

**ACLU**

Mississippi

# RACE RUNS THROUGH

2017-2018  
Annual Report



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# RACE RUNS THROUGH

The ACLU of Mississippi was borne out of the Civil Rights Movement, when everyday people were beaten, arrested, and killed in the fight for justice, equality, and freedom. Today, race remains a critical dividing line in American society.

Mississippi has the second highest African American population in the country. It is with this fact that we understand the intersectionality race plays in justice and equity. The ACLU of Mississippi chooses to focus our work through a racial lens because we believe that racial justice and equity are essential to our mission and our fundamental core values.

The realities of racial disparities wherein we seek to broker change in are all too ravaging. That's why we have been vigilant to demand racial justice and expand racial equity.

With the continued support from our members and allies across the state, we will continue to achieve victories toward a more inclusive and just state for us all.



**917**   
Legal Complaints  
Processed

**9**   
Bills Promoted

**32**   
Calls to Action

**131**   
Bills Tracked and  
Advocated for or  
Opposed via Public  
Education

**1**   
Legislative  
Hearing

**23**   
Written Policy  
Statements

**7**   
Opinion  
Editorials  
Published

**25**   
Demand  
Letters Sent

**41,005**   
Website Hits

**48**   
Speaking  
Engagements

**3**   
Discriminatory  
Pieces of Legislation  
Defeated

**8**   
Pieces of Legislation  
Proposed

**2**   
Local  
Ordinances  
Advanced

**Your support made  
it all possible.**

**ACLU**  
Mississippi

**Fighting For Freedom, Ensuring Justice, Advancing Equal Access.**

# Joint Letter from the Board President and the Executive Director

Last year, this country was reeling from the unimaginable events in Charlottesville, Virginia. All across the country and in Mississippi, people were taking sides. The incident revealed and magnified the realities of opinion and position. Some may ask, “How did we get here”. The answer—very intentionally.

The issues we are dealing with across America and in Mississippi are not new issues. These are issues that were intentionally created by bias. The injustices of the criminal justice system, disproportionately impacting African Americans and other people of color, are a direct result of slavery, Jim Crow era laws and the War on Drugs. Muslim bans, family separation, placing children in cages along our borders and the fear invoked even in Mississippi immigrant communities have nothing to do with keeping this country safe. It has everything to do with racial exclusion.

The hate filled fervor regarding the constitutionally guaranteed right to “take a knee” was fueled because black athletes in the NFL and on Mississippi’s public high school football

fields decided to take a stand against police violence. We are not surprised when books such as “To Kill a Mockingbird” are banned in a state that refuses to abandon its emblem of white supremacy hidden behind a message of heritage. Nor are we ignorant of the intent to hold positional power by legislative failure to expand access to the voting booth or to ensure educational opportunities for all.

**The reality is that bias impacts every issue we work in our offer to fight for freedom.**

These biases, whether they be implicit or explicit, have resulted in structural and institutional racism. In order to achieve progress, especially in our home state we must understand that **RACE RUNS THROUGH** every issue. Understanding that bias and structural racism are mutually reinforcing the reality is key if we are to ever dismantle the fortified racialized barriers to opportunity.



In light of this reality, we have taken a conscious and intentional step in our annual report to show you, our members and supporters, that we recognize this fact and are working side by side with justice involved citizens as well as with law enforcement agencies to strike a balance that supports community trust; with women whose personal healthcare is in jeopardy; and with LGBT communities to gain non-discrimination protections and to be able access to opportunity across life’s critical domains.

We sincerely appreciate the support you have given and continue to provide. Standing together at the intersections of our diversity, we will defend freedom, we will demonstrate that we are all Mississippi, and together we will make Mississippi a fair, just, and equitable home for all.

Mississippi imprisons people at the third highest rate in the country. **The proportion of Black people imprisoned in Mississippi is the third highest in the country, which results in one in 30 Black men in prison.** We have tirelessly worked to reform our broken and imbalanced criminal justice system. We take both a proactive and reactive approach to reducing the state's prison and jail population while also reducing racial disparities in incarceration through legislative, legal, and advocacy strategies.







## Victory: Defeating Anti-Gang Legislation

We vigorously fought against two versions of an Anti-Gang bill, which would have had the potential of doubling the time served requirements for those with underlying nonviolent offenses thereby increasing the state's incarceration rate and prison costs.

The vague definition of 'gang member' had the potential to significantly increase unwarranted prosecution of children, particularly low-income

youth and youth of color, and had chilling effects on the First Amendment rights of expression and association.

Our zealous advocacy inside the Capitol—including engaging lawmakers, participating in a public hearing, and pushing back on inaccurate data by calling for a fiscal note—and outside the Capitol with strategic communications and message developing ultimately killed both bills.

## Victory: Debtors' Prison Reform

The 2018 Legislative session marked one huge victory for Smart Justice in the state of Mississippi through the adoption of HB 387. HB 387 will help those who have served their time for misdemeanor and non-violent crimes re-enter the workforce while also ensuring that people who cannot afford to pay fees and fines are not criminalized for being poor.

House Bill 387 has been at least two years in the making. Our 2016 Biloxi lawsuit brought statewide and national attention to the unconstitutional practice of modern-day debtors' prison and spurred legislative action. Despite a 2017 veto on a similar bill, we maintained our advocacy that resulted in an expanded coalition and secured bi-partisan support, which led to the new state law in 2018.

**Locking up poor, disadvantaged people for their inability to pay fines is a noxious**



**practice that needs curtailing. So our advocacy continued with direct contact within the Mississippi Judicial College, presenting at both 2018 conferences to the justice and municipal court judges.**

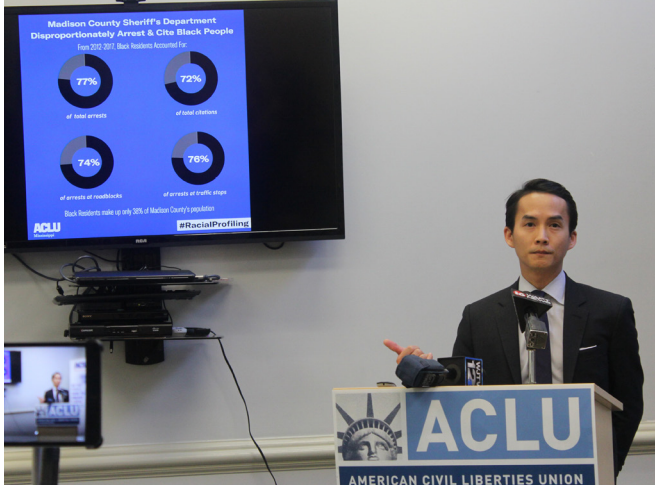
A law is only as effective in its implementation. While HB 387 does not address every inequity in the criminal justice system, it is a step in the right direction.

## Victory: Decriminalizing Marijuana

**Black people are arrested four times as often as white Americans for low-level**

**marijuana possession despite statistics showing roughly equal use.** When the city of Jackson announced it was considering a proposal to decriminalize simple possession of marijuana, we called on the council to also consider policy reform that prevented debtors' prison practices and deprioritized enforcement. As a result, the city council unanimously passed an amendment that reduces fines to \$100 and prohibits jail time for possession of 30 grams or less within city limits. We are working in other local communities to advocate for marijuana decriminalization policies as part of our smart justice work.





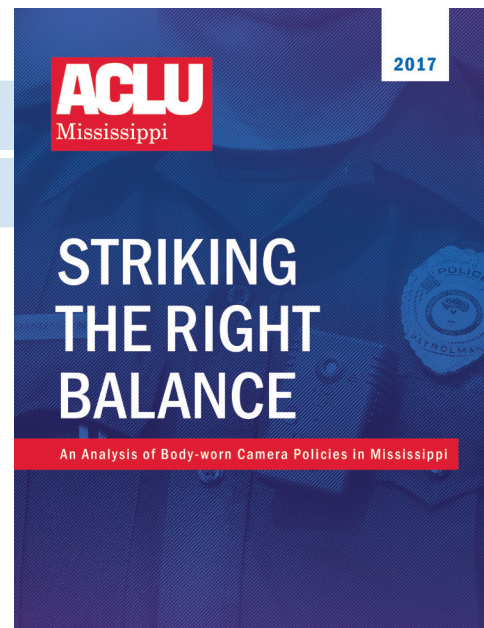
## Police Accountability & Transparency

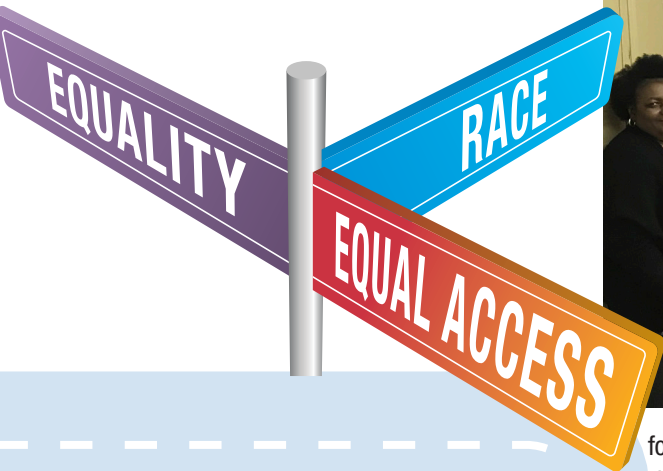
**When police stop, search, or detain people based on their race or ethnicity, it does not help solve crimes.** Instead, it harms the very communities that police are sworn to protect and serve. Our Police Accountability Blueprint calls for four policy reforms that prioritize transparency, accountability, and improving the relationship between communities—particularly communities of color—and the law enforcement officers tasked with keeping us safe.

We continue to aggressively litigate on behalf of Black residents of Madison County against the Madison County Sheriff's Department, along with our co-counsel at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP. Our litigation provides a rare, historical, and longstanding opportunity to bring about change in policing in Madison County.

On a state level, we have monitored the increasing reports of law enforcement agencies acquiring body-worn cameras (BWCs). After filing 147 records requests, collecting, and analyzing 65 BWC policies, we determined that Mississippi's police and sheriff's departments largely fail to ensure transparency, accountability, and trust in the use of BWCs. Our report, *Striking the Right Balance: An analysis of Body-Worn Camera Policies in Mississippi*, served as a tool to advocate for legislation that establishes a comprehensive state policy. For body cameras to promote trust between law enforcement

and the community, they must be used in a way that carefully balances interests in police accountability, governmental transparency, and privacy. Our advocacy efforts continue with government officials at the county and city level to establish or make significant improvements to individual policies.





## Equality For All

**Breaking down barriers to ensure the equal treatment and protection of individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, immigration status, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability remains at the forefront of our incredible work to declare We Are All Mississippi.**

We have been in full force in demanding LGBT rights with an intentional focus on transgender rights; fighting for a woman's right to make choices for her body and command equal pay

for equal work; and standing in solidarity with our partners to urge the prohibition of state resources in support of the inhumane 'zero-tolerance policy,' while declaring that no human being is illegal.

While progress for LGBT rights is slow, it is also steady. We understand that the voices of the LGBT community must be lifted in this work. So, we have been intentional to center the voices of LGBT members and allies by providing training to more than 70 Mississippians across five cities as part of our Liberty Lobbyists Program.

We increased trans visibility at the Capitol and in local communities by advocating for protections in housing and for all state employees as well as non-discrimination policies. We continue to fight against the most egregious anti-LGBT law, HB 1523, by calling out and seeking incidents of discrimination.

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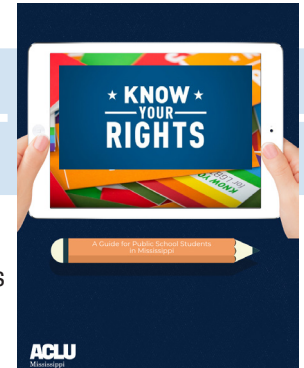
## Youth Advocacy

Students and young people have historically been at the forefront of social change. Their collective power can often times create expeditious change. **From Freedom Riders in the 1960s to taking a knee on the football field to school walkouts in protest of gun violence, the youth voice is extremely impactful.** The ACLU of Mississippi has always valued that power and continues to serve as a resource. Our

new and updated Students Rights manual helps students to not only understand their rights so they can use them, but also how to protect their rights.

The ACLU of Mississippi embarked on a cross-state tour of Mississippi universities to teach students about their rights in four key areas: LGBT rights, voting rights, freedom of speech and expression rights, and in encounters with law enforcement. We visited Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Southern Miss, Alcorn State, and Jackson State University.

We didn't stop there. At the inaugural Mississippi Youth Advocacy Summit, we educated about 30 youth on the civil rights protections still necessary to fight against discrimination.







## Let People Vote

**The most important responsibility and right of citizenship is voting. Voter suppression is a threat to our democracy, disproportionately impacting low-income individuals, racial and ethnic minority voters, senior citizens, and voters with disabilities.** We recognize that restricting voting to Election Day can be a barrier to participation. In a rural state like Mississippi, getting to the ballot box can seem like a daunting task especially if you lack transportation, can't get off work, need to pick up children, or simply can't get to the precinct. The ACLU of Mississippi launched the Let People Vote campaign in connection with People Power to advocate for the support of two election reforms to expand access—early no excuse voting and online voter registration.

We kicked off our campaign with the “Be Counted” forum at Mississippi College School of Law in partnership with several organizations, which included a panel made up of representation from



the Mississippi NAACP, Mississippi Secretary of State office, and State Senate. We followed up with the release of our Advocacy Voting Toolkit and the creating of our online Voting Rights Resource Center. There is a long history in Mississippi of faith communities supporting voting rights. Access to the polls became the core issue during the Civil Rights Movement. So, we engaged faith leadership and sent 177 letters to pastors across the state.

We supported legislation to create a voter disenfranchisement task force, and told the legislature it missed the opportunity to protect the state against litigation by expanding access to the polls.

## I.D. Me

Many transgender people in Mississippi face barriers to civic engagement. The state's strict photo ID law can result in transgender voters being deterred from voting, harassed, or turned away at the polling

place. **We are working to create a barrier-free and non-threatening zone so that all transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) Mississippians can cast their ballot without fear of intimidation with our I.D. Me program.** A project of TEAP-MS, we provide a step-by-step guide and legal assistance to those seeking name and gender marker changes. By assisting them through the process of matching their identification with their identity, we are increasing access and furthering the voting rights of trans/GNC individuals.



**5 women & 2 families have successfully completed the I.D. Me Program**

# Looking Ahead

## **Criminal Justice Reform**

### **Campaign for Smart Justice**

Bail Reform

Prosecutorial Accountability

### **Debtors' Prison Monitor Implementation**

### **Law Enforcement Accountability & Transparency**

Racial Impact Analysis for Criminal Reforms

Body Camera Policy Implementation

Brown v. Madison County

### **Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign**

## **Voter Rights**

### **Let People Vote Campaign**

Early Voting

Online Voter Registration

### **Vote Smart Justice**

## **Equal Access/Equality for All**

### **We Are All Mississippi Campaign**

Transgender Education & Advocacy Program

ID Me Project

I Too Am Mississippi Storytelling Project

Improve Fair Housing Opportunities

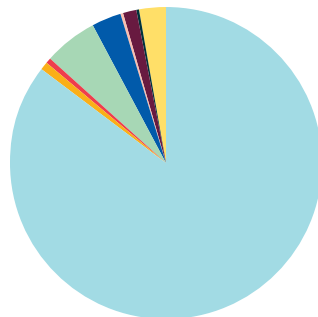
Non Discrimination Ordinances

MS Civil Rights Act

HB 1523 Legal Challenge

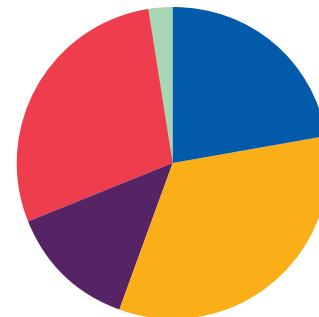
# Financials

## ACLU of MS Foundation, Inc. Revenue & Supports



Support from National ACLU	981,075
Interest and Dividend Income	8341
Events Income	6563
Reimbursement Income	63,374
Unrealized Gain (Loss) on Investments	37,261
Private Foundations	500
Professional Fees	17,788
Other Income	1444
Contributed Income	31,545

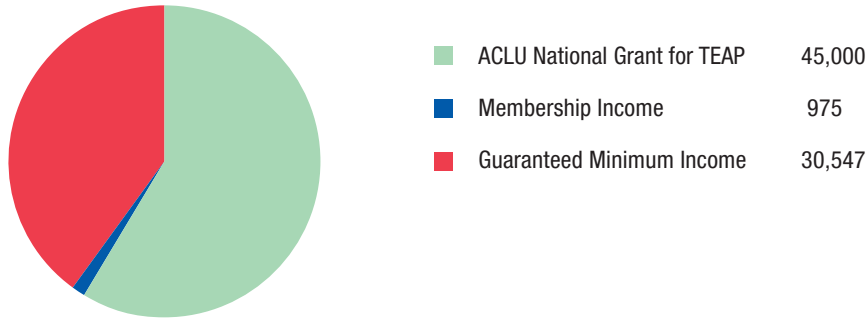
## ACLU of MS Foundation, Inc. Expenses



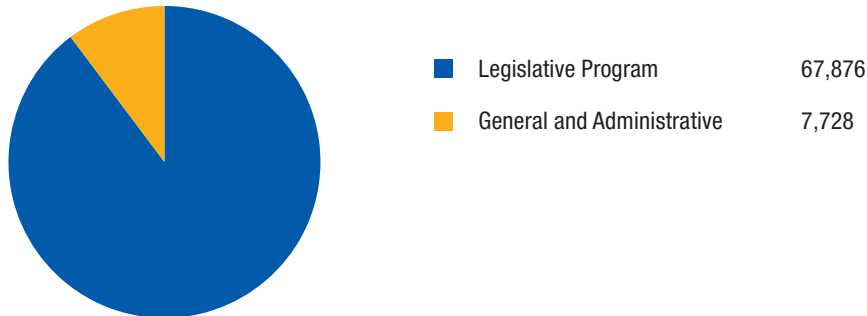
Legal	283,265
Advocacy	417,524
Communication	169,473
General and Administrative	360,048
Fundraising	30,150



## ACLU of MS, Inc. Revenue & Supports



## ACLU of MS, Inc. Expenses



## DONORS

Thank you to these contributors who partnered with ACLU of Mississippi to advance Criminal Justice Reform, Equality for All, Voting Rights, Educational Opportunities, and Governmental Transparency & Accountability.

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Alison Steiner

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Angela Bedenbaugh

Stratton Bull

John & Sumali Conlon

Stephen & Bernice Silberman

### \$250 to \$499

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# ACLU

## Mississippi

[www.aclu-ms.org](http://www.aclu-ms.org)

P.O. BOX 2242 JACKSON, MS 39225

601.354.3408

