



THE DEFENDER

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Newsletter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa

Black Transgender Woman Files Discrimination Complaint Against Hotel

Meagan Taylor was traveling with a friend and staying at a West Des Moines hotel when staff called police, suspecting the pair were sex workers because they were “two males dressed as females.”

As a result of the hotel’s phone call, police came to Taylor’s room the next morning. There was no evidence of prostitution, but police arrested Taylor. They charged her with possession of a prescription drug—her hormone therapy pills—without having the prescription with her. Taylor also had unpaid fines from a juvenile offense years ago.

Taylor was held in jail for eight days. She was able to get out only after posting bond collected through donations. With the help of her ACLU of Iowa cooperating attorneys Jake Feuerhelm and Joe Austen, who handled

the case pro bono, the charges against Taylor were dropped.

Recognizing that Taylor’s case represented an extreme form of discrimination that is all too frequently experienced by transgender people, particularly those of color, in November the ACLU filed a complaint with the Iowa Civil Rights Commission against the Drury Inn for discrimination based on Taylor’s gender identity and her race.

The complaint was filed by the ACLU of Iowa and the national ACLU LGBT Project. Amber Shanahan-Fricke and David Goldman



Taylor spent eight days in jail after Drury Inn staff called police, suspecting she was a sex worker simply because of her appearance. She ended up arrested, but charges were dropped.

of the Des Moines law firm of Babich Goldman, P.C. are ACLU of Iowa cooperating attorneys in the case.

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Fighting to Assure Crime Victims’ Right to Call Police

Iowa’s crime nuisance ordinances continue to penalize domestic violence survivors, the poor, the mentally ill, and the elderly.

Iowans who are concerned about someone harming them or their families shouldn’t have to worry about the repercussions if they call the police for help.

But that is the position many Iowans find themselves in because of so-called crime nuisance ordinances. These ordinances, including one in Cedar Rapids, attempt to make landlords accountable for criminal activity on their properties. Instead, crime nuisance ordinances punish victims of domestic abuse, the poor, those with disabilities, and the elderly—all who have higher need for police assistance.

If you make too many or the wrong type of calls to police, your landlord—or you—could be fined for each call. Victims, in turn, end up pressured to not call police because they may be threatened with eviction.

Penalizes Vulnerable Populations

The ACLU of Iowa and the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence has been working on multiple fronts to reform nuisance ordinances so that they do not penalize crime victims. These include domestic violence victims, as well as those who are disproportionately likely to need law enforcement assistance, including those with mental health issues, the elderly, as well as the poor and those in high-crime neighborhoods.

ACLU representatives met this summer

with Cedar Rapids city officials to work with them to amend their nuisance ordinance, with limited success. In November, amendments to the ordinance were recommended, but they still do not resolve the ordinance’s egregious problems.

Legislation that will resolve this issue is badly needed to resolve not only Cedar Rapids’s problem ordinance but also other similar ordinances in the state.

Right to Assistance Bill Failed

Last year, a “Right to Assistance” bill in the Iowa Legislature would have prohibited crime nuisance ordinances that penalize crime victims. The bill received unanimous bipartisan approval in the Iowa House, including from all six Cedar Rapids

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Team Effort Helps the ACLU Gear Up For The 2016 Iowa Legislative Session

The 2016 session is approaching fast and the ACLU of Iowa is preparing to pursue its usual broad agenda that encompasses the wide array of civil liberties.

We're excited to move forward into the next session with our ambitious legislative agenda.

Over the past months, ACLU of Iowa staff have been meeting with key lawmakers to discuss civil liberties issues that are likely to be facing us in the months ahead. In some cases, we've consulted with them on general content and even specific wording of bills they'll be sponsoring.

Key Legislative Players

Our legislative team will also again include assistance from The Capitol Group, a Des Moines government relations, political strategy and lobbying firm. Our new advocacy coordinator (see back page) will also be a key presence.

And, of course, our Advocacy Director Erica Johnson, and Executive Director Jeremy Rosen will also be heavily involved in our efforts this session.

It will be a session in which education dominates the debate, but we'll be working hard to make sure that civil liberties are also a significant part of the discussion.

While any legislative session holds many surprises, we're geared up to work on voting issues, including preventing the requirement of certain ID for online voter registration (page 3); a Right to Assistance bill (see page 1); and body cameras (page 5); and other government monitoring.

Criminal Justice Reform

Criminal justice reform promises to be a hot topic. Iowa disproportionately incarcerates African Americans, has prisons filled beyond capacity, severely punishes non-violent drug offenders, and continues the hopeless and destructive War On Drugs.

The state also needs policies governing police body cameras and temporary visitor's driver's licenses for eligible immigrants.

The ACLU of Iowa will pursue passage of bills that reform sentences for non-violent drug offenders, decriminalizes marijuana and reform criminal sentencing more broadly.

We will also pursue a bill that bans discriminatory policing and pretextual stops by police officers and requires data collection.

Also important is the ACLU of Iowa's efforts to limit the number and scope of new legislation that expand criminal penalties for existing offenses and create new criminal offenses in the Iowa Code.

If policymakers are serious about making the criminal justice system fairer and better, the first step is to prevent efforts that would increase penalties or add new crimes.

Reforming Civil Forfeiture

Iowa's civil asset forfeiture laws also will be considered. Iowa's laws on this are some of the worst in the country.

Police need only to have "probable cause" to believe a person's property—like cash, vehicles or other personal effects—are the proceeds or instruments of a crime in order to take that property under civil forfeiture. And the person doesn't even need to be charged with a crime.

Further, getting the property returned is such a lengthy, costly, and difficult process that many people just give up.

Iowa's civil asset forfeiture laws do not respect due process rights, and they must be reformed. The ACLU of Iowa will urge lawmakers to abolish civil asset forfeiture.

At a minimum, lawmakers should eliminate the profit motive for law enforcement and county attorneys to engage in civil forfeiture proceedings. They could do this by requiring that forfeiture proceeds go to the state's general fund and by establishing 1 clear reporting requirements to improve the process's transparency. ■



CIVIL LIBERTIES UPDATES

Stay on top of key civil liberties issues in the Iowa Legislature by signing up for ACLU of Iowa emails.

You'll get updates and action alerts about all the latest bills and initiatives, as well as notifications about important events and civil liberties victories.

Get on our email list by going to www.aclu-ia.org or email us at editor@aclu-ia.org.

ACLU Works to Expand Online Voter Registration

With 10 percent of Iowa's eligible voters lacking the needed ID, online voting registration in our state should allow for other means of identification rather than accepting only a driver's license or non-driver identification card.

The ACLU of Iowa and other voting rights advocates have applauded recent efforts to create online voter registration in Iowa. Making the right to vote easier to exercise is important, and online registration is especially important for those who have disabilities and young people.

This new system of registering to vote is scheduled to be available to Iowans in early 2016. However, under this planned system, Iowans who do not have a driver's license or other Department of Transportation-issued identification will not be able to register to vote online.

Thousands Have No Appropriate ID

This is a problem since nearly 150,000 eligible Iowa voters do not have an eligible identification to use for online voter registration. The Iowa Secretary of State's office says that represents about 10 percent of eligible voters in the state. Nationally, studies show that 11 percent of American citizens lack certain types of ID that would be required for voting.

Many of these voters have disabilities, are elderly, or are low-income and do not need ID in their everyday life.



Online voting registration is especially important to Iowans with disabilities who have difficulty registering in person.

Getting an appropriate ID in order simply to exercise their constitutionally-assured right to vote requires time, mobility, and sometimes money that this population does not always have.

Solution: A Supplemental System

As a result, the ACLU has been working to make online voting registration available to those without the required DOT-issued ID. All eligible voters must have access to online voting registration.

As a solution, the ACLU is endorsing the creation of a supplemental online voter

registration system that would cover those without DOT-issued identification.

Seeking A Legislative Solution

We've been advocating for this through formal comments to the Iowa Legislature's Administrative Rules Committee regarding the proposed administrative rule that would put online registration into effect.

Early last year, the Iowa Voter Registration Commission voted to adopt rules establishing an online registration system. We submitted written comments to the commission, urging that the process be expanded to include those without an ID and to make it accessible for those with disabilities.

The ACLU has also been working to get legislation passed that would make sure all qualified voters could register online.

Bill Stalled in the Iowa House

A bill passed in the Iowa Senate last session would have done just that. It was supported by Iowa's county auditors and the ACLU of Iowa, but the bill stalled in the House.

In the next session, the ACLU will be once again supporting this bill, urging the Iowa House to pass legislation in 2016.

In Iowa, a driver's license or similar ID is not required to register or to vote. Instead, during the registration process, other documents or processes can be used to confirm the identity of the voter. ■

Seeking Nursing Accommodations for Iowa Bar Exam

Iowa's two-day exam includes only short breaks that make nursing or pumping difficult, earning Iowa a mere "C" for its policies in accommodating nursing mothers.

Women should not be forced to make a decision between their families and their careers, but that can be the end result if you are a nursing mother who wants to take the Iowa Bar Exam.

The two-day exam includes lunch breaks and a series of other, shorter breaks. But those breaks are too short for many mothers to nurse or pump. Also, there may not be an appropriate place at the exam facility to do so.

The ACLU of Iowa is advocating for better accommodation of nursing mothers

during the exam. In July, we contacted the Iowa Board of Law Examiners urging them to adopt policies and practices to accommodate breastfeeding test-takers.

Iowa's current exam rules don't rank well in accommodating breast feeding mothers.

Iowa's rules do allow breastfeeding women to apply for an accommodation of a health-related condition for the exam. They also allow breastfeeding women to bring a breast pump and accompanying equipment and require that a private location be provided.

However, the national ACLU and Law Students for Reproductive Justice conducted a survey to determine what practices and policies are in place across the country for accommodating those who are breastfeeding during bar exams.

Iowa earned a mere "C" because additional break time is not provided for nursing mothers.

A model policy that the ACLU has shared with the law examiners board recommends providing additional off-the-clock time if existing exam breaks are not frequent or long enough for an individual's circumstances.

The model policy is based on other successful breastfeeding policies adopted in several other states across the country. ■



LEARN MORE

For more information, detail, and updates on the issues you read about here, go online to www.aclu-ia.org.

Kelli Griffin Ex-Felon Voter Lawsuit Appealed to Iowa Supreme Court

An Iowa trial court said the Supreme Court must clarify rules for voting by people with convictions.

In September in the ACLU case *Griffin v. Pate*, the Iowa District Court for Polk County upheld a state law that disqualifies anyone who has been convicted of a felony from voting. In its ruling, the court stated that now it would be up to the Iowa Supreme Court to clarify the definition of “infamous crime” used in the Iowa Constitution to disqualify voters.

As a result, the ACLU has now appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court, asking the Court to decide that a nonviolent drug conviction does not disqualify client Kelli Griffin from voting, because it was not an “infamous crime.”



Kelli Griffin

Griffin, of Montrose, voted in a city election thinking her voting rights had been restored after she completed her sentence of probation for a non-violent drug conviction years ago. She even brought her children with her to cast that vote to teach them about the democratic process.

Outrageously, Griffin was charged with perjury as a result of her voting. A jury later concluded that she had simply made an honest mistake. But even after being acquitted, Griffin still cannot vote.

Iowa is one of only three states that permanently bars voting for people with felony convictions, even after they have fully completed their sentences—unless the governor restores their right to vote.

In 2011 Gov. Branstad issued an executive order requiring people with felony convictions to petition his office to regain voting rights. Since that time, only a handful of the thousands of eligible Iowans have successfully done so. ■

Fighting to Assure Victims’ Right to Call 911

Continued from page 1

Democratic representatives. It was blocked in the Senate by Cedar Rapids’ own Sen. Rob Hogg, despite pleas of advocates for domestic violence victims and homeless people.

Going into the 2016 session, the bill remains in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Sen. Hogg has been holding onto it as the chair of the bill’s subcommittee, which is cause for concern. The ACLU will continue to work in the legislature and with Sen. Hogg to persuade him to move the bill forward.

Crime nuisance ordinances are a national problem. Across the U.S. a growing number of cities are adopting ordinances that penalize landlords and tenants when the police are called “too many” times to the premises.

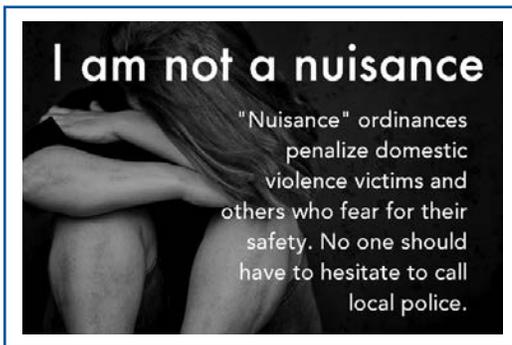
Proponents argue that these ordinances deter crime and recoup costs. Yet there is no evidence that this is the case. There is indeed

evidence, however, that these ordinances can cause harm to vulnerable populations.

In Pennsylvania, the ACLU filed a lawsuit and successfully struck down a Norristown crime nuisance ordinance. Client Lakisha Briggs was threatened with eviction after repeat calls to 911 because of assaults by her

ex-boyfriend. After the last attack, in which she was airlifted to the hospital, she was threatened with removal from her home because she had called the police too often in violation of its ordinance.

“Iowa must pass legislation that allows crime victims to call 911 without fear that they may lose their homes,” said Jeremy Rosen, ACLU of Iowa executive director. “We’ll be working hard to see the Right to Assistance bill passed this year. It cannot wait. This is literally a life-or-death issue that puts human safety on the line.” ■



Transgender Woman Files Complaint

Continued from page 1

Taylor, who is from the St. Louis area, was traveling on July 12 with her best friend, who is also Black and transgender, to the funeral of her friend’s brother.

Taylor, until then a loyal customer, had a Gold Key rewards membership with the Drury, so she made the reservation for the pair. But when they checked in, the process took about an hour, compared to other guests’ check-in of 5 to 10 minutes. The two women felt degraded and humiliated.

Repeat ID Requests

Before finalizing check-in, the desk clerk—at the request of the general manager—asked to make a copy of Taylor’s ID even though they had already processed payment and checked ID once. Like many transgender people, Taylor has not been able to update the name and gender on her ID so the identification listed her birth name and gender, which is different from her new name and gender.

By the next morning, staff called the police to report that they suspected Taylor and her friend were engaging in prostitution because they were “males dressed as females.”

“What happened to Meagan was simply unacceptable and un-Iowan,” said Rita Bettis, legal director of the ACLU of Iowa. “Iowans have long valued the importance of treating every person fairly, and Iowa law has expressly protected against this sort of harmful discrimination by businesses against their transgender customers since 2007.”

Chase Strangio, attorney in the ACLU’s LGBT Project, said, “For Meagan, a stop at a hotel on the way to a funeral landed her in solitary confinement because she is Black and transgender. This type of profiling of transgender women of color is all too common and is part of the cycle that results in 41 percent of Black transgender women having been incarcerated at some point in their lives.”

Violates Public Accommodations Law

Under Iowa’s civil rights law, race, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation are among characteristics protected from discrimination by public accommodations.

In her complaint, Meagan said of the experience, “This ordeal was humiliating, scary and traumatizing. I felt powerless and degraded. I realized I was not welcome in a public place simply because of who I am.” ■

Body Camera in Schools Invade Student Privacy

Body cameras when used during police encounters with members of the public can be a win-win. However, body cameras in Iowa schools is quite another matter.

Des Moines and other school districts already equip their school resource officers (police officers posted in the schools) with body cameras. Now Burlington school administrators have announced that they will start wearing body cameras during interactions with parents and students.

Many schools already have cameras in hallways, stairwells and lunchrooms. Many school buses also have surveillance cameras.

Where does the surveillance end? To put a twist on the famous U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the landmark black armband free speech case, a student does not check all rights to privacy at the schoolhouse gate.

Schools Are Different

Body cameras in the schools are especially problematic. They allow school staff to invade student privacy at an increasingly intimate level — different than the overall monitoring of more open spaces. Body cameras present a real threat to students' privacy and contribute to an environment in our schools of pervasive, intrusive surveillance.

Imagine the effect on an already shy student speaking up with a dissenting view in a political science class. Or teachers videotaping in locker rooms and restrooms — certainly places where more than

a few scuffles or arguments can break out. We also have concerns about a principal recording students who come into the principal's office. How is a student supposed to confide about the true nature of the problem with a camera trained steadily on him or her? There are also concerns about how long the footage is retained and who has access to it.

It's also a problem that school administrators may have the discretion to turn the cameras off and on. Turn them on when the administrator wants to capture a student's or parent's behavior. Turn them off when the administrator or staffer is behaving in a way he or she doesn't want recorded.

Administrators Protecting Themselves?

Comments from the Burlington principal and others indicate that their interest in body cameras may be more about protecting administrators than they are about protecting our far more vulnerable students.

It's a problem to allow mass recording of minors. The law has long recognized that minors do not have the same abilities



Brett Levin

as adults to protect themselves from invasions of privacy. Adults have the mental maturity to comprehend the implications of being recorded and adjust their behavior accordingly. Minors often do not have that same insight or control.

What's more, what these students do as children may have little bearing on who they become in later life (one reason many juvenile court records are sealed). That means body cameras have no place in schools. Even when body cameras are used by law enforcement in the wider world, good laws and good policies dictate that minors should not be recorded.

It's a problem that body cameras in schools likely will end up being another tool in the school-to-prison pipeline. Already, there are too many ways for students wrongly to be fed into the juvenile justice system.

Students of Color Especially Impacted

Students of color are disproportionately being kicked out of school, charged and arrested at a rate far higher than that of white students.

It's worth noting that our state does recognize some privacy rights of students. The Iowa legislature recently declined to advance a bill, with language couched as anti-bullying, that would have put schools in the position of monitoring students 24/7 on social media, even outside of school hours, when no school activities or equipment was involved.

Body cameras in schools are yet another invasion of privacy for students. Iowa legislators, administrators, school boards, and parents should do everything in their power to prevent their implementation. ■

ACLU House Parties Held Across Iowa

Over the past few months, new ACLU of Iowa Executive Director Jeremy Rosen has been participating in a series of house parties in Ames, Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, and Iowa City. The gatherings have been an opportunity for Rosen to meet community members and leaders to discuss civil liberties issues locally and statewide. Shown here is a "pie party" held in Ames in November.



Photo: Russ Hoffmatt

Shown are, from left, Cheryl Langston, Marti Rassmussen, and Geoff Abelson.

Offering an \$80,000 Challenge for ACLU of Iowa's 80th Anniversary



In celebration of our 80th year, three generous benefactors have agreed to match, up to \$80,000, all new and increased gifts.

ACLU supporters share a vision of a country where freedom is a human right—a vision where we all can marry who we love; where women control their reproductive choices; where we can all worship, speak, and dissent openly and without government interference or surveillance; where citizens can exercise their vote without undue obstacles.

A Vision of Fair Treatment for All

It's a vision of a place where prisons are not warehouses for people of color or those with mental disabilities; where equal opportunity, due process, and a fair path to citizenship are afforded to all within our borders.

This vision can't happen without you. As a private, non-partisan and non-profit organization, the ACLU operates entirely with your membership dues and donations.

For 80 years, the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa has helped to shape American history and define the modern-day freedoms

we hold dear. As the fifth-oldest affiliate in the nation, we have been part of nearly every civil liberties battle in Iowa since 1935. We're celebrating our 80th anniversary by increasing our effectiveness in defending civil liberties in Iowa through expanded political influence, amplified public engagement, and our strengthened, cutting-edge legal program.

Matching Incentive for 80 Years

In honor of eight decades of defending civil liberties, three generous benefactors have agreed to match dollar for dollar, up to \$80,000, all new and increased gifts to the ACLU Foundation of Iowa. The matching incentive ends December 31, 2015. As you make your end-of-year donations, please consider the ACLU Foundation of Iowa.

Atlantic Philanthropies Challenge

The Atlantic Philanthropies, a charitable grantmaking foundation, has issued a challenge to all ACLU supporters: Include the ACLU in your will now, and you will qualify the ACLU to receive an immediate cash donation matching up to 20 percent of the value of your future gift.

Your commitment will help us fight the fights of today as well as protect civil liberties for generations to come.

To accept the challenge, or for more information, contact Sarah Conroy, development director: sarah.conroy@aclu-ia.org or 515-207-0595. ■



WHY I GIVE TO THE ACLU

As an American Muslim immigrant born and raised in Egypt, I first joined the ACLU of Iowa following the September 11 tragedy.



Shams Ghoneim
Iowa City

I saw my community of fellow Muslims being harassed, dehumanized, marginalized, and our children bullied in schools and colleges just because of their religion.

During the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq when some of Muslims were unconstitutionally being held without charge in the name of the War on Terror, the ACLU represented many American Muslims and southeast Asians.

The ACLU fought hard to overturn some of the most egregious elements of the Patriot Act. It supported and spoke on behalf of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners in the belief that the rule of law was ignored.

As a member of the ACLU Board of Directors and former president, I may not always agree with the position of the ACLU on some issues, but in looking across its historical and ongoing vital role, I truly believe that this great non-profit organization is essential to our democracy and the rule of law.

Support Civil Liberties in Iowa!

Make your gift with this mail-in coupon or go to www.aclu-ia.org and click on "Donate Now."

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- I pledge to make a gift of \$ _____ before (date) _____.
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Mail to: ACLU Foundation of Iowa, 505 Fifth Ave., #901, Des Moines, IA 50309-2316.

Questions? Call 515-207-0595 or email sarah.conroy@aclu-ia.org.

1503NWS

High School Student Volunteers at ACLU

Roosevelt High School junior Claire Wallace has been doing communications work for the ACLU.



Claire Wallace

It's not often that the ACLU of Iowa takes on high school volunteers, but Des Moines student Claire Wallace has proven to be exceptionally skilled and focused.

She's assisting the communications program, tracking media placements and updating the web site.

In school, she is active in speech, debate, tennis, theater, and National Honor Society. She got involved with the ACLU because, "after reading a lot about its goals and mission statements, I discovered that a lot of my interests and beliefs coincided with those of the ACLU." ■

Sohn Returns as a Volunteer Attorney

Emily Sohn is a California attorney assisting the ACLU's legal program while she prepares for the Iowa Bar Exam.



Emily Sohn

Sohn is a recent graduate of the University of Iowa College of Law who just passed the California Bar Exam and will soon take the Iowa Bar Exam.

During law school, she advocated extensively on behalf of immigrants' rights, including a six-month externship with the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project in Atlanta, Georgia.

Sohn was previously a legal intern at the ACLU of Iowa. Today, she continues to work in the field of immigration law and is the co-author of a comprehensive guide to Special Immigrant Juvenile Status in Iowa.

On behalf of the ACLU of Iowa, she has done legislative work regarding criminal justice reform and litigation work related to the rights of DACA recipients, as well as researching complex procedural issues in federal court. ■



Photo: Benjamin Allen

The beautiful World Food Prize Building in Des Moines was the location of the ACLU's birthday bash.

ACLU of Iowa Celebrates 80 Years in Style

ACLU supporters and honorees gathered October 2 in downtown Des Moines to mark eight decades of defending civil liberties in Iowa.

Dubbed our 80th "birthday bash," the event started with drinks and appetizers in the atrium of the World Food Prize Building. It was a good opportunity for old friends and civil liberties supporters to reconnect and talk about some of the issues that are most important to them.

Rosen Connects with Supporters

It was also an opportunity for many of them to meet the ACLU of Iowa's new director, Jeremy Rosen.

The centerpiece of the event was the program, which included Rosen giving an overview of the ACLU of Iowa's work this year.

Also, three awards given out to Iowans who have made remarkable contributions to civil liberties in our state.

The award ceremonies were appropriately touching, in part because of the nature of the honorees' work and also since some were being honored posthumously. Members of the honoree's families, churches, and organizations that they had been involved in all gathered to honor these remarkable people.

Basinger Accepts Noun Award

Jean Basinger of Des Moines, long-time advocate for Iowa inmate and prison reform, was honored with the Louise Noun Award.

Basinger stressed that doing even small things can result in big changes, and called on others to help those in need.

"Doing things in love indicates caring combined with action. We are called to be actively involved. Our lives must touch the lives of others in small, but meaningful ways," Basinger said in her acceptance speech.

First-Time Allen Award Winners

Dennis Barnum of Gowrie, Mary Garst of Coon Rapids, and Art Neu of Carroll were honored posthumously with the Edward S. Allen Award.

The Allen Award was created this year to honor those who have advocated for civil liberties over their lifetime.

Many of their families were present and it was a fitting tribute to be able to honor and remember these three accomplished Iowans.

Mannheimer Youth Winner

Also accepting an award was Central Academy student Glori Dei Filippone, who received the Robert Mannheimer Youth Advocacy Award.

Glori has been an active advocate for racial justice and non-discrimination and harassment in her school. The award was given, however, primarily for her key role in organizing a "Love Rally" to counter-protest a planned protest at East High School in Des Moines by Westboro Baptist Church, which holds public protests to show its objection to LGBT rights.

New Advocacy Hire to Advance Civil Liberties Agenda

December is usually a time to relax and wind down, to spend time with friends and family. But once every four years, here in Iowa, it's different. It's a caucus year.

And with that comes the non-stop parade of candidates visiting our state, in settings large and small—from the convention center in Des Moines to a tiny coffee shop in a small town.

It's a privilege to have such a large role in picking our next president. But also a responsibility. If we aren't talking to candidates about the issues that matter, someone else will—and they won't necessarily be taking the position of the ACLU and its members.

A New Strategy

Traditionally, the ACLU of Iowa has not significantly engaged with the caucuses. But that's about to change. With our largest grant ever from the national ACLU, we're hiring an advocacy coordinator who will work under Advocacy Director Erica Johnson. This new organizer will attend candidate events

and forums, asking questions and seeking commitments. That person will also push the issues with social and traditional media and put a spotlight on a candidate who does the right—or the wrong—thing.

We'll be focusing mostly on two areas—immigrants' rights and the ACLU's Smart Justice project, which promotes criminal justice reform.

Influencing Debate on Key Issues

Immigrants' rights is critical because of the divisive and hateful rhetoric from many of the Republican candidates when they talk about our fellow Iowans.

Criminal justice reform is key because it's an issue with bipartisan national support that candidates from both parties are discussing. We'll also take opportunities to talk about other issues we care about deeply, including voting rights, LGBT equality, privacy, and reproductive freedom.

But that's not all this advocate will be doing. That person will also be working to mobilize you, our members and supporters.

We need your help to attend events and ask questions. If we do this right, candidates of both parties will be hearing a lot about concerns with the state of civil liberties, and the ACLU of Iowa will demonstrate our political power.

And when the circus tents pack up and leave town in early February, this organizer will remain important, spending time mobilizing supporters to promote our agenda up at the Iowa Capitol, where we are working to make progress on important goals.

Nothing is more integral to American democracy than the Bill of Rights. Stay tuned for more information on how to work with the ACLU of Iowa to use the caucuses to defend our most fundamental civil liberties.

Best,

Jeremy Rosen
Executive Director



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