



## TOOLS FOR ACLU OF MICHIGAN VOLUNTEERS

We have assembled a few resources to assist in learning more about the ACLU of Michigan and the issues we work on, identifying opportunities to get involved, and directing interested volunteers in the advocacy that is essential to bringing about change.

- Overview: The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan – This is a tool for individuals who are relatively new to the ACLU. It provides background information on our organization, including what we do and a summary of the issues we work on.
- ACLU Member Activism – This resource was developed for volunteers who are more familiar with the ACLU and our local units as a refresher on our advocacy and a guide for planning specific activities in activism, public education and awareness, and recruitment and engagement.
- Building Local Action Power with the ACLU of Michigan – Based on the *Indivisible Guide*, this tool outlines effective strategies for direct action that our local unit volunteers can take to engage elected officials on the various issues identified in the Overview of the organization.

We believe you will find these tools helpful as you consider how you might involve yourself in the ACLU's work in ways that suit your interest level, commitment of time and experience.

For additional information, please contact ACLU of Michigan Field Director Rodd Monts at [rmonts@aclumich.org](mailto:rmonts@aclumich.org).





## I - OVERVIEW: THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF MICHIGAN

### Who We Are

Since our founding in 1920, The American Civil Liberties Union has led the fight in the courts, legislatures, and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to all people in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States.

### What We Do

To accomplish our goals we use all tools at our disposal: public education, legislative advocacy, organizing, and litigation. Nationwide, we have over 500,000 active members and supporters, nearly 200 staff attorneys, thousands of volunteer attorneys, and a network of affiliate offices in every state.

In Michigan, we have grown to over 22,000 active members and supporters since we were formally established in the state in 1959. As one of the top affiliates in the country, we have 27 full-time staff who are attorneys, lobbyists, communications specialists, organizers and administrative personnel. The ACLU of Michigan has a presence across the state with our headquarters in Detroit and offices in Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Flint.

### Who We Fight For

Our mission to fight government abuse and vigorously defend individual freedoms knows no party bounds. We regularly join in coalition with conservatives and progressive alike (and everyone in between) on a wide array of issues.

### Issues We Work On

**Smart Justice and Mass Incarceration** – The ACLU of Michigan’s Fair Justice Smart Justice campaign focuses on the “front end” of the criminal justice system—from policing to sentencing— seeking to reduce Michigan’s prison population, reallocate state resources to alternatives to incarceration, improve prison conditions, and help returning citizens successfully re-enter society.

**Reproductive Freedom** – Working in collaboration with allies around the state, we work to ensure that every woman can make the best decision for herself and her family about whether and when to have a child without undue political interference.

**Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Rights** - The ACLU of Michigan’s LGBT project takes a lead role in the campaign to combat LGBT discrimination. We were instrumental in building a powerful business coalition in support of including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in Michigan’s Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.

**Voting Rights** – We work to protect and expand the freedom to vote, through advocacy and litigation. Voting is a fundamental right upon which all of our civil liberties rest. We support proven measures that



ensure election integrity, security, and accuracy while guaranteeing that eligible voters are able to exercise their right to vote.

**Education** – All children in Michigan should receive a high quality education. The ACLU advocates that all children, particularly the most disenfranchised, have equity in their opportunity to receive a quality public education. Our priorities include efforts to dismantle the school-to-prison-pipeline, supporting quality literacy intervention, and advocating for more resources for students with disabilities.

**Immigration** – The ACLU believes that the guarantees of the Constitution apply to all, including noncitizen residents. Our work is focused on state-based issues affecting our immigrant and refugee communities, such as deportation, racial profiling, employment discrimination, and access to public resources.

**Privacy and Technology** – We work to expand the right to privacy, increase the control individuals have over their personal information, and ensure civil liberties are not compromised by technological innovation. We work with stakeholders and the Michigan Legislature on issues such as medical and genetic privacy, surveillance by law enforcement and government entities, consumer, financial, and workplace privacy.

**Religious Liberty** - We safeguard the First Amendment's guarantee of religious liberty by ensuring that laws neither promote religion nor interfere with its free exercise.

**Free Speech** - The fight for freedom of speech, the press, association, assembly and petition have been the bedrock of the ACLU's mission since our founding in 1920. We work to champion freedom of expression in its myriad forms –through protest, media, online speech, and the arts.

## **II - ACLU OF MICHIGAN MEMBER ACTIVISM**

### **ACLU of MI Overview**

The ACLU of Michigan is one of the top affiliates in the U.S. with more than 22,000 active members and supporters. We have 27 full-time staff that includes attorneys, lobbyists, communications specialists, organizers and administrative personnel -- with offices in Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Flint.

To accomplish our goals we use all tools at our disposal: public education, legislative advocacy, organizing, and litigation. Nationwide, we have over 500,000 active members and supporters, nearly 200 staff attorneys, thousands of volunteer attorneys, and a network of affiliate offices in every state. Our mission to fight government abuse and vigorously defend individual freedoms knows no party bounds. That means we regularly join in coalition with conservatives and progressive alike on a wide array of issues.

### **Our Advocacy**

The ACLU's work at both the grassroots and grass-tops levels is in collaboration with our dedicated volunteers and supporters. We have local units across the state, including geographic units representing Metro Detroit (Wayne, Macomb and Washtenaw), Oakland County, Greater Flint, the Lansing area, and West Michigan (including Grand Rapids and regional communities). We also have a statewide unit known as the Tuition Equality Local Unit. Local Units are groups of ACLU members who partner with supporters and community allies to educate and reform civil liberties issues in their communities. Local units focus on three activity areas:

1. Activism
2. Public Education & Awareness
3. Engagement & Recruitment

#### **Activism**

The ACLU Legislative Department relies on our volunteers and supporters for the outreach critical to advancing our state and federal policy work with lawmakers. Constituent contact is the most effective lobbying tool for success, and can include:

- Legislative visits
- Letter writing and social media contact
- Phone calls and phone banking
- Public letters to the editor and op-eds
- Attending in-district coffee hours and town halls
- Appearing at legislative hearings, city council, county commission, or school board meetings

ACLU members also work on a variety of policy efforts in their communities, from county and city ordinances, to school board policies, to connecting their cities to statewide and national rights campaigns. Some successful municipal policy initiatives include:

- Introducing and passing local human rights ordinances, prohibiting LGBT discrimination
- Working with local police to adopt model de-escalation policies
- Ensuring protection of immigrant rights by passing "safe city" ordinances

- Working with school boards to pass anti-bullying policies
- Advancing local policies that foster re-entry resources for the formerly incarcerated
- Working with local city clerks to ensure fair and open access to the voting booth

### **Public Education & Awareness**

Increasing awareness of civil rights and civil liberties issues (immigrant rights, rights in police encounters, student rights, rights of protestors, etc.) is integral to combating discrimination and potential abuses by public agencies. ACLU volunteers play an important role in organizing public education events like town halls, panel discussions, and community dialogues. Examples of these activities include:

- Public forums – ACLU experts and allies discuss racial justice, LGBT issues, reproductive rights, public policy, religious freedom, and other pressing civil rights topics
- “Know Your Rights” training – an opportunity to educate the public on immigrant rights, rights in police encounters, student rights, and voting rights
- Documentary and film screenings – films like “Snowden” to spark community dialogue about privacy rights, “Do Not Resist” to highlight police practices, “13<sup>th</sup>” for a dialogue on systemic racial bias, and “Here’s to Flint” our own documentary chronicling the Flint water crisis for discussion on the pitfalls of emergency management
- Panel discussions – community leaders, public officials, local activists and ACLU staff and volunteers share views on issues that matter where they live, and consider solutions to common problems

### **Engagement & Recruitment**

Promoting the ACLU of Michigan at the community level to attract and engage volunteers and supporters makes all of the other work possible. Engagement and recruitment activities are avenues through which members enjoy socializing and networking while connecting to like-minded individuals who are interested in civil rights and civil liberties issues. These types of activities include:

- Hosting Happy Hour events at local pubs and eateries
- Sponsoring social justice-themed art at festivals like ARTPRIZE, or events at institutions like the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit
- Tabling ACLU information and merchandise at public events like Pride, Hotter than July, Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace Walk, and local marches, rallies, fairs, and parades.
- Organizing “watch” parties for noteworthy events like candidate debates or important speeches
- Hosting house parties to engage prospective members, donors and supporters
- Organizing outings at Detroit Tigers games and other sporting events
- Forming social justice “Meetup” groups and activities that give back, like tutoring at a youth center

### **Civil Liberties Campaigns**

While all of the work we do with our volunteers and supporters falls into the categories outlined above, it connects to a broad array of issues. The ACLU is always vigilant about confronting civil liberties violations. It is important that we are strategic about addressing and reforming our laws and policies that undermine civil liberties, and to this end we have developed specific campaigns to achieve comprehensive reform over the next two years:



**Smart Justice and Mass Incarceration** – The ACLU of Michigan’s Fair Justice Smart Justice campaign focuses on the “front end” of the criminal justice system—from policing to sentencing— seeking to reduce Michigan’s prison population, reallocate state resources to alternatives to incarceration, improve prison conditions, and help returning citizens successfully re-enter society.

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### III - Building Local Action Power with the ACLU of Michigan

- 1) Use the Indivisible Guide (<https://www.indivisibleguide.com/>) to help organize ACLU local teams (<http://aclumich.org/content/get-involved>). While this summarizes top-level takeaways, the full document describes how to actually carry out these activities.
  - a) Ch. 1: We examine lessons from the Tea Party's rise and recommend two key strategic components:
    - i) A local strategy targeting individual Members of Congress (MoCs).
    - ii) A defensive approach purely focused on stopping Trump from implementing an agenda built on racism, authoritarianism, and corruption.
  - b) Ch. 2: How your MoC thinks, and how to use that to save democracy. Reelection, reelection, reelection. MoCs want their constituents to think well of them and they want good, local press. They hate surprises, wasted time, and most of all, bad press that makes them look weak, unlikable, and vulnerable. You will use these interests to make them listen and act.
  - c) Ch. 3: Identify or organize your local group. Is there an existing local group or network you can join? Or do you need to start your own? We suggest steps to help mobilize your fellow constituents locally and start organizing for action.
  - d) Ch. 4: Four local advocacy tactics that actually work. Most of you have 3 MoCs—two Senators and one Representative. Whether you like it or not, they are your voice in Washington. Your job is to make sure they are, in fact, speaking for you. We've identified four key opportunity areas to pressure MoCs that just a handful of local constituents can use to great effect.

For each of these always record encounters on video, prepare questions ahead of time, coordinate with your group, and report back to local media:

    - i) Townhalls: MoCs regularly hold public in-district events to show that they are listening to constituents. Make them listen to you, and report out when they don't.
    - ii) Non-townhall events. MoCs love cutting ribbons and kissing babies back home. Don't let them get photo-ops without questions about racism, authoritarianism, and corruption.
    - iii) District office sit-ins/meetings. Every MoC has one or several district offices. Go there. Demand a meeting with the MoC. Report to the world if they refuse to listen.
    - iv) Coordinated calls. Calls are a light lift but can have impact. Organize your local group to barrage your MoCs at an opportune moment and on a specific issue.
- 2) Coordinating with the ACLU of Michigan

- i) We add resources you can use to target your State Legislators (MoSL), one House member, one Senator:
    - (1) State and local office information, including contact information, staff, coffee hours, Twitter handle.
    - (2) Updates on pertinent legislative action, including background, ACLU position summary, committee hearings, and scheduled votes.
    - (3) MoSL's committee assignments and interest areas so you can invite them to participate in discussions, events, and towns halls.
  - ii) Legislative updates, background information and issue positions on the major civil liberties issues facing our nation:
    - (1) Free Speech
    - (2) Religious Liberty
    - (3) Racial Equality
    - (4) Reproductive Freedom
    - (5) Gay, Lesbian, Transgender Rights
    - (6) Voting Rights
    - (7) Public Education
    - (8) Immigration
    - (9) Privacy and Technology
    - (10) Mass Incarceration
  - iii) ACLU website link for updates on legislative action and voting records of MoSL's on key ACLU issues.
  - iv) ACLU will provide informational resources, including speakers and "know your rights" trainings for your constituent groups.
  - v) Provide them a link to "transition watch" (<https://www.aclu.org/feature/trump-transition-watch>) so they can immediately engage in messaging to their congressional representatives.
  - vi) Provide links to our website where we will put information on pending legislation as it gets introduced.
- 3) Resources:
- a) ACLU of Michigan (<http://www.aclumich.org/>). An invaluable resource for background information, talking points, and avenues to take action on civil rights issues being debated by our lawmakers, updates on our legal docket, and reports and studies to help inform you and your community on issues impacting Michigan citizens. Please use this resource to become familiar with our staff in our headquarters in Detroit and our offices in Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Flint. "FREEDOM, EQUALITY, AND JUSTICE: The Bill of Rights declared that we have rights and liberties that the government shouldn't interfere with. Rights like the freedom of speech and our right to a speedy trial are the cornerstone of our democracy and define what makes us American. Protecting these liberties and pushing for more freedom and equality in our lives is our job. The ACLU of Michigan's mission remains realizing the promise of the Bill of Rights for all and expanding the reach of its guarantees to new areas through all the tools at our disposal: public education, advocacy, organizing, and litigation. We are grateful for the hundreds of thousands of members and supporters nationwide, from all walks of life, who help us carry out our mission every day." We are rightly concerned that the Trump administration may tamp down on free speech



rights and embolden authoritarian tendencies. And download the Mobile Justice App so you can record, report, and witness police abuse. <http://www.aclumich.org/MobileJusticeMI>

- b) The Reclaim Project (<http://www.reclaimproject.org>). This a local organization with the aim of providing resources to women seeking reproductive health care, such as fees for transportation, lodging, meals, babysitting, and fees for translation services. "Our mission is to empower women and communities to reclaim their moral goodness, reproductive rights and access to reproductive healthcare. RECLAIM's focus is advocacy, education and community engagement to facilitate transformation in cultural views of reproductive health. We envision a world in which we can all achieve the freedom of bodily autonomy and express our moral goodness without consequence."
- c) Find your Michigan Senator - <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/fysbyaddress.html>
- d) Find your House Representative - <http://www.house.mi.gov/mhrpublic/frmFindARep.aspx>
- e) Contact the Governor - <http://www.michigan.gov/snyder/0,4668,7-277-57827---,00.html>
- f) Michigan Votes (<http://www.michiganvotes.org/>). A great resource to follow all that is happening at the State Capitol, including bills introduced and votes taken by you own State lawmakers.
- g) Rogan's List (<http://roganslist.blogspot.com/>). This is a daily list of news and meaningful action items compiled by a university librarian who is an information and fact-checking geek. Even if you have only five minutes to spare on any given day, your participation counts and this site makes it easy.
- h) Everyday Project (<https://www.everydayproject.org/>). Provides the resources to take one action per day for the first 45 days of the administration of the 45<sup>th</sup> President. "We're starting now - 45 days from Inauguration Day, to get ready for a reality where political action is a necessary part of our daily lives. We promise to send you one action daily that you can take to fight alongside the people across every group affected by this election. Every action will work to protect the issues and communities most at threat, including: women, people of color, LGBTQ people, voting rights, climate change, healthcare, and immigration."
- i) Wall of Us (<https://www.wall-of-us.org/>). This site suggests we build a wall – a wall of resistance to President Trump. They outline four concrete acts of resistance every week. "OUR MISSION: To make it simply irresistible for Americans to become active participants in rebuilding our democracy."
- j) Countable (<https://www.countable.us/>). This is actually an App that makes it easy to know and understand what is happening in Congress and provides a streamlined process of contacting your lawmaker. This is a very informative and simple-to-use App to stay in the know and make your voice heard.

