

History of Policing, Racism Discussed at Annual Meeting

Over 100 people gathered in Nashville in October for ACLU-TN's annual meeting, "Broken Policing: Windows for Change."

ACLU Deputy Legal Director Jeff Robinson led a riveting discussion on how America's criminal justice system, from its beginning, has



reflected and reinforced the racism found in society at large. From slavery to emancipation, from the Civil Rights movement to Black Lives Matter, American laws and their enforcement have often conflicted with the rights of minorities — far too often with tragic consequences.

"When you look at the history, it's easy to understand why [law enforcement are] behaving like this," Robinson said, speaking of recent incidents of police brutality. "Now we have to do something about breaking that connection."

Robinson also touched on positive examples of policing, such as a November 2015 incident in which the Camden, New Jersey police suc-

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Let People Vote

The 2016 presidential election was the first in 50 years to take place without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act. Not coincidentally, since the 2012 presidential election, 17 states have sought to implement new barriers to voting such as ID requirements, which disproportionately affect minorities and low-income communities. Some, but not all, of these laws were blocked thanks to litigation by the ACLU and others.

In Tennessee this election season, we worked hard to protect rights at the ballot box by distributing tens of thousands of free voting rights resources across the state. We also created and distributed a flyer informing indigent voters how to obtain a free photo ID for voting purposes and that they can still vote even if they do not have a photo ID or the funds to obtain the documents necessary to get one.

We also sent a letter to Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett calling on his office to allow voters wrongfully purged from voter rolls due to inactivity to cast provisional ballots. We continue to work with partner organizations to correct this problem for future elections. *For more on the aftermath of the election, please see "From the Executive Director" on p. 2.*

ACLU-TN Supports Local Marijuana Decriminalization Efforts

Over the past few months, ACLU-TN successfully supported local ordinances in Nashville and Memphis that decriminalize possession of half an ounce or less of marijuana and reduce the penalty to a \$50 fine or up to ten hours of community service. We also supported a similar ordinance in Shelby County, but the measure was voted down.



The Tennessee attorney general recently issued an opinion stating that these ordinances conflict with state law and are unenforceable. While Memphis suspended enforcement of its ordinance in light of this opinion, Nashville has opted to allow its police officers to continue enforcing its measure.

Ordinances like these can be an important step in reducing the costly incarceration rate for this

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From the Executive Director...

Hedy Weinberg

Since Election Day, ACLU has seen a renewed sense of urgency to protect civil liberties from hundreds of thousands of individuals nationwide – people who have subscribed to our emails or liked us on Facebook so that they can stay informed and take action, who have volunteered their service, and who have given financially, at whatever level they could.

As national ACLU Executive Director Anthony Romero said, “This is the greatest outpouring of support for the ACLU in our nearly 100-year history ... this support will be put to good use protecting the rights of all Americans. Immediately, we are working ... to protect the rights of protestors... [and] analyzing the civil liberties records of potential ... federal appointees. In the coming weeks and months, the ACLU will be focusing our legal and advocacy strength on:

- protecting the “Dreamers” who received presidential deferred action protection
- resisting any attempt to create a dragnet deportation force
- obstructing any effort to defund Planned Parenthood and other reproductive health service providers or deny reproductive rights
- preserving civil rights protections for transgender Americans
- preventing “stop-and-frisk” policies from being adopted nationwide
- opposing any ban levied against Muslims for entry into the United States or discrimination against Muslims in the United States.”

Here in Tennessee – at the legislature, in the courtroom and beyond – we will be defending immigrant, refugee, Muslim and LGBT Tennesseans. We will counter attempts to erode voting rights and reproductive freedom and keep pushing for criminal justice reform, police accountability, and racial justice.

We have challenging times ahead of us. But we are ready. Our staff of strategic and tenacious advocates and litigators, our volunteers, our members and our supporters are prepared to fight against any encroachment on our hard-won freedoms and rights. And with your support, we will prevail. Thank you.

Criminal Justice Policy Advocate, LGBTQ Organizer Join Staff

ACLU-TN is excited to welcome two new staff members to the team.

As the new criminal justice policy advocate, Candis White will advance ACLU-TN’s work in criminal justice reform through legislative advocacy, policy research and community engagement. Candis has a master’s degree in Education Administration and Supervision from Tennessee State University and is currently enrolled in the Ed.D. program in Learning Organizations and Strategic Change at Lipscomb University. Prior to ACLU-TN, she worked as a transition specialist for Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, where she advocated for suspended and expelled students. After experiencing firsthand the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline, Candis is excited to continue her work to dismantle the pipeline, as well as to address youth rights and police accountability.



Henry Seaton will also be joining ACLU-TN’s staff as the LGBTQ organizer, building on his past legislative work with ACLU-TN and ACLU National. Henry began working with ACLU-TN in the spring of his senior year of high school to protest Tennessee’s “bathroom bill,” which would have unfairly denied transgender students access to bathrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their gender identity. Henry has worked with numerous local, state and national organizations in support of LGBTQ rights and education for low-income students. He is a chapter leader of the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and a member of the Gender Spectrum Youth Council. Henry looks forward to continuing his work as an advocate for the transgender and gender-nonconforming community.

The Constitution Uncorked: ACLU-TN Celebrates Tennessee's Best and Brightest Defenders of Freedom at 2016 Gala

This November, hundreds of ACLU-TN supporters came together in Nashville to celebrate our work defending the Constitution and celebrate heroes of the movement to make Tennessee more equal, fair and just for all. We were honored to present the Lifetime Achievement Award to Bernard Werthan, in recognition of fifty years of working to dismantle social barriers and realize racial and religious integration in our state. After a powerful musical performance by The Stellas, we also presented the Benjamin S. Pressnell Bill of Rights Award to leaders from the next generation of activists: Justin Bautista-Jones, Drost Kokoye and Henry Seaton, for their work defending voting rights, religious freedom and racial justice, and LGBTQ equality, respectively.





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Want to Join the Fight? Here's How:

We know that many people are looking for ways to protect civil liberties right now, and we truly appreciate you. We need you. Here are some ways that you can help:

- 1) **Become a card-carrying member** or renew your membership: <http://bit.ly/ACLUTNJoin>
- 2) **Join our e-alert list** for up-to-date news and actions you can take: <http://bit.ly/ACLUTNEmail>
- 3) **Learn about additional ways to get involved** with Team ACLU: <http://bit.ly/ACLUTNGetInvolved>

Robinson, cont. from p. 1

cessfully deescalated a confrontation with a Black man swinging a knife in public without serious injury to the man or the officers. It is not a pipe dream, Robinson says, to think that officers can resolve such incidents without the use of deadly force.

The meeting, co-sponsored by the Nashville Public Library, marked the launch of ACLU-TN's Police Accountability Campaign, which will work to foster public safety, prevent abuse in encounters between law enforcement and civilians, and improve community-police relations.

If you missed Robinson's powerful speech, you can view it online at <http://bit.ly/2eYTJ80>.

Decriminalization, cont. from p. 1

low-level violation, freeing law enforcement to focus on addressing violent crime.

Decriminalization of marijuana also helps reduce racial disparities in the justice system. Though Blacks and whites use marijuana at comparable rates, Black Tennesseans are four times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites, leading to disastrous consequences such as the loss of jobs, education and housing opportunities.

ACLU-TN applauds the efforts of local officials to take a smarter approach to marijuana possession. We will continue to work to end harsh crime policies that result in mass incarceration and stand in the way of a just and equal society.