

Mississippi has the reputation of being one of the most conservative states in the union. Some may say it is the buckle of the Bible Belt. Mississippians have the reputation of being the most charitable in the nation. But that spirit of charity is overshadowed by the dichotomy of the realities in which the citizens of Mississippi live. The dramatic racial and economic disparities in our state tell the story of a Mississippi that is home to two histories. Which side of the proverbial track one is standing on dictates whether the history is heritage or horror.

Building a racially equitable state means working across the lines that divide our communities to restore, and in some cases establish, relationships wherein all Mississippians are treated with dignity, fairness and afforded justice. This means creating opportunities for law enforcement officers to work transparently and to remain accountable to the communities they are to serve. It means reducing Mississippi's over-reliance on incarceration. It means promoting a climate of care and respect in schools and in public

accommodations for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender students and citizens. It means using innovation to increase access to the right to vote and restoring the right to vote to formerly incarcerated men and women.

Mississippi must acknowledge its history and the resulting racialized policies that make so many people, especially the most vulnerable, feel unsafe, unsure and uneasy about their future. These policies have led to the departure of our youth and act as a repellant to businesses necessary to help our struggling economy. We know that the politics of hate do not accidentally hurt and divide us; they intentionally diminish the humanity of marginalized people.

The ACLU of Mississippi earnestly believes that despite the often harsh, divisive and emotionally draining cultural and political landscape, people have a vision for a better Mississippi. To that end, the ACLU of MS 2019 Equity Agenda focuses on reforms that can be made at the state and local level to positively impact **freedom, justice and equity in our state.**

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES
of MISSISSIPPI

2019 is the 50th year anniversary of the establishment of the ACLU of Mississippi. We were founded in the thick of the Civil Rights Movement. In Mississippi at that time, Civil Rights workers were being beaten, arrested and killed for demonstrating against unjust laws and institutionalized discrimination. Basic Constitutional rights were being violated daily, from the right to vote, to the right to speak out against one's government without arrest, to the right of equal treatment under the law.

Since our founding in 1969, the ACLU has grown in numbers and strength, but we continue to hold true to our founding mission: promoting, defending, and extending civil liberties to all Mississippians with emphasis on issues related to criminal justice reform, educational opportunities, equal access/equality for all, voter rights, and governmental transparency and accountability. We accomplish our mission through legislation, litigation, and advocacy.

ACLU Mississippi

This agenda provides Mississippi leadership clarity around goals that will create a more equitable state, and guidance to help this state avoid policymaking that perpetuates structural racism. This agenda seeks to help us come together around clear solutions that build a different narrative.

ACLU
Mississippi

2019 Equity Agenda



1 / CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS



Mississippi’s addiction to arrest and imprisonment is wasteful, harms families and communities, and does not provide opportunities for redemption. We, therefore, ask legislators to pass *smart justice* bills that:

- Establish community-oriented and transparency guidelines for law enforcement agencies that utilize technology including body worn cameras, stingray devices, drones and other technologies that capture personal information for which there is an expectation of privacy;
- Allocate more funding for alternatives to incarceration, including more funding for chemical dependency treatment, mental health treatment, and other forms of treatment;
- Revise pretrial detention laws that reduce unnecessary imprisonment, are based upon individual assessment of the ability to pay, and measure risk to society;
- Create alternatives to detention that have shown to be generally more effective at reducing recidivism rates;
- Establish data collection and analysis practices that contextualize the scope, nature, and magnitude of disparities throughout the spectrum of the criminal justice system. Disaggregate data at all major decision points by race, ethnicity, and gender, and further by geography and offense; and
- Oppose the creation of any legislation that creates a new crime or amends language that changes a non-violent or property crime from a misdemeanor to a felony.



2 / VOTER REFORMS



A healthy and strong democracy must include the voices of all citizens. We ask legislators to *Let Mississippi Vote* by expanding access. Support legislation that:

- Ensures every registered voter is eligible to vote early;
- Modernizes our voter registration system;
- Restores the vote back to formerly incarcerated women and men;
- Promotes the voting rights of transgender Mississippians;
- Ends defacto disenfranchisement for pre-trial detainees held in local county jails;
- Removes barriers to absentee voting for college students and other marginalized communities; and
- Opposes any bill that suppresses the right to vote of any eligible Mississippian.



PHOTO BY: DEKEITHER STAMPS

3 / EQUALITY REFORMS



We are all Mississippi! Every person in our state should be treated with dignity and respect. Every person should be afforded the opportunity to achieve the American Dream. We ask that legislators:

- Build more equitable educational opportunities;
- Invest in closing wage disparities for women. Remove barriers to pay equity through higher education access, degree attainment, and childcare program provisions, protect victims of domestic violence, as well as provide targeted training and pipelines to non-traditional careers;
- Secure state civil rights protections for all Mississippians regardless of gender, race, age, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation; and
- Oppose any legislation that attempts to curtail any person’s right to make their own healthcare decision.

ACLU
MS

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The ACLU of MS will publish a Legislative Score Card at the end of the 2019 Legislative Session. The Score Card will highlight “Champions” of Equity and Inclusion. It will also educate the public regarding the record of legislators who fail to ensure racial, cultural, and economic justice for all Mississippians.