

Ohio Civil Liberties Snapshot

Police Practices, Racial Disparity, and Public Unrest

Tarika Wilson, Brandon McCloud, Timothy Russell, Malissa Williams, Tanisha Anderson, John Crawford, 12-year-old Tamir Rice, and most recently Brandon Jones, all lost their lives at the hands of Ohio police. Is this evidence that our policing system is broken?

Many people claim it's not and simply think that if you obey the police, you won't get shot. This is the wrong conversation. We cannot let our focus be drawn away from real concerns. Sadly, issues surrounding police practices, use of force, and the African-American community are not new to Ohio and will not go away overnight.

This is why the ACLU of Ohio and thousands of protestors have taken to the streets to start a conversation on justice, accountability, and our police system. In December, staff members participated in the National March Against Police Violence in Washington, D.C. This rally brought thousands of people together to raise awareness on the need for immediate racial profiling and policing reforms nationwide. Chants of "Black Lives Matter!" and "No Justice, No Peace!" echoed throughout the day.

This is not just a "moment" or one stand-alone protest. We are in a movement. Since last fall, there has been a consistent sense of public outrage fueling numerous marches, demonstrations, and rallies throughout Ohio.

We know from repeated studies that poor police practices and excessive use of force unfairly impact communities of color. In one decade, the U.S. Department of Justice has launched two investigations into Cleveland's police department for its use of force. Most recently, the investigations were related to the 2012 deaths of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams.



Photograph courtesy of Rachel Woods

"For years there have been reports of the excessive use of force against residents and worsening community relations," said Christine Link, ACLU of Ohio executive director. "The Department of Justice's investigation has shone a national spotlight on these problems and provided the city with an opportunity for true police reform."

These policing patterns symbolize a much larger racial injustice where people of color are pushed to the margins and oppressed. Racial profiling, overwhelming police presence in communities of color, and police violence are other examples of a system that creates laws and policies that criminalize, incarcerate, and kill people of color.

Since its founding, the ACLU has fought for racial justice and an end to systemic racism. In Ohio, we're participating in stakeholder meetings, reviewing draft policies, protecting protestors' rights, providing Know Your Rights trainings, and engaging with community members.

Victory for Single Mom in Sex Discrimination Case

In February, the ACLU of Ohio reached a settlement in a lawsuit filed on behalf of a single mother, Jennifer Maudlin. Her employer, Inside Out, Inc., a Christian-based childcare facility, fired her after she told them she was pregnant. Simply because an organization has a religious affiliation does not grant it free reign to ignore laws against sex discrimination.

The ACLU showed a clear pattern of hostile treatment toward unmarried women who became pregnant while working at Inside Out. No pregnant woman should be treated by her employer as if she were branded with a scarlet letter. We will continue to step up for people like Jennifer and battle gender discrimination in the courts, legislature, and public arenas.

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Supreme Court to Hear Marriage Equality Cases, Including Ohio's



There's terrific news for Ohio families! The U.S. Supreme Court will review the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that upheld bans in four states—Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee—on the freedom to marry and recognition of marriages of same-sex

couples legally performed in other states. At long last, the stage for final resolution of the debate about marriage equality for same-sex couples nationwide is set, with a ruling expected by June 30.

The American Civil Liberties Union is co-counsel in the Ohio case, *Obergefell, et al v. Hodges*, which takes up Ohio's recognition of same-sex marriages in other states. It also is co-counsel on the two Kentucky cases, which directly challenge Kentucky's anti-marriage laws.

"We applaud the Supreme Court's decision to accept the Sixth Circuit cases for review," said ACLU of Ohio Executive Director Christine Link. "We are committed to achieving LGBT equality in all aspects of life. We are one step closer to the promise of full rights and freedoms for all loving and committed same-sex couples in Ohio."

Standing Up For Teacher Who Voiced Compassion For Animals

In August 2014, Keith Allison was removed as a Title I tutor by the Green Local Board of Education in Smithville, Ohio. Why?

Because he shared his personal beliefs about the treatment of dairy farm animals and encouraged people to drink soy milk on his Facebook page. Keith did this in his own home, on his own time, using his own computer.

The right to speak your mind for what you believe in is one of our nation's dearest principles. That's why the ACLU of Ohio and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Foundation asked the school board to immediately reinstate Keith and issue an apology. Teachers and other employees do not give up their right as citizens to free speech on social issues simply because they work for a public school system. Keith's Facebook post did not violate any laws. As the training ground for future citizens, schools should educate their students about the Constitution and freedom of speech—not try to suppress it.

Keith went back to work teaching students at a different school in the district in January. This was a big step in the right direction. But our work was not done. After fil-

State Lawmakers Again Attack Reproductive Freedom of Ohioans

Ohio lawmakers have introduced House Bill 69, yet another version of the "Heartbeat Bill." This extreme bill would outlaw abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected, which could be as early as six weeks, before many women even realize they are pregnant.

To make matters worse, lawmakers also have introduced Senate Bill 127, commonly referred to as the "20-week ban." This flawed legislation is seen as an opportunity for the U. S. Supreme Court to overturn much of the *Roe v. Wade* decision on the right to choose.

Governor Kasich's budget will cut Medicaid coverage for expectant mothers. A single woman without children will only qualify if her annual income is under \$21,707, a drop of nearly \$10,000. Those who don't qualify would need to sign up for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act Marketplace during open enrollment. If a woman becomes pregnant outside of the open enrollment period, she will not have health care coverage for prenatal care.

This needs to stop. We need your help to keep politicians out of the personal health care decisions of Ohio families. The ACLU of Ohio will continue to provide testimony and fight for reproductive freedom whenever needed.



ing a lawsuit in federal court in March, the ACLU and the PETA Foundation recently reached an agreement with the school district that vindicates the First Amendment rights of school employees, such as Keith.