

Criminal Justice Reform: A 2016 Advocacy Update

BY **BLAKE FELDMAN**, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR

In recent years, Mississippi has begun the process of reforming its criminal justice system to improve public safety and reduce state spending. Recent data suggests we're on the right path. Mississippi's imprisonment rate decreased more than any other state in 2014, largely due to the passage of HB 585. We may no longer have the second highest incarceration rate in the country, but we cannot be satisfied with fifth. There's a lot more to be done.

If the first step to solving a problem is recognizing there is one, the first potential misstep is underappreciating the extent of that problem. Even in light of this unprecedented decrease in the state's prison population, our incarceration rate is only surpassed by four states. In other words, Mississippi still cages humans at a rate higher than any country on Earth.

All things considered, HB 585 and the prison population decline of 2014 is the first step in a long journey to reform our criminal system into a criminal justice system. The importance of sentencing reform is undeniable, and the ACLU of Mississippi will continue to push more reforms that weren't included in HB 585.

At a time when state officials are considering reforms to assist offenders with successful re-entry upon release, we are continuing to advocate for pre-



release Medicaid enrollment for eligible incarcerated persons.

We are also continuing our work to bridge the gulf of mistrust between law enforcement and the community. In response to the high profile police killings of 2014, local law enforcement agencies began equipping patrolmen with body cameras, but without proper legislative guidelines these cameras are the epitome of "one step forward, two steps back." We will work to ensure that legislative parameters are set so that body-worn cameras actually promote transparency, accountability, and properly balance privacy concerns of civilians.

We are also working with legislators to pass a bill requiring law enforcement officers receive written consent to search vehicles when no other lawful basis – such as probable cause or exigent circumstances – exist. Consensual

searches are bad policy to begin with, but if they continue to be part of police practice, we must require that consent be freely and voluntarily given by civilians who understand their right to refuse.

Finally, we will demand, without compromise, that municipal courts in our state operate within the confines of Due Process. In September, we filed a federal lawsuit against the City of Biloxi for operating a

modern-day debtors' prison, and we have received reports of similar experiences in other towns throughout the state. Poverty is not a crime, and we will not accept any courtroom culture that tramples on poor Mississippians in violation of Fourteenth Amendment.

There's no room for cynicism in this fight, and we are cautiously optimistic our state is genuinely working towards having a fair and just criminal system. However, it is paramount that we vigilantly require good intentions be accompanied with good policy. It is essential that our advocacy overcomes state officials' complacency when we've only begun criminal justice reform.

Check out our 2016 Legislative Preview on page 3 to learn more about what the ACLU of MS has in store this session...

ACLU-MS STAFF

Jennifer Riley-Collins
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dylan Singleton
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS &
ADMINISTRATION

Tabuthia Bell
FINANCE OFFICER

Zakiya Summers-Harlee
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Erik Fleming
LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIST

L. Rene' Hardwick
ADVOCACY COORDINATOR

Todd Allen
ADVOCACY COORDINATOR

Blake Feldman
ADVOCACY COORDINATOR

Aisha Carson
ADVOCACY COORDINATOR

Charles Irvin
LEGAL DIRECTOR

Vacant
STAFF ATTORNEY

Syretta Salahadyn
INTAKE COORDINATOR

Azhia Jones
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

ACLU-MS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alison Steiner
BOARD PRESIDENT

Jack Williams
VICE PRESIDENT

Monica Galloway
TREASURER

Mary Figueroa
SECRETARY

Sam Edward Arnold
Melanie Deas

Charles Holmes

Justin Lofton

Alexander Martin

Laura Martin

Jake McGraw

Eddie Outlaw

Dan Roach

Julie Schroeder

Stephen Silberman

Dr. Temika Simmons

Catherine Sullivan

Cassandra Welchlin

FOUNDATION BOARD

Dorothy Abbott

Andy Guerra

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Members,

When we were last together at the Jazz Brunch, there was an air of hopefulness as we approached what could be possible. I heard and participated in conversations about what could be “if” and “when” in Mississippi. I left the room elated. A few weeks ago, I felt deflated when I read the outcomes from the November elections. But I said to myself and to this staff “this is why we exist”. The ACLU of MS exists because progress has never come easy here. Our work just got harder, but we are stronger and more determined to stand in defense of freedom and to extend equality to all Mississippians.

Members, we must all recognize our work just became more important. We must stand in the gap for vulnerable children especially in schools that are ill equipped to provide education and therefore funnel them into prison. We must push the envelope on equal protections for all people. We must ensure criminal justice reforms make social and just sense not just economic sense. We must not stand by and feel defeated - there is work yet to be done.

You will read in this newsletter about the hard work to challenge practices that make being poor a crime, about our legislative and advocacy efforts to establish protection from discrimination for all Mississippians, about the Sunflower County Systems Change Project and an update on protest protection in Stonewall County the wake of the death of Jonathan Sanders, and even an alert about use of drones. You will see that much work is being done across this state. But we need your help!

You, too, may have felt a little defeated on the morning of November 4th. Please stand with this great staff doing this work, and, now, even harder work. This harder work will take even more resources - please ask your friends, family, folk you see in the store to support this work. As we approach the end of the year, this is a great time to contribute and encourage others to make tax deductible donations. When you are having angry conversations about the election outcomes and the state of affairs, simply say, “Let’s not fuss about it. Let’s fight about it. Let’s put our money in the hands of the best fighter in the ring - the ACLU of MS.”

Together, we will make Mississippi better.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Riley-Collins

Leave a legacy of liberty for generations to come.

Thousands of passionate civil libertarians have stepped forward and expressed their most cherished values by making a deeply meaningful gift to the ACLU in their estate plans.

We invite you to join this special group of ACLU supporters who have made freedom, justice, and equality their legacy.

To learn more, or to take advantage of our estate planning resources, visit www.aclu.org/legacy or call toll-free 877-867-1025.

Upcoming Meetings of the Board of Directors:

December 12, 2015

March 6, 2016

June 5, 2016

September 17, 2016

Legislative Score Card and 2016 Equity Agenda



The ACLU of Mississippi, Inc. is publishing a Legislative Score Card and 2016 Equity Agenda. These advocacy tools will help you hold your legislators accountable for pursuing racial, cultural, and economic equity. Stay up to date by visiting our website at www.aclu-ms.org.

LAW ENFORCEMENT & TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY TRAINING BY CHARLES IRVIN, LEGAL DIRECTOR



In November, the ACLU of Mississippi partnered with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Mississippi, Mississippi Attorney General's Office, the Department of Justice Community Relations Service (CRS), and Southern Poverty Law Center to co-sponsor the "Law Enforcement and the Transgender Community Training." The purpose of this training was to educate law enforcement when interacting with citizens who identify themselves as transgender.

Law enforcement officers from across the state received tools to help them serve transgender communities more effectively by building trust, developing a network of reliable resources, and properly identifying and responding to allegations of hate crimes, harassment, and



violence. Law enforcement learned relevant terminology, gained an understanding of misconceptions that impact the prevention of and response to hate crime, and were exposed to strategies and resources for successful case development in cases involving transgender victims, witnesses, or community members.

After attending the Department of Justice CRS rollout training in Atlanta back in April 2014, our office brought together various partners to plan a Mississippi training for the Northern and Southern Jurisdictions in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney's Office. Our collaborative work with law enforcement came to fruition with November's trainings, and has helped to develop relationships with these agencies in an effort to affect change.

VETERAN POLITICAL STRATEGIST DONNA BRAZILE HEADLINES JAZZ BRUNCH

The ACLU of Mississippi hosted senior Political Strategist Donna Brazile at its Jazz Brunch in September. The Jazz Brunch followed our annual membership meeting and helped to raise funds for the organization. During her keynote, Brazile addressed voting rights, mass incarceration, and marriage equality. "I'm glad that the ACLU is fighting tooth and nail under the law."



We Are All Mississippi

BY TODD ALLEN, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR



The Mississippi economy will grow only as we provide opportunities for every Mississippian to live the best life possible. Prejudice prevents progress. Bias is bad for business. We must increase opportunities for every Mississippian to succeed in school, on the job and in our communities. We must eliminate barriers that limit freedom of expression. That's why the ACLU of Mississippi has developed the "We are ALL Mississippi" Campaign, a movement to urge state legislators to pass the Mississippi Civil Rights Act.

Mississippi is one of the few states where the legislature has yet to secure civil rights protections for everyone. The Mississippi Civil Rights Act will help to foster the best climate for customers, clients and guests who visit our state. Everyone has the right to be free from discrimination.

The Act will protect against discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or familial status.

The largest corporations in America use these same categories of discrimination in all of their policies and procedures. These businesses realize that creating a positive work environment for everyone is the only way for any business to thrive and to grow. However, 21st century businesses will find it difficult to relocate here as long as we allow 19th century practices to continue in the workplace.

Because our state lawmakers have failed to guarantee our civil rights, we remain vulnerable to discrimination. Despite the fact that black men and women have been elected to serve in dozens of

positions in local and state government, Mississippi state law does not protect people from racial discrimination on the job, in the school and in housing and public accommodations. The Mississippi Civil Rights Act will send a strong, clear message: we welcome everyone to the hospitality state.

Mississippians do not have any state civil rights protection from discrimination based on gender. There is no state law to keep any woman from not being hired or from being fired for simply being a woman. This is true even though men are still in the minority in Mississippi. Only 48% percent of Mississippians are men, while women make up a majority of the population with 52%.

In addition to race and gender, people with disabilities who make up 20% of Mississippi's population, have no state law to guarantee their civil rights. Federal regulation and legislation are insufficient to combat the discrimination and harassment that too many of our fellow Mississippians deal with on a daily basis.

Hospitality is not a new concept. It as old as the golden rule and based on the ancient commandment to love each other. Let's live up to our motto and be the hospitality state that we know that we can be.

It is not too late, but we need to act now. Contact your state representative and senator to let them know that you support the "We Are ALL Mississippi" campaign and the Mississippi Civil Rights Act.

Where is the Executive Director?

It has been an amazing two and a half years since I stepped out of combat boots and into high heels as Executive Director of this great organization. In September at the Jazz Brunch I told our guest that I was fortunate to lead a team of warriors who stand daily in defense of freedom. I likened this team to Soldiers who have sworn to protect and defend. Little did we know that I

would once again be called upon to put on my combat boots in full-time service of this nation. As Colonel Collins, I have been ordered to the Washington, DC area for a period of time.

Thankfully, the Board of Directors has approved a plan of action, which postures the ACLU of MS for success. I will continue to provide oversight and

direction as we challenge policies and practices that infringe on the exercise of freedom. I am also pleased that a Deputy Director of Programs will be joining our staff to help ensure our programs are integrated for greatest impact.

I value members input and encourage you to reach out. I can still be contacted at jriley-collins@aclu-ms.org



Sunflower County Systems Change Project

BY AISHA CARSON, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR



When a group of community members in Sunflower County, MS was asked: What are the words that come to mind when you think of Young Men and Boys of Color (YMBOC) in your community?, some people answered “potential.” Others said things like “misguided” or “misunderstood.” These conversations are helping to shape the Sunflower County Systems Change Project (SCSCP), a collaborative effort between the ALCU of Mississippi, Mississippi Center for Justice, Sunflower County Consolidated School District and its P-16 Council. Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, SCSCP is a community based systems change approach that addresses

school discipline, juvenile justice and media narrative of YMBOC.

Young Men and Boys of Color are most susceptible to the harsh realities of criminalization. Perceptions of YMBOC have dictated how people interact with them, even in school. The National ACLU reported that although black students account for only 14% of the children in American public schools, they are 42% of the students with multiple suspensions. Zero-tolerance discipline policies have resulted in black students facing disproportionately harsher punishment, making them three times

more likely to be suspended or expelled. With 31% of black students representing school-related arrests, black students, particularly YMBOC, are more likely to be caught in the school to prison pipeline through increased contact with the juvenile justice system.

The Sunflower County Systems Change Project is actively engaging the school district, juvenile justice system, media, and community stakeholders in an effort to establish best practices and supportive strategies that will create a model for improved outcomes for YMBOC. Stay tuned to aclu-ms.org for project updates.

Debtors' Prison Class Action Lawsuit

BY CHARLES IRVIN, LEGAL DIRECTOR



Qumotria Kennedy, Richard Tillery and Joseph Anderson – ordinary Mississippians failed by the municipal court system in Biloxi. They are plaintiffs in a class action lawsuit filed by the ACLU against the city of Biloxi, the chief of police, judge and a private probation company. These three individuals are among the victims of an illegal scheme that jails poor people for failure to pay fees and fines without a hearing. Nationally this practice is referred to as “Debtor’s Prisons,” and Biloxi is running one.

It’s been more than three decades since the Supreme Court banned the practice of locking people up because they can’t afford to pay court fines or fees, but allegations of modern-day debtor’s prisons have continued to crop up throughout the country.

“It’s a debtor’s prison out of the dark ages. Bottom-line: people are jailed because they don’t have money.”

- Nusrat Jahan Choudhury,
ACLU Racial Justice Program

Kennedy was thrown in jail for five nights following her arrest on a warrant for failure to pay traffic fines. Police arrested Anderson, who is disabled, on a warrant charging him with failure to pay a traffic fine. He sat behind bars for seven nights before going to court. Tillery, who is homeless, has been arrested nearly 90 times. In all of these cases, and in many others, the victims are told they can only

avoid jail if they pay the entire amount of outstanding court fines and fees up front.

The detainment, as is the case in each of our named plaintiffs, is not for the crime but the money owed. They are not provided an attorney to represent them in an ability to pay hearing and in many cases, they sit in the Harrison County Adult Detention Center for days and sometimes weeks before they are brought before the court again. This policy and practice must stop.

The lawsuit is a result of an investigation by the ACLU of Mississippi and the ACLU National Racial Justice Project.

FOR THE FULL COMPLAINT AND TO SHARE YOUR STORY, VISIT ACLU-MS.ORG.

**MOBILE JUSTICE
MISSISSIPPI NOW
AVAILABLE FOR
IPHONE AND ANDROID!**



Hold law enforcement accountable and keep your rights in the palm of your hand! Download Mobile Justice Mississippi.
www.aclu-ms.org/mobile-justice



IPHONE



ANDROID

Domestic Drones in Mississippi

BY BLAKE FELDMAN, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR



The use of domestic drones are not just a federal issue anymore. The Rankin County Sheriff's Office acquired a drone in October following the release of our white paper, *Domestic Drones: Cause for Concern?*, which outlined our concerns with the use of drones by government agencies.

Last year, the state legislature introduced a Drone Prohibition Act (HB 347), which was deficient in civil liberty protections. The ACLU of Mississippi actively lobbied against this proposal. Not only did the bill allow for law enforcement to conduct drone surveillance without a warrant, but

it also failed to establish clear standards for the retention and disclosure of the images and other data acquired through governmental drone use.

Privacy rights and civil liberties are at the heart of what it means to be American. There's so much room for our fundamental rights to be violated and – equally concerning – for the public's willingness to exercise those rights to be chilled because of mass surveillance.

Drone policy will be legislated and regulated in coming years, and we will continue to track legislative, policy, and industry developments within Mississippi – supporting those respecting privacy rights and zealously opposing those which do not.

[READ DOMESTIC DRONES: CAUSE FOR CONCERN? AT ACLU-MS.ORG.](#)

Protest Rights in Stonewall

BY BLAKE FELDMAN, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR



Jonathan Sanders was exercising his horse in the relative cool of night this summer when Stonewall Police Officer Kevin Herrington placed him in a lethal chokehold, which ultimately resulted in Jonathan's death. In response to community members eager to express their grief, anger, frustration and

demands for justice following the incident, the ACLU of Mississippi sent a letter urging Stonewall authorities to respect their First Amendment rights.

On September 1, our office received reports that the local government had implemented a policy requiring protests

of more than 25 people to receive prior permission. We provided the Board of Alderman and Mayor with notice that we were troubled by the reports we had received. We have maintained communication with Stonewall Chief of Police, who has been completely open to our involvement in drafting a protest ordinance. Thus far, recognizing that we are watching, Chief Michael Street, Mayor Glenn Cook, and the Board of Alderman have neither denied a permit for a planned protest nor shut down a protest.

We have also received reports of possible harassment and intimidation from nongovernmental actors. We have encouraged protesters to report intimidation to the ACLU of Mississippi and the local authorities – who have a lawful obligation to respond. We are continuing to monitor the situation.

Restraint and Seclusion: Pushing for Statewide Policy for All Children

BY L. RENE HARDWICK, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR



This summer, we brought you the stories of Cade and Krystin, two of the many children in Mississippi who have been impacted by restraint and seclusion in school. Cade, a 9-year old with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Central Auditory Processing, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, forced into a box by his teacher when he became upset at school. And 14-year old Krystin, who also suffers from Autism Spectrum Disorder, restrained, arrested, and placed overnight in the detention facility for disorderly conduct.

The passionate, emotional, and heart-wrenching testimonies of Cade and Krystin's parents, other caretakers, advocates and stakeholders were the highlights of two public hearings aimed at the Mississippi Department of Education's Proposed Draft Policy 4013-Restraint and Seclusion.

The ACLU of Mississippi in conjunction with the Concerned Citizens Group and other advocacy and disability agencies and organizations across the state facilitated the oral proceedings request, held in September and October. The hearings provided the forum for public testimony to be heard and documented by MDE concerning the urgent need to develop and expand upon draft Policy 4013.

Mississippi is one of 5 states that lacks any guidelines, regulations, mandates or legislation with respect to the use of restraint and seclusion, an aversive practice used as a form of punishment and discipline on students. These practices are disproportionately used on students with disabilities and against students of color.

While MDE is working to establish policies and procedures to protect our most vulnerable, the ACLU of MS believes that more work is required to develop a more holistic policy that keeps our students safe, which:

- Establishes prevention as the foundation for reducing the need or restraint and seclusion if not eliminating its use altogether.
- Ensures school leaders are involved.
- Provides a baseline to report and collect data regarding the use of restraint and seclusion.
- Economically benefits districts: Restraint and Seclusion use is violent, expensive and largely preventable. Research demonstrates that the use of prevention and positive approaches are cost saving.

- Promotes the safety of both children and teachers.
- Excludes the use of restraint and seclusion as a planned intervention in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Behavior Intervention Plan, (BIP), and 504 Plan, except in emergency responses when all else has failed and there is imminent danger of serious bodily injury.
- Promote alternatives, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports and other de-escalation techniques.

The approval and adoption of a comprehensive state-wide restraint and seclusion policy would clearly create safe schools for all children and school personnel.

The ACLU of MS has sounded the alarm and urges MDE to take action, for the academic futures of all children and for the state of Mississippi is dependent on it.

DO YOU HAVE A RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION STORY?

VISIT KEEPSTUDENTSSAFEMS.ORG TO SHARE AND FOR MORE INFORMATION.

Schoolhouse Rights Rock!

BY L. RENE HARDWICK, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR



In light of recent acts of violence and deaths at the hands of law enforcement, it is fair to conclude that there is an affront against the youth of America. Our most vulnerable, particularly African American males, children of color and disabled children across the nation, are disproportionately abused, criminalized, racially profiled and funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline—all right before the very lenses of our phones and cameras.

As part of our dedication and commitment to protect and defend the freedoms and liberties of all Mississippians, the ACLU of MS hosted its first annual Schoolhouse Rights Rock! created to promote public awareness and education of these rights in an effort to empower, inform, and influence change.

Designed as a “know your rights” campaign, middle and high school students across the state converged upon the Mississippi Museum of Art on Saturday, August 29, 2015 for the one-day back to school event. The program showcased a series of public education “Know Your Rights” forums for students, parents and advocates on issues pertaining to Restraint and Seclusion in Schools, Encounters with Law Enforcement, Schoolhouse Rights, and LGBTQ Rights.

New York-based performing arts troupe Theatre of the Oppressed interactively engaged participants through role play activities that applied knowledge and perception in solving real world issues. The troupe trained a group of willing and

excited students, who not only served as volunteers and co-facilitators during student workshops, but were also featured as the culminating theatrical performance on the main stage set against a life size backdrop which read: “Our Students Deserve Better: Support Safe Alternatives to Restraint and Seclusion.”

Kevin Fong, a nationally recognized facilitator and trainer, utilized philosophies in organizational systems to involve students, parents and advocates in understanding and resolving conflict, specifically, when engaged with law enforcement. Additionally, Attorney June Hardwick, former Municipal Judge and Hinds County Public Defender, provided insight and brought a “real world” context and relevance to knowing your rights in theory and in practice when encountering law enforcement.

The day ended with a concert featuring local celebrity Noo-Noo, a 14 year old scholar and artist who uniquely blends hip hop and pop into her music.

Next year’s Schoolhouse Rights Rock! is sure to provide an even greater and broader platform to enjoy a day of fun while increasing the knowledge, awareness and the involvement of youth, parents and advocates across the state. Until then Mississippi, #RockYourRights!

**Sign up for email alerts at
www.aclu-ms.org and connect with us on social media.**



ACLU OF MISSISSIPPI



@ACLU_MS



@ACLU_MS

LGBT Rights Inside the Schoolhouse

BY TODD ALLEN, ADVOCACY COORDINATOR



"LGBT children are our children. They should not be left alone to fend for themselves or to navigate perilous systems. Like every other child, LGBT children in our communities must be made to feel safe. Too often, LGBT students are subjected to

discrimination and harassment, especially at school. Without a welcoming learning environment, there are significant consequences to a student's sense of safety and ability to succeed in school."

This passage appears in the recently published education resource guide entitled, "Advocating for LGBTQ Students Rights in the Mississippi Delta." The ACLU of Mississippi in collaboration with the Nollie Jenkins Family Center, Inc. co-authored the manual in response to the urgency of these needs and concerns of Mississippi Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth.

The 64-page publication is a reference tool for parents, students, advocates as well as

educators and school administrators in an effort to support the creation of safe spaces for LGBT students, and to encourage a community that acknowledges and includes LGBT young people.

Notably, this guide primarily involved the work of young people in the Mississippi Delta region with the help of a grant from the LGBTQ Racial Justice Fund. The fund aims to "develop and strengthen a strategic and effective advocacy sector addressing the needs of LGBTQ communities of color in the Southeastern United States."

"Advocating for LGBTQ Students Rights in the Mississippi Delta" can be accessed and downloaded at aclu-ms.org.

LEGAL UPDATES

BY CHARLES IRVIN, LEGAL DIRECTOR

Nation Watching Mississippi's Google Suit

In partnership with the National ACLU Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, the ACLU of Mississippi filed an Amicus brief in the Google, Inc. v. James Hood appeal, a case that has garnered global attention from Hollywood to internet providers. The Attorney General sought to use subpoena power to get information from Google containing information of citizens across Mississippi. Google sought an injunction in the Southern District of Mississippi, which was later granted. As a result the Attorney General filed an appeal with the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. The use of subpoena power in this case is



an infringement on the very essence of free speech. Those first amendment rights should not be sacrificed in this age of technology and daily internet use. This type of monitoring of usage simply should not occur. There's no ruling yet. The ACLU of Mississippi will continue to monitor this case.

ACLU Files Amicus Brief Against Dollar General

In October, the American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi joined the National Office in filing an Amicus Brief on behalf of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians at the United States Supreme Court against Dollar General Stores. A Dollar General employee was accused of sexually assaulting a teenager

of the Tribe, who was in the Dollar General sponsored "Youth Opportunity Program." Dollar General is now attempting to avoid jurisdiction. We support the Mississippi Band of Choctaws right to exercise jurisdiction over Dollar General and its employee.

Welcome New Staff

Aisha Carson



Aisha Carson is the Advocacy Coordinator for the Sunflower County Systems Change Project. A native of Vicksburg, Mississippi, she is a proud alumnus of the University of Southern Mississippi, where she received a BA

in Political Science with a concentration in Black Studies. Her experience in volunteering for Mississippi Center for Justice and as a civil rights researcher in the Center for Oral History exponentially grew her knowledge of the fundamental challenges that face vulnerable populations and helped to shape her aptitude for systems change. Aisha also received a Master's in Public Administration from Belhaven University.

Blake Feldman



Blake Feldman is the Advocacy Coordinator for Criminal Justice Reform at the ACLU of Mississippi and a recent graduate of the University of Georgia School of Law. During his spring and winter breaks,

he volunteered twice for the Orleans Public Defenders in Louisiana and once for the Capital Post-Conviction Counsel in Mississippi. Through law school clinics, he interned with both the public defender office in Athens, GA and the Federal Defender Program in Atlanta, GA, and

he was a summer intern for the Bronx Defenders in 2014. He has assisted in the defense of clients prosecuted by the U.S. government for felony drug and sex crimes as well as clients prosecuted at the state level for crimes ranging from disorderly conduct to capital homicide. Before moving to Georgia in 2012, Blake received his BS from the University of Southern Mississippi. While he hasn't ruled out a future career in public defense, he is excited to work for systemic reform through community organizing and public advocacy.

Erik Fleming



Erik Fleming is the Legislative Strategist for the ACLU of Mississippi, and brings a wealth of experience to this position. Fleming, a 2006 and 2008 Democratic nominee for the U.S. Senate in Mississippi,

was a member of the Mississippi House of Representatives - 72nd District. He successfully authored or co-authored 20 bills that became law in the state of Mississippi. Most recently, Fleming was a Collector of Revenue, Deputy Sheriff, a paralegal with the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance and an advocate with the Mississippi Community Development Corporation. He has also previously served as the Chief Operating Officer for New Horizon Ministries, Inc. and Associate Editor of the Mississippi Link Newspaper. Fleming received his Bachelor's degree in political science from Jackson State University, and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity from the Universal Life Church in Modesto, California. He is the father of one son, Sean Christopher.

INTERN SPOTLIGHT

Congratulations to two former ACLU of Mississippi interns.

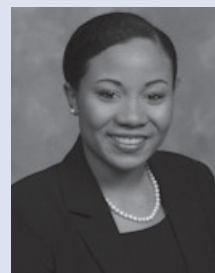


Rita Santibanez is graduating this month from Mississippi College School of Law with a Certificate in International Comparative Law.

After graduating from the University of Oregon with a Bachelor's in Political Science, International Studies, and Spanish, she entered into the Peace Corps in Nicaragua, Central America as Community Health Promoter. Here's what she had to say about her experience with the ACLU.

"My time as an intern was one of my most valuable and interesting experiences in law school. The work I did while interning at the ACLU of Mississippi was so rewarding and I actually felt like I made a difference. My time interning under Charles Irvin and the rest of the staff at ACLU of MS only inspired and fueled my desire to fight for justice."

Rita says she plans to move to Washington, DC to pursue a career dedicated to the struggles of civil rights, international human rights, and immigration.



We also congratulate Nikita S. McMillian, who will now serve as judicial law clerk to Federal District Court Judge Carlton

Reeves for the 2016-17 term. Nikita is currently a 3rd year law student at Mississippi College School of Law, sits on the Editorial Board of Law Review, won the Law Review's Best Casenote Award in 2015, and won awards on Moot Court.

**AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION OF
MISSISSIPPI
P.O. BOX 2242
JACKSON, MS 39225**

T/601.354.3408 OR
1.888.354.ACLU
F/601.355.6465
WWW.ACLU-MS.ORG

NON-PROFIT
ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
JACKSON, MS
PERMIT #256



SAVE THE DATE! LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY DAY

February 23, 2016 | 12-3 p.m. | State Capitol
Press Conference @ 11:30 a.m.



www.aclu-ms.org