



THE DEFENDER

April 2015

Vol. 43 / No. 1

Newsletter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa

Final Win: Secretary of State's Office Drops Voter Purge Lawsuit Appeal

In March, the state asked that its appeal in *The ACLU of Iowa and LULAC of Iowa v. Matt Schultz* be dismissed, ending three years of litigation.

"This is an important victory for the protection of voters' rights in Iowa," said Rita Bettis, legal director of the ACLU of Iowa.

"It means that Iowans will not have to worry about the voter purges we've seen take effect in other states with a disastrous impact, especially for new U.S. citizens and Latinos."

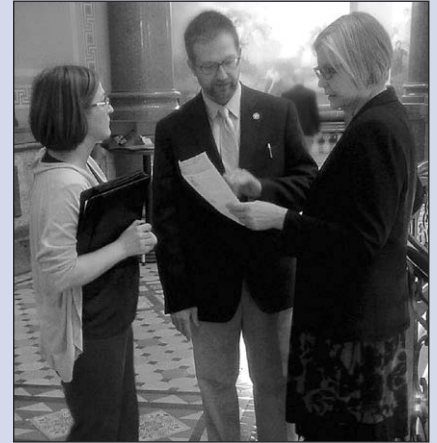
In March, the Iowa Supreme Court granted a request from the Iowa Secretary of State's office to dismiss the state's appeal in the case.

A year earlier, in a district court ruling, the ACLU and League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) won their voting rights case against the

former Secretary of State's office. That decision invalidated a series of regulations the Secretary of State adopted to identify, challenge, and remove suspected non-citizens from Iowa's registered voter rolls. The scheme was similar to voter purges in other states like Florida and Colorado, where thousands of voters were wrongfully disenfranchised.

The district court decided that the actions of the former Secretary of State, Matt Schultz, were unlawful. The state appealed, and the parties had been litigating the case in the Iowa Supreme Court for approximately a year.

The case was set for final submission in March. The state dropping its appeal means that the permanent injunction stopping Schultz's unlawful attempts at a voter purge will remain in place. Joe Glazebrook, an ACLU cooperating



This legislative session the ACLU of Iowa is working with the three contract lobbyists. Legal Director Rita Bettis is managing the legislative program this session. Bettis is shown, left, talking with one of the contract lobbyists, Pete McRoberts, and Representative Beth Wessell-Kroeschell (D-Ames).

attorney in the case, said, "Iowans can now rest assured that their right to vote will not be infringed by the Secretary of

Continued on page 3

Jeremy Rosen Named ACLU of Iowa Executive Director

Formerly of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty in Washington, D.C., attorney Rosen also has experience working with the ACLU.

Previously the center's director of advocacy, Rosen started his new position at the ACLU of Iowa in February. His extensive background includes litigation with the ACLU at the state and national level on voting rights, First Amendment issues, and anti-eviction programs for victims of domestic violence.

Experience in Key Area

Rosen also has experience in core elements of the ACLU's work, including policy work at the state legislative and state agency level, public education and communications, and fundraising.

A native of Boston, Rosen received his undergraduate degree with honors at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and his law degree at The George Washington University Law School.

"I am honored to lead the fifth-oldest ACLU affiliate in the country and to continue the organization's vigorous defense of the civil liberties protected by the U.S. and Iowa Constitutions," Rosen said.

Immediate First Tasks

At the ACLU of Iowa, Rosen has a number of pressing tasks ahead of him, including hiring a new development director and legislative director.

He'll also spearhead the Iowa affiliate's growing lobbying presence at the statehouse, continue to strengthen an

expanding litigation program, broaden the organization's advocacy capacity, and manage a communications program that has also been growing rapidly.

Poised for Growth

Ed Broders, president of the ACLU of Iowa Board of Directors, said "We are pleased that Mr. Rosen has chosen to bring his considerable talents and passion for civil liberties to the ACLU of Iowa. Under Mr. Rosen's leadership, we expect that the affiliate will continue to grow in its role as the preeminent defender of civil liberties in Iowa." ■

See Jeremy Rosen's inaugural executive director's column on the back of this newsletter.



The Defender is the printed newsletter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa. It is published in April, August, and December.

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION of IOWA

505 Fifth Avenue, Suite 901
Des Moines, Iowa 50309-2316
515-243-3576 or info@aclu-ia.org

Visit us at www.aclu-ia.org

Volume 43, Number 1, April 2015

© 2015 American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa

Jeremy Rosen, *Executive Director*
Ellen L. Simmons, *Operations Manager*
Veronica Lorson Fowler,
Communications Director
Rita Bettis, *Legal Director*
Erica Johnson, *Advocacy Director*

**ACLU of Iowa
Board of Directors**

President: Ed Broders, Davenport

Vice President: Shams Ghoneim, Iowa City

Secretary: The Rev. Mel Schlachter, Iowa City

Treasurer: Mark Rosenbury, West Des Moines

Affirmative Action Officer:

Georgina Dodge, Iowa City

At-Large Executive Committee Members:

Benjamin W. Allen, Des Moines

Sally Frank, Des Moines

Alejandro Andreotti, Ames

LaMark Junior Combs, Sr., Davenport

Susan Cory, Muscatine

JP Greer, Spencer

David Hoffman, Ames

Jill June, Ankeny

Mary Kelley, Dubuque

Ousainou Keita, Iowa City

Joan Masover, Fairfield

David Muller, Iowa City, *Hawkeye Chapter Representative*

Linda Murken, Gilbert

Dennis Parmenter, Huxley

Gayle V. Strickler, Jr., Marshalltown

Judy Stockbridge, Carroll

Sandy Vopalka, Indianola, *National Board Representative*

Printed on 10% recycled paper

Taking Stock After the First Legislative Funnel

Two priority bills we're supporting and one priority bill we oppose are moving forward.



Rita Bettis

It's been an intense session so far, with more than enough work to keep two ACLU of Iowa staff members and three full-time contract lobbyists busy.

As of publication time in early April, we've made it through the first legislative "funnel"—the date by which most bills need to pass out of committee in the chamber they were filed. It's a time when some bills die and others go forward.

As an organization that has declared its position on approximately 150 bills filed in the Legislature, after the funnel, we can focus our efforts on those bills that have garnered enough support to move forward.

As we take stock of our agenda at this legislative milestone, three priority bills stand out.

Creating a Fair and Accessible Online Voter Registration System (SF331)

We are *for* this bill. Filed by Senator Danielson (D-Cedar Falls), it reflects the work of a bipartisan team of county auditors and voting rights organizations in our state and nationally, and is already being used as a model bill for advocates in other states.

SF331 expands on regulations set to go into effect in 2016 that would limit online voter registration to Iowans with a DOT-issued license or non-operator's ID. The bill would allow all eligible Iowans the option of using online voter registration, while leaving the paper system in place for those who are more comfortable with the current paper process. Online voter registration is a cost-efficient, secure, and critical change that is necessary to bring more Iowa voters into the election process; 24 other states already have some form of online voter registration.

The bill has passed the Senate and now sits in the House state government committee.

Reducing Penalties for First-Offense Possession of Marijuana (SF219)

We are *for* this bill. Drug sentencing reform is a priority for the ACLU.

A 2013 ACLU report used FBI data to show that in Iowa, we have the worst racial

disparity in marijuana possession arrest rates in the country, despite equal usage rates among white and black people.

Criminal penalties for marijuana have lifelong negative consequences for young people, their families, and their communities, and ultimately, have proven a total failure at actually reducing marijuana use.

SF219, filed by Senator Sodders (D-State Center), would reduce the maximum sentence for first time possession of marijuana from 1 year to 30 days. It also, importantly, allows officers to give a citation to a person rather than arrest and book them. This is an important first step toward larger drug sentencing reform.

This bill has passed the full Senate chamber with significant bipartisan support, and is now in the House.

Strip Searching People Arrested for Simple Misdemeanors and Scheduled Violations (HF227)

We are *against* this bill. HF227, filed by Representative Chip Baltimore (R-Boone), would leave at the jail's discretion whether to strip search a person arrested for simple misdemeanor or even a traffic violation before admitting them to the general jail population.

The current law requires probable cause, meaning the jail can already strip search a person who was arrested for a simple misdemeanor when officers have an legitimate basis for suspecting a person is carrying drugs, weapons, or contraband.

While strip searches are sometimes necessary, they are also a significant exercise of police power that we should not treat as a mild intrusion; and strip searches may be used to abuse and humiliate.

Alarmingly, the bill passed out of the full House Judiciary committee, and is now eligible for debate on the House floor.

Rita Bettis
ACLU of Iowa Legal Director



STAY INFORMED

For civil liberties news, updates, and action alerts, sign up for our ACLU of Iowa emails. Go to www.aclu-ia.org/newspublications/e-mail-alerts.

Final Win in Secretary of State Voter Purge Lawsuit

Continued from page 1

State. We are pleased that because of this action, the court order declaring these rules illegal will be allowed to stand, and the unfortunate wounds caused by these rules will begin to heal. We certainly hope that in the future, government officials will keep this lesson in mind and will work towards expanding and protecting the right to vote as opposed to curtailing it.”

National Attention

The case attracted attention and support from important voting rights organizations nationally.

Several organizations filed friend-of-the-court briefs in the case in opposition to the voter removal efforts: Project Vote,

the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, and Latino Justice PRLDEF had filed briefs in the case.

Rights of Latino Voters Protected

“We are incredibly thankful to our client, LULAC of Iowa, for its work to advance and protect the rights of Latino voters, and to Joseph Glazebrook, who argued the case so well at the district court level,” Bettis said.

Because the ACLU and LULAC secured a temporary injunction early in the case, the voter purge initiated by

emergency administrative rule-making shortly before the 2012 general election was never allowed to take effect.

Jeremy Rosen, ACLU of Iowa executive director, said “This case is part of a broader effort nationally to push back on unfair voting restrictions by politicians that make it harder for people to vote, who are more likely to be minorities, poor people, the elderly, students, and people with disabilities.”

Matt Schultz is no longer Secretary of State. He left office for an unsuccessful congressional bid. He is now the Madison County Attorney. Paul Pate is the new Iowa Secretary of State. ■

“Nuisance Ordinances” Prevent Victims From Calling Police



The ACLU of Iowa is fighting laws that could prevent women and others in rental properties from calling police.

For survivors of domestic violence, feeling secure in having a place to live and having access to police assistance is essential to living free from abuse. However, towns and cities across the country, including Waterloo and Cedar Rapids, are increasingly passing so-called “crime nuisance ordinances”—also called disorderly house ordinances or crime-free ordinances.

A Crime Victim is Not a Nuisance

These ordinances label a rental property as a nuisance when it is the site of a certain number of calls for help to police.

Upon citation, the property owner or landlord is typically instructed to “abate the nuisance” or face steep penalties.

As a result, many landlords respond by evicting the involved tenant (who can be the victim of the crime, not the perpetrator), refusing to renew their lease, or instructing tenants not to call 911.

Some tenants, concerned that they’ll be evicted, decline to call the police at all.

“The bottom line is that people should not face eviction as a result of calling 911,” said ACLU of Iowa Legal Director Rita Bettis. “Nuisance ordinances end up punishing victims for crimes against them in their homes.”

Domestic Violence Victims Affected

“These ordinances also disproportionately harm vulnerable people who need help from police, including women, children, the elderly, low-income citizens, people with mental health conditions, and victims of crimes,” Bettis said.

Nuisance ordinances can further impede enforcement of restraining orders and impede identifying and prosecuting repeat and serious offenders.

Abusers can even use their knowledge of the nuisance ordinance to intimidate and harass their victims, using their fear of eviction as a tool for control.

A “right to assistance” bill in the Iowa Legislature (HF493) would stop cities from implementing nuisance ordinances, and is strongly supported by the ACLU.

In fact, the ACLU has been working on the issue with advocates against domestic violence, homelessness prevention groups,

and landlords against these ordinances even before they started work on legislation. The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault both support the bill.

The Right to Assistance bill was filed by Rep. Chip Baltimore (R-Boone) and was managed by Rep. Zach Nunn (R-Bondurant).

Some opposing the bill believe that exceptions for domestic violence would make nuisance ordinances less punitive.

But those exceptions do not work, partly because they lack adequate definitions of domestic violence. Also, a domestic violence situation may not always be apparent to first responders. And a domestic violence exemption doesn’t address the other vulnerable populations that are more likely to need police assistance.

Exceptions Fail to Protect

“Narrow exceptions for domestic violence complaints are misleading and fail to safeguard women and others who need protection from eviction and homelessness,” Bettis said.

As of publication of this newsletter, the bill passed the Iowa House with unanimous bipartisan support. But it never made it out of the Senate judiciary subcommittee, blocked by Sen. Rob Hogg (D-Cedar Rapids). However, the ACLU and its allies are working with Senate leadership to see if the bill can proceed in other ways. ■

Prison Reform Advocate Jean Basinger Named Louise Noun Award Recipient

A pen pal correspondence sparked a lifetime of advocacy for those behind bars.

Ever since she was just a few years old, growing up in Goldfield, Iowa, Jean Basinger knew she had a strong desire to help others. She gravitated naturally into a career in medicine, first getting a nursing degree and another in health science.

In 1955, she married William Basinger, with whom she would become a true partner in social justice advocacy.

Years as a Missionary

In the '60s, the Basingers and their children served as missionaries in Japan and then South Korea, where she was a public health nurse in the Seoul slums. They also worked with human rights and democracy activists in South Korea, then run by a dictator.

The family even hid South Korean activists in their home for safety. At one point, William and others were interrogated for 10 hours following a demonstration after the government "executed eight innocent men, accusing them of being communist spies. Their only real crime was being poor and defenseless," Basinger recalls.

When the couple returned to the U.S. in 1980, Basinger began to work to help the impoverished and the defenseless in her home country. This led to her work with those in Iowa's jails and prisons.

She volunteered to become a pen pal for those in jail, and it became a window into their world. She saw the excessive use of solitary confinement, the lack of mental health services, the high cost for prisoners making phone calls, and the harsh restrictions on visits from loved ones. "It is a system built on punishment rather than rehabilitation," Basinger says.

A Leader in CURE

She became active in Friends of Iowa Women Prisoners and in Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE). In 1991, she helped form the Justice Reform Consortium, 17 organizations working for reform through legislation—which has worked with the ACLU on changing laws on sentencing juveniles to life without the possibility of parole.

She was chair of the Restorative Justice Taskforce of Iowa Board of Church and Society. She's also served for 20 years on the board of Hansen House of Hospitality for Men coming out of prison.

Her many years of effective service made her a clear choice for the Louise Noun Award, named after the long-time president of the ACLU of Iowa Board of Directors. The award honors Iowans who have distinguished records of fighting for civil liberties. Basinger will be honored at the ACLU of Iowa annual event, Friday, October 2 in Des Moines.

Erica Johnson, ACLU of Iowa advocacy director, said "One of Jean's great strengths



Jean Basinger

is how she personally connects to those who are not being treated fairly by the system. She meets with prisoners and talks with them to ask 'What are you struggling with? How can we help?'

A Personal Touch

She's worked to provide Christmas gifts for women prisoners to give to their children. She's sewed costumes for the women's prison drama project.

"How I wish you could have seen the way their faces glowed when they put on elaborate costumes that transformed them for the roles they were playing," she said. "For a few hours, they were transported out of prison and came to realize that they have creative gifts to share. I find that very rewarding." ■

"Model Public Servant" Art Neu Passes Away

His distinguished political and public service career included a commitment to civil liberties.

The former lieutenant governor, state senator, member of the Iowa Board of Regents and Iowa Board of Corrections, and mayor of Carroll passed away in January at age 81 from complications from pneumonia.

Fellow civil libertarian Michael Gartner, a close friend, was quoted at the time: "Art



Art Neu

was a lovely man who put the interests of the people above all else. He cared deeply about Iowa and Iowans. He was also delightfully witty and enormous fun to be with."

Another friend, Jefferson Bee & Herald publisher and editor Rick Morain, described Neu this way:

"He was a delightful man to know, thanks to his towering and wide-ranging intellect, his rapier wit, and his general enjoyment of life," Morain said.

"He was a master storyteller, and he had plenty to tell from his Iowa legislative career and his lifelong interest in politics. I would call him a liberal Republican, a species that has pretty well disappeared

from the political scene. Not many western Iowa Republicans are also active members of the American Civil Liberties Union, as was he. Art was adept at conversation, and I would have feared to oppose him during a legislative debate or in the courtroom. He was a great friend, and I will sorely miss him."

Jeremy Rosen, ACLU of Iowa executive director, said, "Art Neu was passionate in his beliefs and persuasive in articulating them. The ACLU of Iowa and everyone who works to defend civil liberties in this state will miss him tremendously. He was a model public servant, and we are grateful for his many accomplishments." ■

ACLU Helps Launch Iowans 4 Medical Cannabis

The new advocacy group aims to promote safe and regulated access to medical cannabis for patients in Iowa.

Although Iowa now has a law that allows people with intractable epilepsy to treat their conditions legally with a medical cannabis oil, Iowans still cannot get the oil safely, affordably, and legally.

So an advocacy group was formed in December to push for legislation that will allow controlled access to safe, affordable cannabis in Iowa.

Besides the ACLU of Iowa, this new group, Iowans 4 Medical Cannabis, includes two vocal parents of children with conditions that would benefit from medical cannabis, Maria LaFrance and Sally Gaer. It also includes the Easter Seals of Iowa; the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Iowa Chapter; the Epilepsy Foundation of North Central Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska; and Epilepsy Families for Medical Cannabis.

Iowa's Cannabis Law Doesn't Work

Current Iowa law doesn't cover patients with conditions other than intractable epilepsy. Yet reputable, peer-reviewed medical research has shown the benefits of medicinal cannabis



Iowans 4 Medical Cannabis held a press conference December 16 at the Iowa State Capitol to announce its legislative agenda moving forward.

as a treatment option for a number of other illnesses, including symptoms of cancer treatment, HIV/AIDS-associated conditions, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, and others.

Also, although 23 states have legalized the sale of medical cannabis, it's legally available almost exclusively to in-state residents, not Iowans, and there are laws against taking the cannabis out-of-state.

Clear Goals

Iowans 4 Medical Cannabis has three legislative objectives:

- Establishing controlled Iowa production, processing, testing, and dispensing of cannabis for medical purposes in the state.

- Creating a Medical Cannabis Advisory Committee within the Iowa Department of Public Health. The committee would be comprised of medical professionals (such as doctors and pharmacists), who would monitor the program and determine what medical conditions would benefit from access to medical cannabis.

- Rescheduling cannabis in Iowa from the DEA Schedule I (a classification for no medical value) to recognize its medicinal benefits and to allow for academic research and medical use in our state.

Regulation an Important Element

Another key goal of medical cannabis advocacy is to work for regulation of cannabis so that Iowa doctors and their patients with serious health conditions who choose to use it will know exactly what they are getting as part of their treatment and care plan.

A bill (SSB1243) expanding the legal uses of medical cannabis and its availability is being sponsored by Joe Bolkcom (D-Iowa City). It was scheduled for a subcommittee hearing as of this newsletter's publication in early April. ■

Transgender Know Your Rights Workshops Offered

The ACLU of Iowa and other advocacy organizations presented free know-your-rights sessions in Des Moines and Iowa City both for transgender individuals and for attorneys.

Rita Bettis, ACLU legal director and the coordinator of the workshops, said that education on transgender rights is badly needed:

"There are many people who don't yet have a good understanding of what it means to be transgender. Consequently, transgender Iowans face discriminatory barriers to full equality. Transgender people may face difficulties meeting even basic needs, such as getting a job, housing, or health care. They also want to exercise their right to have their gender identity respected through things like in the simple act of going to a public rest room."

Transgender parents also often face barriers when seeking to continue relationships with their children.

The ACLU of Iowa, working with ally organizations, took the lead in organizing the sessions, which included information that is now online at www.aclu-ia.org.

Four Sessions in Two Cities

On April 8, a session developed for transgender individuals and their allies was held at the Drake Law School.

On April 9, a similar session was held at the Iowa City Public Library and a Continuing Legal Education (CLE) session specifically for lawyers was held at the University of Iowa College of Law.

On April 10, a second session for lawyers was held at the Drake Law School.

The presentations explored legal issues facing transgender individuals, including discrimination in the workplace, housing,

public accommodations, and schools, as well as challenges transgender people face in accessing health care, criminal justice issues, and obtaining legal identity documents.

The CLEs featured John Knight of the national ACLU LGBT & HIV Project. They also offered guidance for attorneys regarding how to effectively and ethically work with transgender clients.

The presentations for individuals also featured Donna Red Wing, K.O. Myers, and Keenan Crow from One Iowa.

Broad Sponsorship

Besides the ACLU, sponsors of the programs were One Iowa, the University of Iowa Clinical Programs Law and Policy in Action Project, the University of Iowa LGBTQ Clinic, the Drake Constitutional Law Center, the Journal of Gender, Race & Justice, and the Drake OUTlaws. ■

Long-Time Legal Director Randall Wilson Retires After 27 Years of Service

Wilson generously agreed to stay on several additional months to serve as interim director.

It wasn't easy for Randall Wilson to get out the door.

Well over a year ago, as legal director, he announced his plans to retire on the first of December, 2014. Rita Bettis was named the new director and Wilson was named general counsel as part of the transition. Wilson reduced his work schedule to four days a week to further transition into retirement.

But after the departure of then-executive director Ben Stone last summer, the affiliate needed an interim director to guide the organization until a permanent director could be found.

At the ACLU of Iowa Board of Directors' request, Wilson selflessly agreed to go back

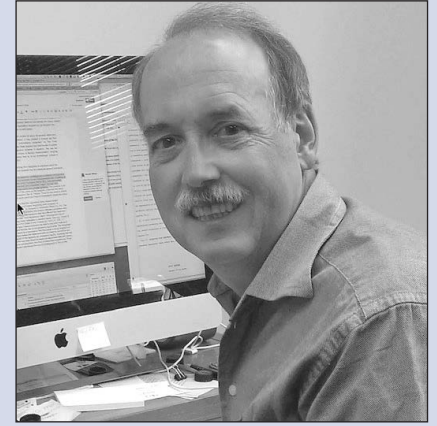
to a full time schedule and serve as interim director. Finally, in February, roughly three months after Wilson thought he would retire, new director Jeremy Rosen arrived. Only then was Wilson was able to clean out his office and truly begin to enjoy retirement.

True to form, he has stayed available to help with additional questions and the ongoing transition.

Oversaw an Era of Growth

His departure truly marks the end of an era. Wilson was hired in 1987, back when the ACLU of Iowa could afford only a half-time attorney. Wilson took on other legal work on the side.

In 1995, a case against a county sheriff who had been grossly mistreating prisoners so drained the Iowa affiliate's legal fund that it had to stop all litigation for nearly



Randall Wilson

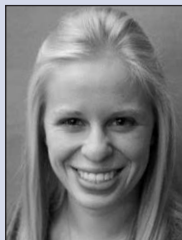
a year. Over time however, important legal wins encouraged more donor and national support. Today, the legal program is prospering.

Even in retirement, Wilson has agreed to stay on as a cooperating attorney to assist with some cases.

He may not get out the door yet! ■

Simpson Student Gaining Experience as Spring Communications Intern

Michelle Hartmann, a junior at Simpson College, has been working as the ACLU of Iowa's spring communications intern.



Michelle Hartmann

A native of Albert Lea, Minnesota,

Hartmann is working on a degree in public relations and psychology. She's also captain of the women's tennis team and an editor for The Simpsonian student paper.

"I wanted to intern with the ACLU because it was an excellent opportunity to work with a very active non-profit organization that creates many positive changes for people all over the country," Hartmann said.

Her centerpiece internship project has been creating an intranet site for ACLU of Iowa board members to use to retrieve and share documents and information.

Returning intern Drake law student Andrew Duffelmeyer is continuing his work with us this semester and is working on legislative issues and lobbying. ■

ACLU Seeks to Hire Director of Development and Legislative Director

The ACLU of Iowa has launched its search for a new legislative director and will be starting its hunt for a development director soon.

Both positions had been left vacant until a new executive director could be hired. With the hiring of Jeremy Rosen, who started in February, both positions can now be filled.

Rosen said, "With the legislative director, we are looking for someone who can help us plan and carry out our ambitious legislative agenda, which encompasses a broad array of civil liberties issues."

That person will also be responsible for overseeing our policy agenda before the state legislature, as well as with the executive branch and local governmental bodies. See the job posting at www.aclu-ia.org.

For the development director, Rosen said, "we're looking for that special person who has both a passion and understanding of civil liberties. But that person must also be an experienced development director who knows how to build an effective fundraising program and connect with our remarkable donors."

To find out more about this development director position, email jobs@aclu-ia.org. ■

3 Named to ACLU Board of Directors

Jill June, Ousainou Kieta, and Linda Murken started their terms in March.

The ACLU Board of Directors has added three new members.

Jill June of Ankeny is the recently retired CEO of Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, and has teamed with the ACLU of Iowa in the past on collaborative efforts.

Ousainou Keita of Iowa City is president of the Iowa City Mosque executive committee. A new citizen to the United States, he is a

native of Gambia, West Africa, and studied at the University of Akron in Ohio. He also serves as an informal legal advocate in his community and has served on the boards of other non-profit organizations.

Linda Murken is a long-time member of the ACLU and of the League of Women Voters, for which she currently serves as the Ames League President. She has also worked in Iowa's community corrections system for 37 years as a probation officer and as a district director. ■

ACLU Client Kelli Griffin Gains National Media Attention

The Montrose mom arrested after showing her children the importance of voting is raising widespread awareness about disenfranchisement of Iowans with past felony convictions.

The story of Kelli Griffin, who was convicted years ago of a non-violent drug charge, has struck a chord. She found herself arrested in 2013 after casting her vote in a local election, her children in tow because she wanted to teach them about the importance of voting.

Griffin ended up facing as many as 15 years in prison as well as the emotional roller coaster and steep legal expenses—\$10,000—for a trial. The jury took just 45 minutes to acquit her.

Her compelling story gained national attention, and became part of larger stories about ex-felon voting rights and voter disenfranchisement trends in general. MSNBC reporter Zach Roth filmed a segment that aired on the shows of Melissa Perry-Harris and Joy Reid.

Griffin's plight also got considerable national social media attention. Facebook posts about her case earned nearly 19,000 views and a blog post received 110,000 visits.

Griffin thought she was doing everything right. When she pled guilty to the drug charge, her defense attorney told her (correctly at the time) that she would have her right to vote restored automatically after she finished probation. But the law changed with a 2011 executive order from Governor Terry Branstad and Griffin was never notified.

In fact, a series of executive orders from different governors has left a confusing patchwork of voting rights for those with past criminal convictions.

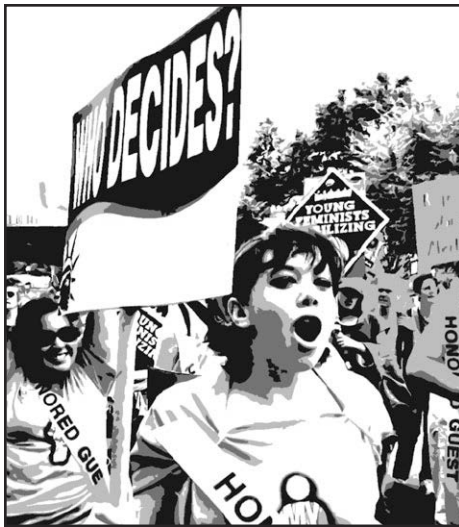
There is also a lack of clarity about which crimes strip Iowans of their right to vote. Until a recent state court ruling, some types of misdemeanor offenses were treated



by the governor's office as if they disqualified Iowans for voting, but not by the secretary of state's office.

The ACLU of Iowa filed a lawsuit on Griffin's behalf in November. Despite her acquittal, which simply found her not guilty of voter fraud, Griffin still can't vote. Our lawsuit seeks a ruling that she has the right to vote, as would other Iowans with similar, lower-level felonies in their background. ■

Nominate a Remarkable Student For the Robert Mannheimer Award



Do you know of a young Iowan age 14 to 19 who has shown an exceptional passion for civil liberties?

Consider nominating that person for the ACLU of Iowa's Robert Mannheimer Youth Advocacy Award.

We're looking for that remarkable young person who is willing and able to advocate for civil liberties with passion and

determination—someone who recognizes injustices and finds ways to correct them.

Created in memoriam of the long-time Des Moines attorney and defender of civil liberties causes, the \$500 annual cash award will be given to a young person who has demonstrated a passion for civil liberties and a record of advocacy for civil liberties, such as free speech, free expression, LGBTQ issues, immigrants' rights, racial and gender equality, bullying, religious freedom, reproductive freedom, privacy issues, or disability rights.

The person may be nominated by anyone familiar with that young person's accomplishments. Parents, teachers, guardians, religious leaders, advocacy groups, community leaders, and others all are encouraged to make nominations. The young person may also nominate himself or herself.

The deadline for entries is Monday, April 20. A brief nomination form and more details about the award can be found at the ACLU of Iowa web site at www.aclu-ia.org. Or call Veronica Fowler at 515-243-3576 ext. *812, or email her at veronica.fowler@aclu-ia.org. ■



ANNUAL DINNER

Annual Dinner To Get a Revamp

The ACLU of Iowa Annual Dinner, a long-time Iowa City tradition each May, is getting an update as we find new ways to attract even more attendees and enliven the event for today's audiences.

This year, a fall event is being planned in Des Moines for Friday, October 2. It will be held in the beautiful restored World Food Prize building, formerly the Des Moines Public Library, on the river. We're planning a shorter program that allows more mixing and mingling of attendees.

A centerpiece of the event will remain honoring our Louise Noun winner—this year, Jean Basinger (see page 4). We'll also honor the Mannheimer Student Advocacy Award winner and celebrate the highlights of recent work.

Look for details and updates in the August Defender and through emails and our website.

Father's Free Speech Legacy Inspires Son's Vocation

In 1962, my father used the ACLU library in New York and worked with his high school history teacher to prepare a speech to be delivered at his high school graduation. The topic was the right to freedom of speech.

More precisely, the topic was the right to free speech for people of all political persuasions, including the Communist Party. The teacher, unhappy with the speech's content, leaked the topic to members of the community. In turn, they protested to the school principal, asking that the speech be banned. Outraged, my grandfather and father spoke with the principal, the Constitution prevailed, and the speech went forward.

I learned about this as a teenager, when I found a dusty copy of the speech buried in a desk drawer. My father and I talked about it, and I realized that the ACLU exists because not everyone has the wherewithal or political power to stand up to government when it seeks to suppress speech. I'm proud to lead the ACLU's efforts to fight those threats.

So who am I? I'm a native New Englander, who came to the Midwest for college, embraced our smart and sensible values, and who is delighted to be back after many years away. I'm a defender of the underdog, who has worked with the ACLU (from outside the organization) to defend free speech for panhandlers, protect the voting rights of people unable to obtain photo IDs, and promote the human rights of all Americans. And I'm a fan of baseball, politics, and Bruce Springsteen—a man who has spent a career speaking passionately and poetically about civil liberties.

Iowa holds much promise for civil libertarians—our state motto is “Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain.” Yet the same state that proudly flies that motto on its flag, still denies voting rights to ex-offenders who have fully paid their debt to society. Our criminal justice system still disproportionately locks up people of color and we still do not provide full equality for LGBT and immigrant communities.

We can do better, and we will. With our dedicated staff and board and our strong

supporters, we are already well-positioned to tackle the toughest civil liberties challenges. But trying times demand that we do more. Over the next few years we will expand our legislative team so that more of our priority bills become law and we can defeat more civil liberties attacks. We will continue to build our legal program so that we can take on even more groundbreaking cases. We will increase our community outreach and engagement to make sure that key civil liberties facing our state are understood and that we are building the capacity of our allies to join us.

This is an ambitious agenda, but one that is well within our grasp. Our board, staff, and I look forward to working with all of you to make our civil liberties dreams the new Iowan reality. ■

Jeremy Rosen
ACLU of Iowa
Executive Director



*Prizing liberty and maintaining rights
since 1935*

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES
UNION OF IOWA
505 Fifth Avenue, Suite 901
Des Moines, Iowa 50309-2316
515-243-3576