

MAKING MISSISSIPPI BETTER

An Introduction to The ACLU of Mississippi's 2015 Equity Agenda

BY KEIA JOHNSON, LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIST

The lessons learned 50 years ago during Freedom Summer, the knowledge gained since then, and the reality of things we still need to learn demonstrate the continued need for promotion of constitutional rights and the advancement of civil liberties today.

Every day in Mississippi, marginalized communities including communities of color, immigrant communities, people with disabilities, women, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community face barriers to true opportunity. The ACLU of Mississippi 2015 Equity Agenda highlights the unfinished business of achieving “justice for all” in Mississippi.

The path to this reality demands equity and inclusion for all of our diverse communities. It is our sincere hope that Mississippi's leadership will take initiative in pursuit of a better Mississippi. To realize this vision, racial, cultural and economic equity must be at the core of our values.

It is with this in mind, that in January 2015, the ACLU of Mississippi published its first ever Equity Agenda. We set out priorities in hopes that the agenda would serve as a guide to issues that remain unaddressed in Mississippi. It documented opportunities for our state legislators and governor to dismantle barriers and promote equity. While the agenda was not exhaustive, it should have been used as an informative tool.



During the 2015 Legislative Session, we expected our leaders to speak up for the disenfranchised and oppose policies that were detrimental to the welfare of our state. To “Promote Criminal Justice Reform” we asked that legislators seek to reduce Mississippi's prison population, promote community policing, transparency and accountability, and support restorative justice. We asked that legislators work to “Extend Equality to All Mississippians” by ensuring the equal treatment of all people, protecting women's rights, guaranteeing safe and supportive schools, and protecting

voting rights. Finally, we asked that legislators “Guarantee Freedom of Speech & Expression” by defending religious freedom and protecting freedom of expression.

The agenda was endorsed by other community organizations who believe that together we can make Mississippi better. These organizations are working individually and in coalition to advance justice on issues that impact racial, cultural and economic justice. Together, we seek to educate legislators, policy makers and the public to make them aware of some of the steps that are necessary for progress in Mississippi.

MEASUREMENT OF LEGISLATIVE PROGRESS ON ISSUES OF EQUITY IN 2015

We will publish a Legislative Score Card that will be available to the general public before the November elections. The Score Card will highlight those legislators who “championed” equity and inclusion. It will also hold accountable those who failed to promote racial, cultural and economic justice.

As we approach the 2015 elections, we will educate the public and increase awareness about where lawmakers have stood on the civil liberties issues that are important to them. We will strive to present an accurate, fair and unbiased presentation of the record. Stay tuned!

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A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On March 7th, I stood at the crest of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL, unsure of whether we should look back or forward. I stood there thinking of all the issues we are facing in Mississippi. The issues range from the absence of laws protecting citizens against discrimination, to the challenge of promoting transparency and accountability of our law enforcement agencies to ensure

young people of color are safe to walk our streets, all the way to unsafe prison conditions fed by mismanagement of private for profit companies. From where I stood in my mind's eye there was not much difference. And then I thought of the great organization I have the fortune of leading and the courageous staff with whom I work and I knew I should look forward.

As you will read in this letter, the ACLU of Mississippi has been tremendously busy in its work to protect constitutional rights and extend civil liberties. Our efforts have included vigorous legislative efforts which resulted in defeat of many bad bills to include House Bill 1305 intended to create an exemption to public records for pharmaceutical companies supplies lethal injection compounds; legal action in defense of children in school including action to protect students first amendment rights of expression and defending them against practices intended to push them into the school to prison pipeline; and our advocacy energies safeguarding citizens by requiring transparency and accountability of law enforcement agencies.

None of our efforts however would be possible without you. As you read this letter, I hope that you will feel a sense of pride in the work we are able to do because of your support. Please continue to contribute – together we are making Mississippi better!

Sincerely,
Jennifer Riley-Collins



ACLU Executive Directors Jennifer Riley-Collins of Mississippi, Howard Simon of Florida and Susan Watson of Alabama on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING DATES

June 6, 2015

September 12, 2015

Annual Meeting of the Membership

Annual Meeting of the Board
(Officer Election)

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2015 Legislative Session Comes to an End

BY KEIA JOHNSON, LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIST

The 2015 legislative session came to an official end on April 3rd 2015. Below is a breakdown of some of the key bills we actively supported or opposed during the 2015 Legislative Session. Bills are listed by issue area with their current status italicized.

Reduce Mississippi's Prison Population / Support Restorative Justice

Supported SB2059, SB2053, and HB602 – These measures were intended to authorize the creation of the “Re-Entry Council,” to help inmates successfully reintegrate into society. Legislation like this promotes principles of restorative justice and rehabilitation.

SB2059 and SB2053 died in Committee. HB602 was approved by the Governor.

Supported SB2780 – This legislation sought to provide immunity from arrest or prosecution for certain drug violations committed by a person seeking treatment for a drug overdose. The SB2780 “Good Samaritan Act” addresses substance abuse as a public health matter, not a law enforcement matter.

The language in SB2780 was combined with the language in HB692 to create “The Emergency Response and Prevention Overdose Act”. HB692 was approved by the Governor.

Supported HB173 “Ban the Box” – This bill would have eliminated barriers to employment for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Died in Committee.

Promote Community Policing, Transparency and Accountability

Proposed HB1279 – This bill, authored by the ACLU of MS in partnership with Rep. Chuck Espy, would increase police transparency and accountability. A win-win, it sought to protect the public against police misconduct and protect police from false accusations of misconduct.

Died in Committee.

Opposed HB1305 – Across the United States, drug companies are seeking to circumvent public disclosure

laws. HB1305 violated principles of transparency and open government.

Died in Committee.

Equal Treatment of All People

Opposed HB714 – Under HB714 there would be a rebuttable presumption formed that a child being placed in the custody of a homosexual parent is not in the best interest of the child. This bill fostered discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Died in Committee.

Proposed HB408 and SB2107 – The bills mandated that all sections of the Mississippi Code be amended to require the use of Person First Respectful language when referencing people with disabilities. Mississippi’s laws currently use outdated and offensive terminology in reference to people with disabilities.

HB408 died in Committee. SB2107 passed the House and Senate. The bill’s conference report was filed and is now due from the Governor.

Supported SB2499 – SB2499 sought to authorize the issuance of Racial Impact Statements to determine how proposed legislation may affect certain populations. The legislation would have provided legislators with an important new tool for addressing racial inequality in Mississippi.

Died in Committee.

Proposed HB652 and SB2498 – An affordable college education should be accessible to everyone, but currently, many immigrants cannot access higher education within the state because they are required to pay non-resident tuition. These measures were intended to allow all students to receive in state college tuition and financial aid at Mississippi Colleges & Universities.

Both died in Committee.

Protect Women’s Rights

Supported HB113, HB12, and HB1200 – The purpose of these bills was to create the “Fair Pay Act” to require employers to pay equivalent pay for equivalent jobs— regardless of sex, race, national origin, age or disability.

All died in Committee.

Opposed SB2138 – This measure intended to increase the minimum waiting period before a woman can have an abortion from 24 hours to 72 hours.

Died in Committee.

Guarantee Safe and Supportive Schools

Supported HB429 – HB429 sought to directly tackle the school to prison pipeline in Mississippi by requiring that schools annually report unlawful activity to the Mississippi Department of Education. The bill also required ongoing training for school staff and law enforcement professionals.

Died in Committee.

Proposed HB478 and SB2332 – These bills would have mandated “prior to placement” training for School Resource Officers in the areas of child adolescent development, cultural competence and building relationships with students; deescalating violent situations; identifying the social, emotional, and mental needs of the students; directing youth to appropriate services rather than using force; and due process protections for students.

HB478 died in Committee. SB2332 passed the House and Senate but after making it out of conference, died on the calendar.

Proposed HB750 and SB2474; Supported HB573 and SB2466 – Mississippi schools have a real problem with student bullying. Our bullying laws fail to address the

LEGISLATIVE SESSION CONTINUES ON PAGE 4

fact that some student populations are statistically proven to fall victim to bullying at much higher rates than others. In 2015, the ACLU of MS and other social justice organizations offered bills intended to amend the state's bullying laws to enumerate categories of victims, and mandate the creation of anti-bullying policies for school districts.

HB750, SB2474 and SB2466 all died in Committee. HB573 died on the floor.

Protect Voting Rights

Opposed HB932- This measure was intended to require registrars to mail a voter registration card to the mailing address provided on an applicant's voter registration form. As HB932 was written, individuals would be allowed to change their address over the phone, but their voter registration cards would still be mailed to the address on their original application. As a result, countless voters may never have received their voter registration cards, even though they had taken measures to ensure that they could legally vote.

Died in Committee.

Defend Religious Freedom

Opposed HB493, HB1218, and HB177 – In violation of the Constitution, these bills would have prohibited the application of foreign law.

HB493 and HB1218 died in Committee. HB177 was approved by the Governor.

Protect Freedom of Expression/Privacy

Opposed HB347- HB347 failed to place any restrictions on law enforcement use, retention, and disclosure of captured images from drones. We support legislation that regulates the use of drones, but that legislation must require a search warrant for drone use by law or regulatory enforcement agencies and establish clear data retention limitations, and disclosure requirements so that the public is aware of the uses being made of drones.

Died in Committee.

Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Law Enforcement

BY REBECCA CURRY, DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Mississippians deserve law enforcement that is committed to promoting public safety and fair treatment of all people. Recently publicized incidents—from Ferguson to New York City—highlight a trend of excessive police force, shedding light on pervasive patterns of racial profiling and discriminatory enforcement of criminal laws in communities of color. It is clear from widespread protests and heated debates that there is growing distrust of police within the very communities they are sworn to serve.

We believe that body-worn cameras and citizen journalists are part of the solution of promoting greater transparency in law enforcement. Knowledge of police activity enhances the ability of the public to hold officers accountable for their actions. By capturing the true version of events, we can prevent the unfortunate dilemma of radically divergent personal accounts that sometimes accompany instances of police violence.

Body-worn cameras are a win-win, helping to guard the public against misconduct by law enforcement, while also helping protect police against false accusations of abuse. While we applaud efforts to bring bodycams to Mississippi patrol officers, it is critical that they are accompanied by a framework of strong policies. Accordingly, we are working with several law enforcement agencies across the state, including the Hinds County Sheriff's Department and the Jackson Police Department, to develop procedures governing bodycam usage.



During the legislative session, we worked with Representative Chuck Espy to introduce HB1279. It would have established state-wide bodycam policies. For example, the bill would have ensured continuous recording during interactions with the public, and it included provisions aimed at protecting the privacy of individual recording subjects. Unfortunately, this measure died in

committee. Over the summer we plan to build support for such legislation in hopes that it will be re-introduced.

Beyond bodycams, citizen journalists are equally significant. Pursuant to the 1st Amendment of the U.S Constitution, the public has a right to video-record and share footage of law enforcement acting in their official capacity in any public space. Under the 4th Amendment, officers may not confiscate devices or demand to view content without a warrant. Nevertheless, police too often order people to stop recording, seize personal property, or even detain individuals for exercising this freedom.

We sent letters to 82 sheriff and 28 police departments across the state, encouraging local law enforcement to establish policies and training relevant to the citizen journalists. As of March, nine agencies have adopted policies that expressly recognize the "right to record." We are continuing to push for more agencies to adopt policies and train their forces regarding this right. By proactively ensuring that all officers are aware of their obligation to respect this right, we can avoid conflicts, prevent constitutional violations, and further spread knowledge about police activity.

Keeping Mississippi Students Safe

BY L. RENE' HARDWICK, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR

"Scream rooms," "a boy stuffed in a duffel bag" and "handcuffed and face-down on the floor" are not descriptors one would expect to associate with environments parents entrust their children to each day. In fact, parents expect schools to be places where their children receive an equitable and equal education; places where teachers and students alike, are honored and valued in a safe and secure environment. However, for far too many students across Mississippi, this is not the reality. Unfortunately, Mississippi is one of five states that lacks a statute, regulation or even nonbinding guidelines to the use of restraint and seclusion in schools.

In response to this issue the ACLU of Mississippi has acquired grant funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in support of a Keeping Students Safe project. This initiative is designed to improve outcomes of Mississippi's students with disabilities and students of color by restricting the use of restraint and seclusion on vulnerable children.

In a 2009 Federal Government



Accountability Report, it was reported that each year, hundreds of children are being injured - some seriously - while others, during incidents involving restraint and seclusion, have resulted in death. Restraint and seclusion are methods used to control children who exhibit challenging behaviors. When implemented incorrectly and disproportionately, restraint and seclusion are the most dangerous so-

called disciplinary practices that continue to threaten all students, particularly students with disabilities and students of color. Research shows that such methods - which include forced immobilization, sensory deprivation and physical harm - are more akin to torture and can be harmful to a child's cognitive, social and emotional development.

Every child has the right to be free from restraint and seclusion unless he or she poses a clear and imminent physical danger to him or herself or to others. We are committed to supporting this effort by: fostering collaborations and venture partnerships within the targeted areas; increasing data collection, public awareness, advocacy, training on preventive and intervention supports and services, and best practices methods; and reducing the use of exclusionary discipline among students with disabilities and students of color. As freedom's watchdog, the ACLU of Mississippi is committed to restricting and reducing the use of restraint and seclusion in schools.

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www.aclu-ms.org/mobile-justice

Learn how you can promote accountability and transparency by becoming a citizen journalist with our Mobile Justice Android app! The iPhone version will be available in the next few months.



WELCOME

L. Rene' Hardwick

Rene' joins the ACLU of Mississippi as an Advocacy Coordinator to specifically work on reducing restraints and seclusion in schools. She previously served as Director for the Hinds County Justice Court Misdemeanor Drug Court for four years.

For over 13 years prior, Rene' has held Administrative positions in higher education as a Director, Associate Professor, Archivist, IT Specialist, and Academic/University Librarian. Over the span of 20 years, she has voluntarily advocated for and provided consulting



services related to meeting the educational needs of children in K-12 learning environments.

Rene' is a native of Jackson and obtained her B.S. Degree from Spelman College, Atlanta, GA. She completed graduate

work in Educational Technology & Instructional Design, with a specialization in Educational Psychology from Michigan State University. Rene' earned a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from Jackson State University.

Voter Intimidation Still on the Agenda

BY JENNIFER RILEY-COLLINS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This piece was originally featured as an op-ed in the Clarion Ledger on March 7th, 2015

It's hard not to measure our words on the subject of voter intimidation. Speak too forcefully, and some will accuse you of imagining conspiracy theories. Too softly, and people won't pay attention. But standing under the dome of the Mississippi Capitol in Jackson and listening to legislators attempting to chip away at hard-won rights of this state's people has a way of getting my dander up.

Let me be crystal clear: Many legislators in the state House would like nothing better than for voters to stay home on election days. The tactics may have changed since the outright violence of the Civil Rights Era, but the strategy—and the hoped-for outcome—is the same: Don't upset the status quo.

These lawmakers do not want voters to approve ballot Initiative 42, which will mandate adequate school funding instead of leaving it at their discretion. The tactics include putting a competing initiative (called Alternative 42) on the ballot to ensure splitting the vote so that the state isn't required to change a thing.

Rep. John Moore, R-Brandon, chairman of the House Education Committee, also wants to intimidate public-school teachers. In House Bill 449, Moore proposed not only to stop teachers and administrators from speaking out about political issues on the job, he wanted them fined up to \$10,000 if they dare break the rules.

Moore's bill died, thankfully. If it had passed, it's doubtful if it could have survived a legal challenge. Clearly, such a tactic denies the constitutional First Amendment right of all citizens to freely speak out. In this case, Moore's bill targeted those who might speak against a policy that affects every child attending public school in the state. That's simply wrong, and Mississippians must stand united against such tactics.

Fifty years ago last month, on March 7, 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led



some 600 marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala. The plan was to walk the 50 miles to Montgomery, but on this day, the walkers would not arrive at their destination. Just across the Alabama River, a phalanx of roughly 150 armed sheriffs, policemen and white citizens, many mounted on horses, waited to stop the peaceful demonstrators. And stop them they did—with billy clubs, teargas, bullwhips and fists. Fifty-eight marchers required hospitalization when the smoke cleared.

The 600 wanted to exercise their right to vote. They understood that changing an entrenched system of bigotry and racism required outvoting those invested in keeping that system intact and inviolable. They had had enough of poll taxes and impossible questionnaires and organized violent repression. It took a federal hearing and pressure from an outraged nation to allow the march, but three weeks later, 3,200 demonstrators walked across the bridge and on to Montgomery.

Clearly, the cause of justice has shifted dramatically since those bad old days, not only for African Americans, but for all Americans, including women, the LGBT community and children. Some circumstances have not. In Mississippi, the difference between African Americans and white children

graduating from high school is 69 percent versus 82 percent, and blacks are three times more likely to spend time behind bars than whites. And, similar to many other states, in Mississippi, a felony conviction means disenfranchisement.

One key to having an active, informed and responsive citizenry—all antithetical to the status quo—is education, so it is not surprising to find virulent opposition to fully funding public education in Mississippi. The arguments, based almost entirely on money, have tremendous short-term appeal. No one enjoys paying taxes. In the long-term, though, we all pay for short-sighted savings. Don't invest in maintaining your home today, and pay through the nose to replace your crumbling foundation tomorrow. Don't adequately fund schools today, and build more prison cells tomorrow.

Fifty years ago, men and women of all races fought so that the right to vote would be enshrined in this nation's Constitution for all of her people. Remember that power, and the responsibility, this right—and the right to freely speak out—gives you today. As U.S. Rep. John Lewis—who suffered a skull fracture at the hands of police on that Alabama bridge 50 years ago—is fond of saying, when you pray for change, move your feet.



ACTION DOCKET

Rankin County Gay-Straight Alliance

BY CHARLES IRVIN, LEGAL DIRECTOR



On January 14th, The Clarion Ledger read, “Rankin County school board members approved a change in the district’s school club policy on Wednesday after a group reportedly tried to form a gay club.” This headline caught our attention. We immediately sent a demand letter to the Rankin County School Board and Superintendent advising them of the law.

In 1984, The Equal Access Act specifically provided that a school cannot deny equal access to student activities because of the “religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings.” Since any moral objections the school may have to a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) are based on the religious, political, or philosophical views of its members, such an objection isn’t recognized by the

Act. Simply put, the school cannot ban a GSA based on issues of morality if the GSA doesn’t interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities in the school. Thus, abstinence-only sexual education is not a proper reason to block the formation of a GSA club.

As a direct result of our actions, we were contacted by several of the students involved and began crafting their plan of action, to form a Gay-Straight Alliance.

A Gay-Straight Alliance is a student-run club, typically in a high school or middle school, which provides a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and work to end homophobia and transphobia. (gsanetwork.org). Our efforts spurred an



increase from student groups across the state in having the ACLU of Mississippi review their club’s status and help them determine whether they are being treated fairly under the law.

If you know of a student in a similar situation, have them contact our office at 601-354-3408 or email office@aclu-ms.org.



ACTION DOCKET

Advocating for Restraint and Seclusion Policy Change

BY MORGAN MILLER, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

In December 2014, we, along with our partners Mississippi Center for Justice, Mississippi Parent Training Institute, and Families as Allies, publicly commented on a restraint and seclusion policy at the Jackson Public School (JPS) Board of Trustees meeting. We expressed our concerns regarding a revised policy that the JPS Board was proposing to enact.

The policy outlined the use of restraint and seclusion techniques in school but it was in need of some significant changes. It failed to focus on creating a safe environment for students and faculty, lacked clarity in the definitions of the techniques that open the door for harm, and did not promote positive behavioral interventions, among other concerns.



After the meeting, we worked in partnership with the Superintendent, Dr. Cedric Gray, and members of the school board to craft a policy that outlined the use of restraint and

seclusion techniques in school.

In February 2015, the JPS Board adopted a revised policy that was an improvement from the original. As a result of our efforts, the revised policy has more emphasis on prevention, robust definitions, more specificity to the training component and inclusion of proper reporting guidelines.

We applauded the JPS Board's efforts in taking a generic policy and bringing added clarity for the benefit of students, parents and administrators. We will continue to work across the state to reduce and restrict the use of restraints and seclusion in schools to keep students safe.

Taking On Debtors Prisons In Mississippi

BY CHARLES IRVIN, LEGAL DIRECTOR

The ACLU of Mississippi is fundamentally opposed to the use of privatized for-profit misdemeanor probation. The ACLU of Mississippi and the ACLU National Racial Justice Program are investigating the use of for-profit probation companies who are the drivers of the debtors' prison. The reality is their supervisory tactics lead to extreme profits for companies at the expense of the poor. Those who cannot afford to pay are jailed.

Our preliminary investigations reveal that across Mississippi, a niche business has commenced the jailing of already impoverished citizens because they cannot afford to pay a fine. For-profit probation companies are erroneously promising municipalities with struggling budgets that they can collect the



fines owed more efficiently and at a greater rate than previously achieved.

No one should go to jail because they cannot afford to pay a fine. No one should be forced to endure the horrible choice of choosing between food, work or supervision fees. We understand the need to enforce the rule of law and the need for municipalities to collect

"Being poor is not a crime. The Supreme Court made that clear decades ago."

- NUSRAT CHOUDHURY, ACLU RACIAL JUSTICE PROGRAM

levied fines. However, we do not condone the practice of doing so on the backs of our poorest citizens, who are often disproportionately minority. The means must not justify the end.

Our goal is to illuminate their methods, reform state law and educate the public so that wherever these practices are occurring, we can end them. Our work across the state will continue as we work towards changing the practice of for-profit probation.

Drug Testing Instrument Comes Out Against Use In TANF Program

BY CHARLES IRVIN, LEGAL DIRECTOR

During the 2014 Legislative Session, House Bill (HB) 49 requiring the drug testing of new applicants for TANF was passed into law despite our diligent efforts in opposition.

On March 24, 2014, HB 49 was signed into law. We knew our efforts to ensure that economic justice prevailed could not end here.

We continuously monitored the proposed rules and responded immediately when a policy was introduced by the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS). We provided public comments and were successful in blocking implementation through a public hearing, requiring MDHS revise its policy. Again, we continued to monitor this measure in protection of Mississippi's most vulnerable children and impoverished families.

We truly believe it is not a crime to be poor and that the poor should not be treated differently. Additionally, we have remained consistently concerned with the improper use of the SASSI instrument to determine drug usage.

The SASSI Institute expressed their unequivocal opposition to use the SASSI instrument for the purpose of



disqualifying or denying applicants for public assistance. The purpose of the SASSI is to help people who have substance use disorders. To use the SASSI to discriminate against individuals, such as disqualifying job applicants or to deny public assistance,

violates the purpose of the SASSI and is in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. More to the point, they make clear that SASSI screening results do not provide evidence that an individual is using or abusing a controlled substance. Thirty eight of the roughly 3,600 welfare applicants in Mississippi have been required to take a drug test after completing the SASSI questionnaire; of those thirty eight, only two have failed.

The ACLU of Mississippi along with our key partners recently met with MDHS to request that they stop using the SASSI and seek any avenues that would relieve this unnecessary burden from TANF applicants. We continue to refine our legal and advocacy strategies around the contentious use of the SASSI instrument.

If you know any potential TANF applicants affected by this, please direct them to the ACLU of Mississippi complaint form on our website at www.aclu-ms.org.

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ACLU OF MISSISSIPPI OPEN HOUSE



BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Melanie Deas

I am excited to be a new member of the ACLU of Mississippi Board of Directors. This appointment echoes a lifelong enthusiasm for the protection of rights. I have been an advocate for freedom of speech most of my life. In college, I began hosting "First Amendment" movie nights to protest censorship, an issue that was becoming increasingly important to me as an artist. Since I moved back home to Mississippi and began working with organizations like the ACLU of Mississippi and Equality Mississippi, I have realized



that while we have made significant progress, Mississippi still has work to do ensuring everyone has the civil liberties to which they are entitled. Too many people have asked me why I care so much about issues that they don't see as having any personal impact on my life. I tell them I that as a human being I care about the lives and rights of all people: I don't have to be gay to support LGBTQ equality; an immigrant to support immigration reform; in prison to support protecting prisoners. We are all connected.

INTERN UPDATE

Nikita McMillian

Nikita McMillian, a student at Mississippi College School of Law and former ACLU of Mississippi Legal Intern won "The Best Casenote Award" from *Mississippi College Law Review*. During her summer 2014 internship, she spent a considerable amount of time organizing a public hearing to delay a law to require drug testing for TANF recipients. This work helped to change the Mississippi Department of Human Services policy to improve the outcomes for children affected by the law.

In the fall, after becoming a member of Law Review at Mississippi College School of Law, Nikita began writing about poverty, public misconceptions about the poor, and questioning the mandatory drug testing of welfare beneficiaries. Her casenote is titled, *From Loving Mother to Welfare Queen to Drug Addict? Lebron v. Sec'y. Fla. Dep't of Children & Families and the Evolving Public View of the Poor as a Class of Sub-humans with Sub-rights*. Her publication will appear in a published issue likely in 2016.

Nikita's casenote faculty advisor, Professor Angela Kupuenda, states, "Nikita's casenote is extremely well researched and powerfully written."

We are very proud of our former intern and look forward to seeing her excel in the future!



Nikita McMillian, Jennifer Riley-Collins, and Rita Santibanez at the 2014 ACLU-MS Annual Dinner.

Intern Spotlight

Kendra Martin

LEGAL INTERN

Mississippi College School of Law

Having a devout interest in the public interest law sector, my experience with the ACLU of Mississippi has been nothing less than rewarding! In addition to becoming fully

aware of rights I possess as an individual, I have been able to work with one of the most passionate and hard-working staff in Mississippi. ACLU of Mississippi has allowed me to attend prospective client meetings, visit prisons to conduct client interviews, and research a variety of topics and issues which impact the rights of Mississippi citizens.

In addition, the ACLU of Mississippi has given me independence on projects that is uncommon in the legal field as a legal intern. As a second year law student, being given the opportunity to work independently has allowed me to develop skills which I know will benefit me throughout my career. That is what makes the ACLU experience so rewarding. I have been given a chance to flourish, and find my passion. I encourage all law students to apply to the ACLU of Mississippi for a legal internship.

Victoria Mcgee

LEGISLATIVE INTERN

Jackson State University

I have had a wonderful experience at the ACLU of Mississippi as a legislative intern. This opportunity has given me the chance to engage legislators, policy makers and stake holders.

The ACLU of Mississippi has been helpful even in my everyday class participation. I am a Political Science major, and in

my American Legislative Process class, my participation and understanding of the subject area has tripled because I have been able to relate my hands on

experience at the capitol to what I have learned in class. As the legislative intern, I have taken a tally of key votes on different pieces of legislation. I have attended House and Senate Committee meetings and reported back to my internship supervisor. I have also shadowed Keia Johnson, the Legislative Strategist, and took note of her interactions with legislators as she educated them on issues of importance.

The amount of information and insight has had a tremendous impact on my life and career path choices. I now see how laws and policies that impact everyday citizens are shaped. I am glad the ACLU of Mississippi is here ensuring rights are defended. The environment is an amazing work place. I am so thankful for all the opportunities that have been provided through the ACLU.

TaJuana S. Bryant

ADVOCACY INTERN

Jackson State University

My experience interning at the ACLU of Mississippi has been very interesting and informative. I have been a part of projects that I feel are very significant at this time in our lives as American citizens. This opportunity has allowed me to learn how the law actually affects the lives of everyday people. This has deepened my interest in the work the ACLU of Mississippi does. The staff here is very friendly and have welcomed me with



open arms as if we have known each other for years. I feel like I play an important part in making a difference in the lives of Mississippians every day that I am here.

Azhia Jones

COMMUNICATIONS INTERN

Jackson State University

Before I started with the ACLU of Mississippi this semester, I did a lot of research and I was impressed to see the things that they stand for. I have had the privilege of working with and shadowing Morgan for three months. This opportunity has given me more insight into the role non-profit communications play in building support for the program work of the ACLU; in educating the public on key issues; and using social media for policy and advocacy.

I traveled to Selma, Alabama for the 50th Anniversary of "Bloody Sunday." I was able to capture the stories of thousands of people as we walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. This was the most moving experience I have ever had. The experience made me think of the importance of the ACLU-MS Mobile Justice app for young people today as I will be assisting with the launch of the iPhone version in the next few months. These experiences have spurred an interest in criminal justice and voting rights.

The ACLU has allowed me to not only learn more about the world around me, but myself as well. Not every day are you able to work with people who are passionate about their jobs. This is a team full of selfless individuals who remarkably protect the rights of all citizens. As I continue to intern with the ACLU of Mississippi, I anticipate acquiring more knowledge, not only on the communications side, but from others as well.



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