationship between police and the Latine community. The dates and locations have yet to be determined but will be shared on our social media. In the meantime, people can share their stories directly with the Intake Unit by emailing admin@acluidaho.org.

Legislative Advocacy

Beyond the Statehouse

Amy Dundon | LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIST

Every legislative session, our Advocacy team works hard to protect civil rights and liberties through direct engagement with lawmakers and stakeholders. But our work doesn't stop at sine die. Instead, the final days of Idaho's legislative session signals the beginning of our team's robust public education efforts.


Public education, as we understand it, is a unique avenue to share our extensive knowledge about new laws and empower Idahoans to know their rights. It allows us to foster engagement and build momentum in the ongoing struggle for a more just Idaho. In recent years, public education has become central to our legislative advocacy; it is a direct and intentional response to ever-more extreme attacks from lawmakers against Idahoans' most precious civil rights and freedoms.

The truth is in the numbers: In 2024, our advocacy participated in or facilitated over a dozen public education events. The work started just weeks after the close of legislative session, with a revival of our Sessions Confessions event. Here, alongside partner organizations, we detailed the meaning and impact of freshly passed laws, outlined ways to engage at the statehouse, and even forecasted likely bills in sessions to come.

Weeks later, in May, Advocacy and Legal staff collaborated with our partners at Lambda Legal for a lively public-facing discussion in Boise, this time centered on new Idaho laws and their anticipated impact on LGBTQ+ students, their families, and allies.

Throughout June, our team celebrated Pride at events in Twin Falls, Canyon County, Idaho Falls, Sandpoint, and of course, here in Boise. Rather than simply attend more Idaho Pride events than in years past, Advocacy staff strategized ways to make our presence impactful. This meant building relationships with volunteers across Idaho (who graciously supported our booth!), fostering enthusiastic participation across all of our affiliate's departments, and meeting new and curious members of our community. Perhaps most importantly, we leveraged Pride celebrations to implement a creative, Q&A-style Know Your Rights trainings.





In July we convened the third-annual Freedom Schools, an online, weeks-long training program for youth focused on academic freedom and inspired by 1960s Civil Rights racial equality activism and organizing. August saw our second-annual Back to School with the ACLU of Idaho tour, where we traveled across Idaho to discuss recent laws and their anticipated impacts on LGBTQ+ students, their families, and public school faculty and staff.

Public education efforts continued throughout the fall. In September and October, we partnered with Idaho-based organizations like The Hunger Coalition, The Community Center, and even the University of Idaho and shared vital information about recent Idaho laws and ways to protect folks' civil rights and freedoms. Importantly, these events have intentionally integrated information about legislative engagement, advocacy, and organizing – all critical components of the movement for justice and freedom in Idaho.

Not only do we recognize the utility of public education efforts as a critical component of ensuring Idahoans are set up to protect their rights, we take seriously the responsibility of community-facing work. We know extremist lawmakers will continue to pass laws that threaten Idahoans' civil rights. We also know the potential of community to come together, organize, and dream up new ways to protect and defend the basic freedoms, dignity, and rights of all Idahoans.



Communications Update

Finding our Center Amidst the Chaos

Rebecca De León | COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

The Communications Department at the ACLU of Idaho has experienced some drastic and exciting changes; we have all new staff since last year's newsletter.

Most noticeably, long-time communications lead, Jeremy Woodson, realized his desire to relocate his family to Portland in August. Jeremy had been a one-person comms department leading the ACLU of Idaho's public presence for nearly seven years. In addition to evolving the communications department by creating policies, procedures, and norms, Jeremy also brought a strong sense of racial and gender equity to our affiliate, which he centered in all comms materials. Despite the incredible demands on one person to uphold all public-facing materials for the powerful advocacy, legislative and legal work of the affiliate, Jeremy was always eager to support his colleagues. Often acting as a level-headed source of strength for so many of us here, earning him his self-dubbed title "Uncle Jer Jer."

Staying true to his skillset and passion for justice and advocacy, Jeremy is working as Communications Associate with Oregon Consumer Justice. We wish him the best and miss him.

Photo by Catherine Wheaton



Jeremy Woodson, Jenna Damron & Ruby Mendez-Mota at the Idaho State Capitol.

ACLU

Idaho



Taylor Munson
ACLU of Idaho's new
Communications Manager

Nevertheless, we are incredibly excited to welcome Taylor Munson as our new Communications Manager as of October 28th.

Taylor brings a wealth of experience in communications and journalism as well as a humble and warm presence. She previously worked in communications and marketing at Hummel Architects, PLLC, Tribute Media, Boise State Public Radio, and Ronald McDonald House. Before that, she was an editor at The Arbiter and earned her degrees in journalism and dance at Boise State University.

Amid a very competitive applicant pool, Taylor stood out for her ability to think strategically about people-forward communications, her organized project management, clear and concise communication style, thoughtful graphic design, and her strong understanding of equity and justice. Our communications department will be more robust and engaging because of Taylor's many impressive qualities.

I came on as Communications Director in November 2023, making me the newest director on staff. In my first year, I learned about affiliate-specific communications, leadership in advocacy, and organizational direction, sometimes through trial by fire, but with a ton of support from my colleagues. I am now refocusing the department to shift away from capacity-hungry reactionary comms to proactive, unapologetic community leadership.

Nationally, Idaho is where the fight is. If an egregious attack on a community's rights can be stopped in Idaho, it can be stopped anywhere. And we're just scrappy enough to pull it off.

I am working to sharpen our focus in comms to strategically targeted spaces and communities where we currently don't have a presence, while growing our online presence in a way that shifts negative stereotypes, rather than only speaking to long-time supporters and impacted communities, as much as we love that.

Doing this is no easy feat, as comms experts across the country in politics, advocacy, and organizing are scrambling to figure out how to best cut through the noise, counter disinformation, and empower the people to believe in the court system and in our democracy again. There's no clear answer, no one-size-fits-all solution, no definitive state of perfection; such is the challenge and beauty of comms advocacy.

Working in communications at the ACLU of Idaho is a unique privilege because this department is the final step in large projects and we're often the first interaction people have with the organization. We will always be strong, just, compassionate, and eager defenders of liberty and justice. Moving forward, we will be focused, bold, and, hey, why not have a little fun while doing it, too?

Community Spotlight

Rebecca De León | COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR



Andy Gael del Toro Obeso (he/él) Embracing Power & Service

Andy Gael del Toro Obeso, a student at the College of Western Idaho pursuing a degree in political science, initially came to the ACLU of Idaho over a year ago looking for volunteer work because a political science professor told him that if he wanted to make a career in politics, he needed to start by volunteering.

Since then, he has transformed from a helpful volunteer to an outspoken powerhouse advocate, who also still volunteers at the ACLU.

Andy volunteers helping the ACLU's legal department by reading and categorizing the intakes the organization receives. Through this, he is exposed to the myriad ways that people's civil liberties are violated with no repercussions, particularly among incarcerated individuals – something he admits opened his eyes to the impact of systemic issues.

Staff said that when Andy started, he was a bright young man who was shy and rarely spoke and was always kind, respectful, and eager to help. Now, Andy fearlessly joins staff at rallies, protests, and community gatherings, in full resistance regalia, shouting alongside the loudest chanters.

A Nampa native, Andy credits his family for his passion and intelligence. His parents are immigrants from Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico. He has a younger sister who still attends high school in Boise, keeping him mindful of protecting the next generation, and an older brother whom he credits for teaching him politics and critical thinking.

Andy admits that growing up, he had a politically conservative mentality, but his older brother – a speech and debate champion and someone who obtained a bachelor's in political science – challenged his thinking and reasoning.

Now, Andy thinks deeply about systemic changes and how they can reform society. He saw the racism that his family and other Latine families experienced, and began challenging the designed structures that support that.

The ACLU of Idaho wishes to thank Andy for his dedication to the organization and to enhancing civil liberties and for his fierce and unapologetic advocacy.

Nikson Mathews (they/he) To Marching & Running

Among community leaders who seem to be powered by some unlimited energy source, Nikson Mathews stands out as exceptional, even among them.

Just this year, Nikson ran a powerful and hopeful campaign for the House, District 16, Seat B. Although this campaign did not result in a spot in the statehouse, Nikson successfully paved the way for other openly trans Idahoans to run for office as an example of placing community first.

During and after their campaign, Nikson has been a superstar volunteer and supporter of the ACLU of Idaho and the LGBTQ+ community, helping organize queer-affirming events and stepping up any time a difficult conversation was needed which resulted in some of the most powerful testimony in the legislative session.

On top of this, Nikson helped re-launch the Queer Caucus of the Idaho Democratic Party and now serves as the caucus chair. Nikson is also a driving force behind Add The Words, an LGBTQ+ community mobilizing and mutual aid organization.

Nikson was born and raised in a small farming community in southeast Idaho and now works as creative director for a creation agency in Boise, where he puts his BFA in graphic design from Boise State University to us – in a field he’s spent 11 years in.

From an early age, his parents, a retired school teacher and postmaster, instilled in him the values of hard work, kindness, and active service; they organized a youth baseball league and founded the local Rural Fire District, earning them the “Idaho Gem” award.

Nikson also understands the financial struggles many Idahoans face, having lived in inadequate housing and worked multiple jobs to make ends meet. Today, he shares a home with his partner, Reilly, and their spirited pup, Maisie, living the kind of happy, fulfilling life he believes every Idahoan deserves.

The ACLU of Idaho applauds Nikson and his fierce advocacy, incredible work ethic, and courageous heart.

Bonnie Violet Quintana (she/her) Uplifting Trans Joy

The ACLU of Idaho is proud to highlight Bonnie Violet Quintana, a drag artist, chaplain, and trans community leader who has worked to create spaces where trans joy and resilience can thrive.

As a trans woman who grew up in southern Idaho, Bonnie Violet has addressed the hostility against trans folks in Idaho with love and joy, organizing Idaho’s first Trans March right before the Boise Pride Festival this year, among other community efforts. The Boise Trans March represented a new tradition – one rooted in celebration rather than political activism and marked a milestone for the community, setting a precedent for future years.

Bonnie Violet brought her unique blend of performance and ministry to the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Idaho, organizing a drag-centric service that celebrated sanctuary and inclusion. The service featured drag performances interwoven with faith, including a cancer survivor’s testimony and symbolic rituals set to music.

As host of the “Drag & Spirituality” podcast, Bonnie Violet largely contributes a broader effort to expand drag, queer identity, and being an Idahoan beyond traditional venues.

The Boise Trans March, the first of its kind in Idaho, was successfully organized and led by Bonnie Violet, which more than 1,000 people in attendance. It signified a shift toward a more public space for trans acceptance and visibility, shifting the narrative from struggle to one of resilience, community, joy, and pride despite the mounting challenges.

The Idaho Trans March also served as a call to allies. By participating in a celebration rather than solely focusing on the hardships faced by trans people, allies are invited to witness and support the joy of the community.

The ACLU of Idaho applauds Bonnie Violet and her strength as she leads the community with love, communicating a strong message to all of the Gem State: trans people are here and deserve to thrive in Idaho.



ACLU
Idaho

ACLU of Idaho
P.O. Box 1897
Boise, ID 83701
208-344-9750



FALL / WINTER 2024
IDAHO LIBERTY