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## A HUNGER STRIKE EXPOSES IMPUNITY IN IMMIGRATION DETENTION

BY SARAH HOPKINS

On the morning of March 7, 2023, Milton Mendez and Pedro Figueroa-Padilla awoke to a scene of chaos at the Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center in Bakersfield, California. Officers from The GEO Group, Inc. (GEO), the private prison corporation that owns and operates the immigration detention facility under a contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), were raiding their dorm, wielding batons and pepper spray.

Officers from an ICE special response unit entered behind them, demanding that all detained people in the dorm, including Milton and Pedro, get on the floor.

As the officers were streaming in, Pedro had been able to quickly reach an immigration attorney on a video call through a detention center tablet. The attorney witnessed the officers' arrival on video until the stream suddenly paused; it appeared an officer had grabbed the tablet from

Pedro's hands and thrown it to the ground.

But the audio continued. She heard officers handcuffing Pedro as he cried out in pain. "You're hurting my hand! Why are you doing this? I'm not resisting. My arm!" she heard him scream.

Milton and others frantically tried to reach their families and attorneys, but staff cut the phone lines.

Lines of communication would remain shut down for the following six hours, as officers slammed people to the floor, kicked one man until he fainted, and transferred four people—including Pedro—to an ICE facility in El Paso, Texas, under the pretext of providing "medical care."

This was one of many attempts to break a peaceful hunger strike that approximately 82 people at Mesa Verde and another detention facility, Golden State Annex in MacFarland, California, had begun to protest unpaid labor and inhumane living conditions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

## WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU! TAKE OUR 15-MINUTE SURVEY

At the ACLU of Northern California, we're committed to keeping our members informed and engaged. We've been doing that through our newsletter, the *ACLU News*, since 1936. As part of our ongoing commitment, we want to ensure that the *ACLU News* is a valuable resource providing you with what you need to take action to defend and expand civil liberties and civil rights.

That's why we're asking you to take 15 minutes or less to share your thoughts with us in a survey. We're interested in learning about your experience with the newsletter and how you'd like to receive information from us. This helps to ensure we're providing you with useful resources and the best possible experience.

**Take action now at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/aclunc](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/aclunc)**

And as a token of appreciation for your time, we'll send you **a free sticker!** If you share a membership with anyone, please ask them to take the survey as well.

We'd love to hear from everyone. Thank you for your continued support.



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# BOARD ELECTION NOTICE

We're always looking for committed members to join the Board. The nominating committee is now seeking suggestions from the membership to fill positions on the Board.

Candidates and ballots will appear in the Fall issue of the *ACLU News*. Elected Board members will begin their three-year term in January.

Pursuant to Article VI, Section 4 of the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California's bylaws, there are two ways for members to participate in the Board nominating process:

1. Send suggestions for the nominating committee's consideration by Sept. 5, 2023. Address suggestions to: Nominating Committee, ACLU-NC, 39 Drumm Street, San Francisco, CA 94111. Include your nominee's qualifications and how the nominee may be reached.
2. Submit a petition of nomination with the signatures of 15 current ACLU-NC members. Petitions of nomination, which should also include the nominee's qualifications, must be submitted to the Board by Oct. 18, 2023 (20 days after the September Board meeting).

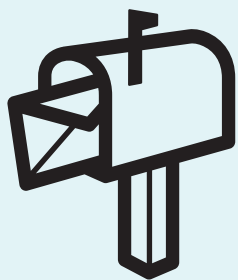
Current ACLU members are those who have renewed their membership during the last 12 months. Only current members are eligible to submit nominations, sign petitions of nomination, and vote. No member may sign more than one such petition. ACLU members will select Board members from the slate of candidates nominated by petition and by the nominating committee. The ballot will appear in the Fall issue of the *ACLU News*.

## BYLAWS OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

### ARTICLE VI, SECTION 4B NOMINATIONS BY MEMBER PETITION

Any 15 or more members of this corporation in good standing may themselves submit a nomination of a member in good standing of this corporation to be included among those voted upon by the general membership by submitting a written petition to the Board not later than 20 days after the adoption by the Board of the slate of Board nominees. No member of this corporation may sign more than one such petition and each such nomination shall be accompanied by a summary of qualifications and the written consent of the nominee. This provision of these bylaws shall be printed in an issue of the *ACLU News* or other document mailed to this corporation's members before each election, together with an article advising members of their rights in the nominating process.

## WANT TO CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS OR MAILING PREFERENCES?



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## TO OUR MEMBERS

Mailings to our members and the general public provide opportunities to describe complicated legal and political issues in ways not possible in other media and to describe strategies we plan to use for future actions. They enable us to explain, in detail, the benefits and provisions of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the ways our rights can be protected in today's world, and the costs of preserving those rights. We use the mail to inform people of the importance of our legal work and to solicit funds that enable us to continue our litigation, public education, and legislative lobbying.

Sometimes, as part of our program to find and recruit members, we exchange or rent our list of members' names to like-minded organizations and publications. We do this so that we will be able to send our membership letters to their lists.

The ACLU never makes its list available to partisan political groups or those whose programs are incompatible with the ACLU's mission. Whether by exchange or rental, the exchanges are governed by strict privacy procedures, as recommended by the U.S. Privacy Study Commission. Lists are never actually given into the physical possession of the organization that has rented them or exchanged for them. No organization ever possesses our list and no organization will ever see the names of the members on our list unless an individual responds to their mailing.

While mailings—under strict privacy guidelines—form the basis of our new member acquisition program, and are key to our growth, we understand some members do not wish to receive solicitations from other groups and we gladly honor requests from our members to be removed from the process. Once you make this election, you do not need to do so again unless you wish to change your preference back.

If you do not wish to receive materials from other organizations, please email [membership@aclu.org](mailto:membership@aclu.org) or complete this coupon and send it to:

ACLU Membership Department  
125 Broad Street, 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10004

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# PROGRESS IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS FIGHT AGAINST FACE SURVEILLANCE

BY MATT CAGLE

For years, ACLU of Northern California has built momentum to ban the use of face surveillance by law enforcement. That’s why we put all our muscle behind a campaign to defeat AB 642, a bill that would have normalized real-time, mass surveillance. This is a momentous civil rights win for the millions of Californians who don’t want a future where police can secretly identify and track us whenever we’re in public.

AB 642 was a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Originally supported by the police, this bill claimed to limit face surveillance, but in reality, would have provided law enforcement with sweeping authorization to use the technology to scan, track, and record people without their knowledge or consent.

For example, the bill would have enabled the police to place Californians in a perpetual virtual lineup by allowing the use of driver’s license photos to power face surveillance and other biometric systems (use of California driver’s licenses for biometrics has been long prohibited). A provision in the bill also would have explicitly condoned the creation of community-wide, real-time face surveillance networks, meaning that people could be forcibly identified every time they passed a police camera—a civil rights nightmare that advocates have called it the digital equivalent of “show me your papers.”

As with other dragnet surveillance practices, face surveillance would disproportionately harm Black and Brown Californians. Face

recognition is notoriously less accurate on Black and Brown faces, and it is built upon databases populated with millions of mugshots of Black and Brown victims of the War on Drugs and other discriminatory laws. As a result, people of color are more likely to be identified, profiled, stopped, detained, and entered into these databases, exacerbating a cycle of racially biased policing and incarceration.

Because face surveillance supercharges discriminatory policing and gravely threatens privacy and freedom of expression, the only responsible regulatory approach is a complete prohibition on its use by law enforcement. Any regulation short of a full ban would be like trying to block a cannonball with cardboard. Many privacy and civil rights leaders share our view, and even companies like Amazon, Microsoft, and IBM refuse to sell face surveillance technology to police.


Twenty U.S. cities have prohibited the use of face surveillance. This started in San Francisco, where an ACLU-led civil rights coalition worked to pass a landmark ban in 2019.

Our opposition to AB 642 was so strong that we tagged the bill as a “Justice Denier” so that lawmakers would know that the ACLU would score their legislative record based in part on this bill. We not only defeated AB 642, but also a strong and diverse coalition led by ACLU NorCal has advanced another bill through the Assembly, AB 1034 (Wilson), which moves us a step closer



ART BY JAMES SHIELDS

to a world free from dangerous face surveillance. If passed by the Senate and signed into law by Governor Newsom, AB 1034 would prohibit police from using body worn and held cameras for face surveillance. Police body cameras were intended for transparency and accountability, not for officers to use to surveil people going about their daily lives or engaging in social protest.

ACLU NorCal and civil rights partners across the state have put in an immense amount of work to get where we are today. We still have a long way to go, but together, we stopped a terrible bill that would have endangered the rights and safety of Californians and undermined the national movement to protect against this uniquely dangerous surveillance technology. 

*Matt Cagle is a senior staff attorney at the ACLU of Northern California.*

## IN MEMORIAM

### ACLU VOLUNTEER AND CHAPTER LEADER ELLIOT HALPERN

The ACLU of Northern California mourns the loss of Elliot Halpern, who passed away in April 2023. He was born in 1939 in New Orleans, and spent his life dedicated to the advancement of civil liberties and racial justice.



PHOTO BY MARTHA WINNACKER

Elliott Halpern

Elliot was at the forefront of many of the important civil liberties victories in Berkeley over the past several decades. He joined the ACLU Berkeley North-East Bay Chapter in 2007, jumping in immediately as a leader. He was also a member of the local NAACP and in 2011 he co-founded the Coalition for a Safe Berkeley to fight against police racial profiling, surveillance, cooperation with ICE, and militarization. He

also sat on several city commissions and was instrumental in passing a city charter to institute the Berkeley Police Accountability Board.

We remember Elliot as a friend whom we looked forward to meeting for a cup of coffee or a phone call to learn more about the needs and politics of the Berkeley community. With his passing we lose a partner in fighting for justice, and we remember him as an inspiration as a new generation of advocates builds on his legacy.

### LONG-TIME SUPPORTER EVA GROVE

Eva Grove, a long-time member and supporter of the ACLU, passed away on May 31, 2023. Eva and her husband Andy each escaped the Holocaust as children, lived in New York where they met and married, and then moved to California.

Eva’s experience gave her deep appreciation for this country, but also a recognition of systemic barriers. In a 2018 interview for the ACLU, with her quintessential candor she said,




PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GROVE FOUNDATION

Eva Grove

“I’ve been thinking my good immigration experience had a lot to do with the fact that I was white. People didn’t know I was a foreigner until I opened my mouth!” She tackled those systemic barriers through her approach to philanthropy:

build power in communities directly impacted by injustice, so they can craft the solutions.

After the election of Donald Trump, Eva made a transformative gift to the ACLU’s Centennial Campaign. When she went to wire the gift, she increased it substantially on the spot. She explained in a phone call to the ACLU later that day, “This is not the time to hold back.”

Thankfully, Eva Grove never held back her kind spirit, deep curiosity, and fundamental respect for human rights. And our country is better for it. 



# ANNUAL ACLU NORCAL CONFERENCE MAKES TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO SACRAMENTO

BY LISA P. WHITE

For the first time since 2019, hundreds of ACLU NorCal volunteers gathered in Sacramento for our annual conference which had been virtual for the past three years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Celebrating the theme, Unite, Rebuild, Transform, the workshops addressed a range of pressing civil rights and civil liberties issues including—independent sheriffs oversight boards, housing justice, local budget advocacy, the family policing system, government surveillance, Indigenous justice, and mass incarceration.

A few attendees shared their reflections on this year's gathering:

## VICTOR SIN, SANTA CLARA VALLEY CHAPTER

A conference veteran and chapter chair, Sin looked forward to reconnecting with fellow ACLU volunteers. "It's always inspirational to see and feel the people power," he said. Sin intends to share with his chapter information

about ACLU NorCal's nascent local budget justice campaign that will train volunteers to advocate for investments in housing, mental health services, and public defense.

## BHAJLEEN KHALSA, SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY CHAPTER


Khalsa was eager to attend the conference and lobby in person for the first time since she joined the ACLU in 2020. Having an opportunity to meet volunteers and hear stories about what drew them to activism and the ACLU was powerful, she said. Since the conference, her chapter has discussed how they can fight for reproductive justice and push for local funding to support the unhoused community.

Khalsa, a college student, also urged ACLU leaders and community members to participate

in future conferences. "For change to happen, we have to show up as a community."

## LOQ BERRY, SONOMA COUNTY

After training as a volunteer legislative advocate with ACLU NorCal, Berry attended their first in-person conference this year eager to build community and meet other volunteers from the Sonoma County area. Berry said they learned about county budgets, how boards of supervisors function, and the value of storytelling in activism.

"Hearing the affected families of police violence brought tears to my eyes and galvanization to my heart," they said. 

*Lisa P. White is a communications strategist at the ACLU of Northern California.*



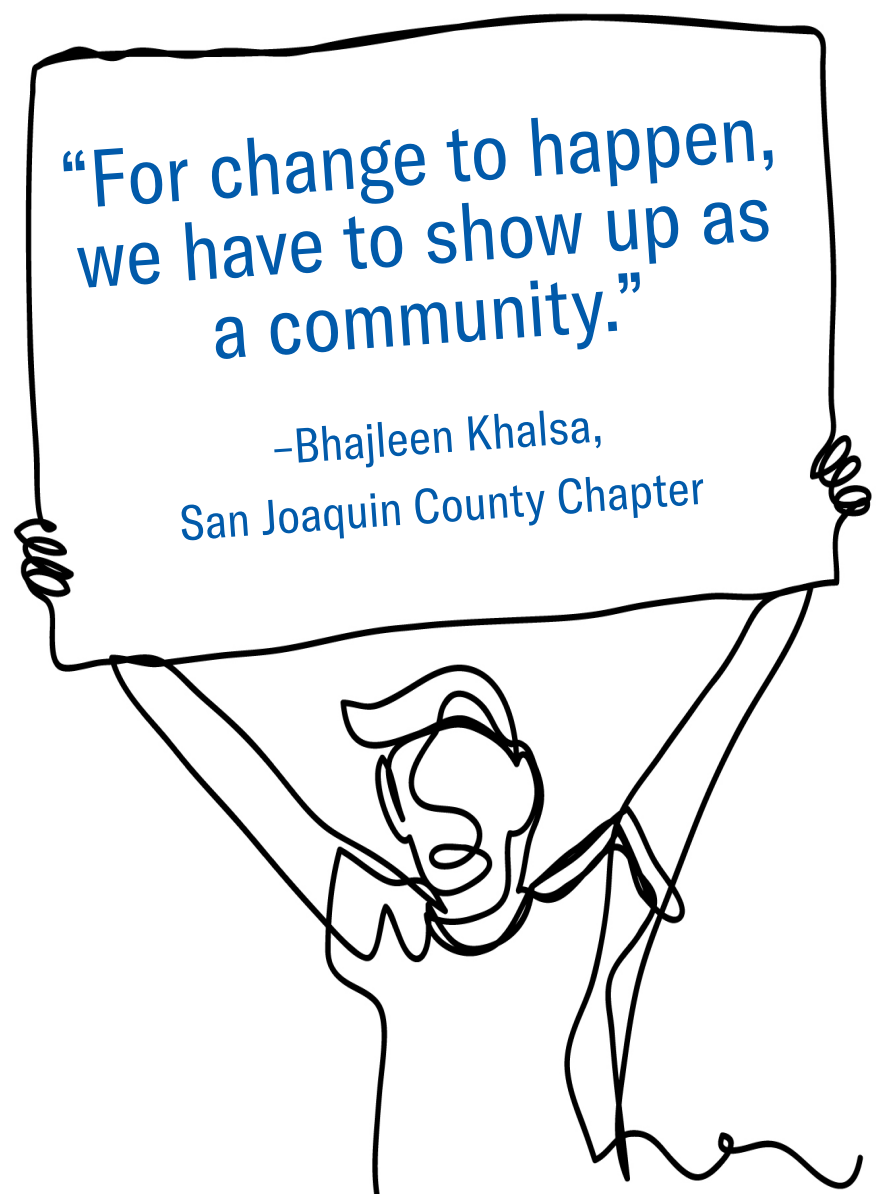
PHOTO BY MICHAEL B. WOOLSEY

Workshops featured activists, artists, organizers, and more. Shown above, ACLU NorCal Artist in Residence Edgar Arturo Camacho led an Art for Organizing workshop.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL B. WOOLSEY

Participants applaud at the conclusion of the afternoon spotlight panel.





# PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN WERE KILLED BY POLICE TURN ‘PAIN INTO PURPOSE’

BY LISA P. WHITE

Eleven years before George Floyd’s murder sparked worldwide protests, Oscar Grant’s 2009 shooting death at the Fruitvale BART station in Oakland shocked the Bay Area and became a catalyst for the national movement to end extrajudicial police killings of Black and Brown people. Since then, victims’ family members have joined activists in the streets and in the halls of power to demand police accountability.

At the ACLU NorCal conference, four parents whose children were killed by police, and one woman who is fighting for charges in her son’s murder, shared their heartbreaking and inspiring stories during the “Voices from the Front: An Overdue Reckoning with Structural Racism in Policing in California” panel.

Though still grieving the devastating loss of their loved ones, these remarkable parents have transformed their “pain into purpose,” successfully advocating for changes in California law to reduce police violence. The ACLU has partnered with many of these families to pass and then enforce a number of these laws.

“The power of the police to use deadly force is the most significant responsibility we can give any public official,” said moderator Cephus Johnson, Oscar Grant’s uncle. “That responsibility must be guided by common sense legislation that protects our rights and saves our lives.”

Fouzia Almarou worked tirelessly to pass the Kenneth Ross Jr. Police Decertification Act after a Gardena police officer fatally shot her son in April 2018. The bill, which went into effect in January, creates a statewide process to strip licenses from police officers fired for serious misconduct, including wrongful shootings and sexual assault.

“I will not stop fighting for justice,” Almarou said. “When we fight, we win.”

After Sacramento police officers shot and killed Stephon Clark in his grandmother’s backyard in March 2018, his mother Sequette Clark pushed for passage of ‘The California Act to Save Lives,’ a 2019 law that restricts police use of deadly force.

“It doesn’t bring back my son, but it does save the lives of your sons,” Clark said.

Miles Hall and Angelo Quinto were in mental distress when they were killed in separate incidents by police officers who responded to relatives’ 911 calls for help. The circumstances of their tragic deaths are not unusual. In fact, 21 percent of victims shot and killed by law enforcement were undergoing a



PHOTO BY MICHAEL B. WOOLSEY

Parents of victims of police violence spoke during an afternoon spotlight panel on the power of coming together to fight for change. Left to right: Oscar Grant’s uncle Cephus Johnson, who moderated the panel; Taun Hall, mother of Miles Hal; Sequette Clark, mother of Stephon Clark.

## “I will not stop fighting for justice.”

—Fouzia Almarou, who worked tirelessly to pass the ‘Kenneth Ross Jr. Police Decertification Act’ after a Gardena police officer fatally shot her son in 2018

mental health crisis at the time, according to The Washington Post, which has tracked fatal police shootings in the U.S. since 2015.

“I knew right away we had to change the

way police respond to people experiencing mental health challenges,” said Taun Hall, whose son, Miles, was shot by Walnut Creek police in June 2019.

Passed in 2022, the ‘Miles Hall Lifeline and Suicide Prevention Act’ established an emergency response phone line people can call to request aid from trained mental health professionals, rather than armed law enforcement.

In December 2020, Angelo Quinto died from asphyxiation after Antioch police officers pinned him to the floor for several minutes.

“There were two victims that night. The first victim was Angelo, and the second victim was the truth,” said his father, Robert Collins. “I say that because what killed Angelo was a system that cannot police itself.”

‘Angelo’s Law,’ which prohibits police from using restraints that cause positional asphyxia, passed in 2021.

Charmaine Lawson is still seeking justice for her son, Cal Poly Humboldt student David Josiah Lawson, who was fatally stabbed at an off-campus house party in April 2017 during an attack that may have been racially motivated. Despite eyewitness accounts and physical evidence, the Humboldt County district attorney has not charged a suspect.

Clark, Hall, Lawson, and Ross were Black, Quinto was Filipino.

“This is the worst pain that a parent should ever have to go through,” said Lawson, who is working to hold the prosecutor accountable and to address campus climate with respect to hate crimes in California. “That’s why I’m here, fighting for my baby.”

# SAN MATEO COUNTY ENDS ICE COLLUSION AFTER YEARS OF LOCAL ACTIVISM

BY BRADY HIRSCH

One in three people in San Mateo County is an immigrant, but in 2020 and 2021, San Mateo County helped deport more community members than any other county in the Bay Area.

The practice dates back to at least 2010, when the San Mateo County’s Sheriff’s Office drastically increased its collusion with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, holding immigrants past their release date and helping transfer them into ICE custody.

In response, the San Mateo County Coalition for Immigrant Rights (SMCCIR) was born. The ACLU-North Peninsula Chapter was a founding member, and what started with small evening meetings in local churches evolved into a decade-plus campaign in which activists, community organizations, and impacted people united to end San Mateo County’s collusion with ICE.

Thanks to the dedication and bravery of so many caring residents, on April 11th, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance that forbids any county cooperation with ICE.

But this final victory was built by smaller ones. Early work focused on stopping the deportation of children—at the time, San Mateo County had one of the highest referrals from youth probation to ICE in the nation.

What started with small evening meetings in local churches evolved into a decade long campaign in which activists, community organizations, and impacted people united to end San Mateo County’s collusion with ICE.

For years, SMCCIR organized to stop the Sheriff from handing people over to ICE. In public hearings and lobbying visits, the coalition explained how ICE collusion tears families apart and dissuades survivors of domestic violence from seeking help, making the community less safe and more divided.

SMCCIR uplifted stories from people like Nora Meléndez, who publicly shared how after her husband was transferred to ICE, their “young children suffered eight months of the destabilizing effects of their father’s absence,” with the family now “forced to plan for the possibility of his deportation.”

The coalition also held rallies. In April 2020, a coordinated cadre of cars encircled the jail where immigrants were held in conditions that were high-risk for COVID. As activists honked their horns, detained people inside waved.

In 2021, Sheriff Bolanos ended ICE transfers, a promise upheld by his successor, Sheriff Corpus. By the time the Board of Supervisors passed the final 2023 ordinance, the climate had completely shifted, and the law was approved by a near unanimous vote.

“I’m so proud to finally be able to say that San Mateo County is safer for our undocumented neighbors,” said ACLU-North Peninsula Chapter Co-chair Sara Matlin. “Our community is a rich tapestry of people that we should be honored live here.”

*Brady Hirsch is a communications strategist at the ACLU of Northern California.*

# THE CALIFORNIA CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO PRIVACY TURNS 50—OUR LONGTIME WORK TO MAKE RIGHTS REAL

BY BRADY HIRSCH

Life, liberty, and...privacy. These inalienable rights are enshrined at the top of the California Constitution. Fifty years ago, with support from the ACLU, a modern constitutional right to privacy was added to the state constitution through a prescient ballot measure. And for the last five decades, that right has helped to safeguard our homes, our families, our bodies, our thoughts, and our associations from invasion by government and corporate interests.

The United States Constitution had long provided protections for due process and unreasonable search and seizures by the government, but it was not crafted to stop encroachment by corporations, nor the full surveillance capabilities enabled by new technology. As the computer age eliminated the logistical difficulty of surveilling millions of people, it became clear that new and stronger privacy protections were critical.

After supporting its passage, the ACLU helped bring the Privacy Amendment to life. An early test was the 1975 landmark case, *White v. Davis*. We sued the Los Angeles Police Department for infiltrating UCLA courses and organizations to create dossiers on other students

and professors, without any suspicion of illegal activity. The California Supreme Court wrote that the LAPD’s spying program “epitomizes the kind of governmental conduct which the new constitutional amendment condemns.” Other ACLU lawsuits built on this ruling by focusing on private actors. Among these was *Sheehan v. San Francisco 49ers*, an important suit to stop sports organizations from requiring indiscriminate body pat-downs to gain admittance to games.

California’s constitutional right to privacy has also been the north-star for our work on cutting-edge laws—from consumer protections that require businesses to provide people with privacy policies, data-breach notifications, and the right to know about and delete the information being collected on them—to anti-surveillance laws that require the government get a warrant to access our personal information and that protect against face surveillance and other dangerous technology.

Yet there is more work to be done. Privacy rights have become even more salient given recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions and the passage of anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ laws in many states.

In a digital world, our freedom depends on our

ability to control how our personal information is collected and used. And thankfully, our work to enact, defend and promote California’s inalienable right to privacy over the past 50 years has given us the means to face today’s challenges.

For more information on the California Constitutional Privacy, look out for an upcoming fall Symposium hosted at Berkeley Law and visit [www.aclunc.org/tech](http://www.aclunc.org/tech).

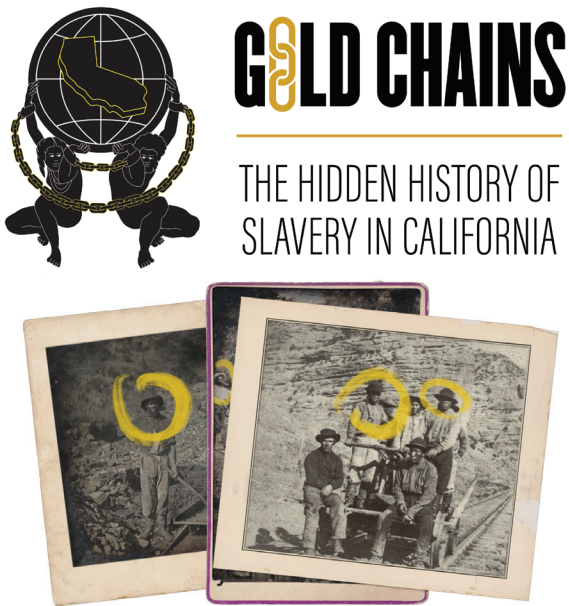
Privacy rights have become even more salient given recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions and the passage of anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ laws in many states.



# CALIFORNIA TAKES HISTORIC STEP ON REPARATIONS FOR BLACK AMERICANS

BY TAMMERLIN DRUMMOND

In the Fall of 2019, the ACLU of Northern California launched our public education campaign Gold Chains: The Hidden History of Slavery in California. While California was ostensibly admitted into the union as a “free state”, we documented how California’s government institutions conspired at every level to keep Black and Native people enslaved through violence, racist laws, and corrupt courts.



Gold Chains makes the case for why reparations are not only just but necessary. California’s little-known slavery history deprived generations of African Americans of economic wealth and countless opportunities. That’s why reparations are not only just, but necessary. Learn more at [www.goldchainsca.org](http://www.goldchainsca.org).

Not long after that, in the midst of the racial reckoning in the summer of 2020, then-Assemblywoman Shirley Weber’s office contacted the ACLU. She wanted to introduce a bill that would make California the first state to create a task force to develop reparations proposals for African Americans. We supported AB 3121, which Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law in 2020.

After two years of investigation and 15 public meetings featuring 100 expert witnesses, the Reparations Task Force voted to approve its final report in May to submit to the state legislature. It recommends that the state compensate eligible Black Californians with cash payments to begin to repair the harm from slavery and 170 years of state-sanctioned policies that robbed many African Americans of the opportunity to build generational wealth. The 9-member panel also urged California to give an official apology to its Black residents.

“The California Reparations Task Force is the first body of its kind in the country,” said Brandon Greene, director of the Racial and Economic Justice Program at the ACLU of Northern California. “Its work will likely have reverberations nationwide.”

Greene testified before the panel about discriminatory housing practices that have pushed Black people out of their communities and into homelessness. He noted that many of the task force recommendations are connected to the ACLU’s ongoing racial justice work.

Deborah Archer, president of the National ACLU also appeared as an expert witness to detail how federal transportation projects

destroyed Black communities all over the country, often by building highways through them.

Our ACLU California affiliates wrote a letter to the task force members, endorsing their work and urging Californians to educate themselves about the recommendations.

There is no price tag that could ever make Black people whole from slavery and its long legacy of discrimination. However, economists have estimated that California could owe about \$500 billion to compensate those eligible for reparations, as much as \$1.2 million per person.

Under the eligibility guidelines recommended by the task force only those who can trace their ancestry to descendants of enslaved or free Black people who were living in the United States before 1900 would qualify for cash payments.

The report now lies in the hands of the legislature, which will ultimately decide, which if any recommendations move forward. The proposals face an uphill battle. California faces a \$22.5 billion budget shortfall, and it’s unclear where the funds would come from.

But regardless, the fact is, California, the nation’s most populous state, has taken an important and long overdue step toward addressing slavery and its legacy. Without a doubt, this represents one milestone toward achieving reparations on a national scale.

The rest of the country and the world are watching. 

*Tammerlin Drummond is a senior communications strategist at the ACLU of Northern California.*

## A HUNGER STRIKE EXPOSES IMPUNITY IN IMMIGRANT DETENTION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

For years, GEO has taken advantage of the labor of detained immigrants, requiring them to prepare and serve food and to clean bathrooms and dorms for just \$1 a day, without proper safety training or protective equipment. People detained at Mesa Verde and Golden State have reported cleaning black mold throughout the facilities and seeing black dust blow through air vents. (In January 2023, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health fined GEO \$104,510 for violating state code by subjecting detained workers to such conditions.)

Through grievances and complaints, people in detention have also repeatedly denounced ICE and GEO for denying them medical care, revoking medical accommodations, cutting off their ability to file grievances, threatening deportation, denying release requests, restricting the right to seek asylum, engaging in verbal abuse and intimidation, and cutting off air conditioning during extreme heat—among many other degradations to the conditions of their civil detainment.

On Feb. 17, 2023, people in both facilities escalated their protests, launching a joint hunger strike to demand the immediate release of all people detained at the facilities and the shutdown

of both detention centers. ACLU NorCal joined a group of 16 other legal and immigrants’ rights organizations to help the hunger strikers with legal support, congressional advocacy, and public awareness of their demands.

“It came to the point that we needed to put our lives in jeopardy to make people aware of what we were forced to deal with in detention, and how our human rights were being violated every day,” said Milton.


Pedro said the protest was a call for protection from the inhumanity of immigration detention. “Why did we have to endure torture when we were asking for protection from torture?” he asked during a recent phone call from Mesa Verde.

The hunger strikers decided to put the strike on pause on March 23, after enduring weeks of retaliation. Their protest persisted for a total of 35 days, sparking national media attention.

Ultimately, ICE and GEO’s callous response to the strikers’ protest served to spotlight why the ACLU and other advocates continue to fight alongside and support detained immigrants: they are all too often at the mercy of their jailers. There is little to no outside scrutiny of, or accountability for, abuses within detention center walls. This

is compounded by the fact that issues relating to immigrants’ rights can be easily swept away by people in power. It is sometimes difficult to get elected representatives to prioritize the needs of immigrants or their family members, who may not have the right to vote.

“Although the hunger strikers experienced tremendous harm, they also demonstrated incredible resilience and dignity,” said Minju Cho, staff attorney for ACLU NorCal’s Immigrants’ Rights Program. “They demonstrated that they have power and solidarity when they organize, and that they gain strength when they support each other. They could not have lasted through a 35-day hunger strike without that support. Their care for each other is very clear and very beautiful.”

“This abuse is going to happen as long as these detention centers are open,” said Pedro. “ICE and GEO don’t see us as people. They see us as money. Standing up for our rights, and against the wrongs that they do, is very hard but extremely necessary. I’m going to continue doing it as long as I’m in this place.” 

*Sarah Hopkins is a communications strategist at the ACLU of Northern California.*

# A LETTER FROM ACLU OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ABDI SOLTANI

One of the qualities of the ACLU that I really appreciate is that it is a truly nationwide organization. That means we can respond to civil liberties and civil rights violations on the ground in every state. It also means that we can develop and pass local and state policies that advance people's rights. Both protecting and advancing rights are essential to what we do. In a federated system of government, ideas that take hold in one place—good or bad—can spread laterally to other cities and states, or vertically through decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court, executive orders, or acts of Congress.

Today, those dynamics are amped up by the increasing polarization in our country, both among our population and among states. Racial and partisan gerrymandering concentrates power even further, leading to even more extreme policies. Politicians in states like Texas and Florida and many others pass policy after policy that violates rights. Elected officials in California have taken strong stances in defense of abortion access, trans rights, and voting rights, but part of our job at the ACLU of Northern California is also to hold them accountable for civil liberties issues in our cities and state.

In that context, I want to highlight three national headlines from the month of June to share some perspective on what these mean for our work going ahead.

## RACIAL GERRYMANDERING IN ALABAMA

Protecting the right to vote is a core issue for the ACLU. That includes the right to register and cast a vote, but also for the vote to count and have equal representation. The ACLU sued the state of Alabama under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. In a 5-4 vote, the US Supreme Court agreed that the Congressional maps adopted by the state legislature violated the rights of Black Alabamans. This decision will have enormous implications throughout the South and beyond, where ACLU attorneys and community partners will use this decision to challenge other cases of racial gerrymandering. In California and other states, we will also work to strengthen our state laws and state requirements for fair maps and representation.

## TRANS HEALTH CARE BAN IN ARKANSAS

The idea started in Arkansas and spread really fast. Arkansas was one of the early states to adopt legislation to ban access to gender-affirming care for transgender youth—and many states quickly followed to pass similar laws. That's why a federal court victory on June 20 in Arkansas was so important. The ACLU of Arkansas sued on behalf of trans youth and their families as well as their caregivers. We won a preliminary injunction, and then went to trial. In the most recent decision, the federal judge struck down the law as a violation of First Amendment rights of health care providers, as well as equal protection and due process rights of trans youth and their parents. Arkansas has already indicated it will appeal. The ACLU will continue to defend trans youth in Arkansas and will immediately use this decision and its factual record and success in our litigation and advocacy in other states.

## INDIGENOUS JUSTICE AT THE SUPREME COURT

In a stunning 7-2 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark victory for indigenous communities. The case at hand was *Brackeen v. Haaland*, a challenge to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). ICWA was passed by Congress in 1978 to stop the crisis of native children being removed from their families and tribes, which in turn posed a threat to tribal sovereignty and survival. As is often the case with the Supreme Court, the concurrences and dissents



PHOTO BY BETHANIE HINES

ACLU of Northern California  
Executive Director Abdi Soltani

were numerous and point to the future. Justice Gorsuch's opinion provides an essential historical context to understand this decision, while Justice Kavanaugh essentially invited a future challenge to the law. The ACLU submitted an amicus brief in this case to support native organizations in their advocacy. Our next step is to work with ACLU affiliates across the country to strengthen their state laws that help enforce the goals of the federal Indian Child Welfare Act. We will also continue to deepen our work on indigenous justice in partnership with tribes and indigenous communities nationwide.

All of this work is made possible by your support as members of the ACLU, as donors to other organizations in movements for equality and justice, and through your participation in our democracy. Thank you.

Abdi Soltani, Executive Director  
ACLU of Northern California

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