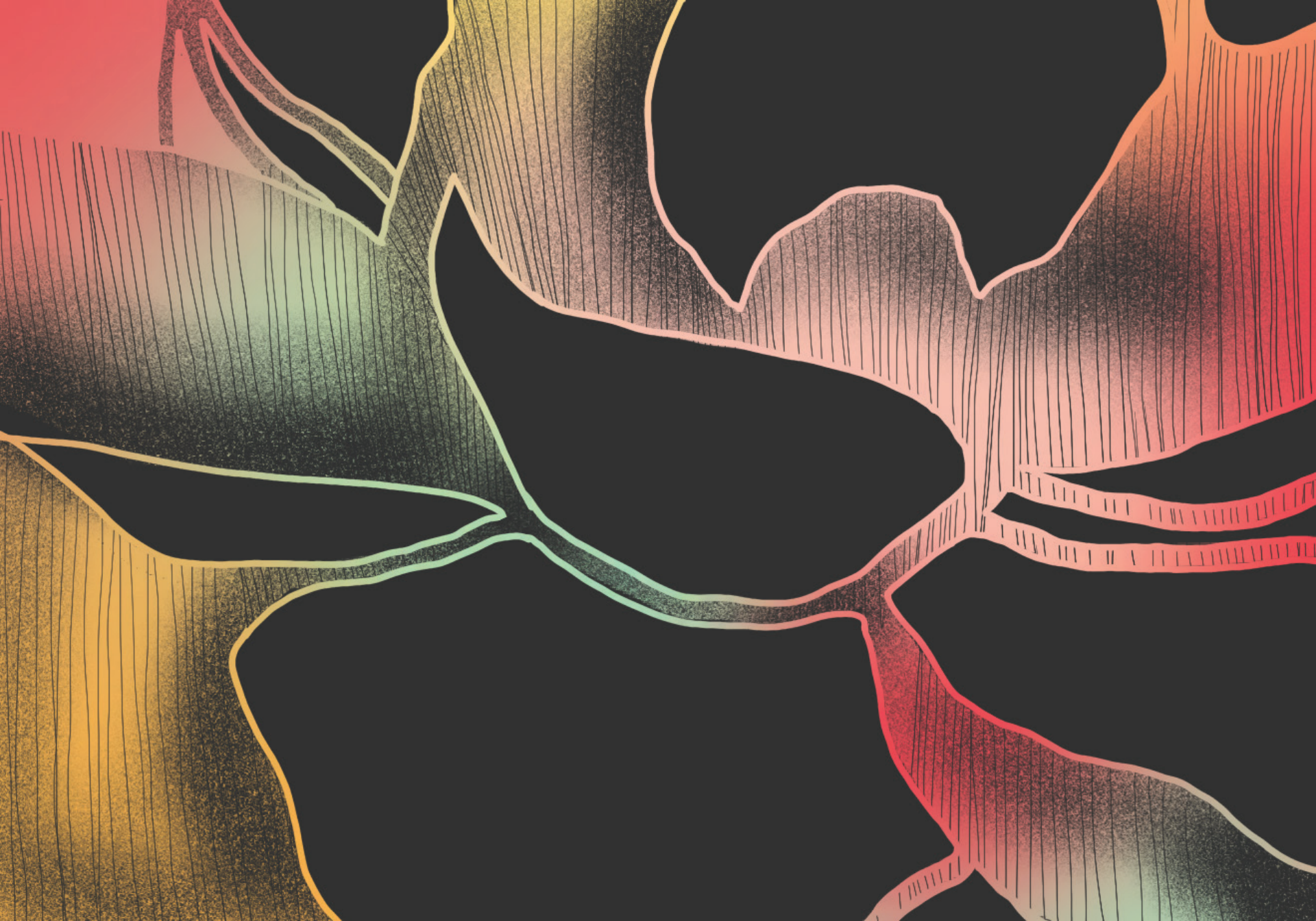


The background features a vibrant, abstract design with a rainbow gradient from red at the top to blue at the bottom. Overlaid on this are several large, organic, hand-drawn shapes in various colors (yellow, green, blue, red) that have a fine, vertical-line texture, resembling wood grain or a similar material. These shapes are layered and partially overlap each other, creating a sense of depth and movement.

2021 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
**AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
OF MISSISSIPPI**



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WELCOME

*notes from our
Board President and
Executive Director*

A LETTER FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

Friends,

This annual report provides myriad reasons to be proud of this organization's achievements and excited about its future. Our first full year under Executive Director Jarvis Dortch has seen the incredible ACLU-MS staff press forward despite the continued disruptions of a global pandemic, continuing to make Mississippi a better place through litigation, legislation, and advocacy.

The staff has grown in 2021 as Jarvis and his team have welcomed new colleagues to focus on specific issues. The staff is just now returning to a more traditional in-person work setting in their new Jackson office, adding the element of easy collaboration to the work they were already doing so effectively even while in a virtual setting.

Our Board is also fully stocked with passionate members who care about the work and goals of ACLU-MS. At every Board meeting I am reminded how lucky I am to work with such a dedicated group of volunteers who share their wisdom and insightfulness to move the organization forward.

Ultimately, though, none of the work of ACLU-MS is possible without you, our members. Everything in this report is supported financially by your dues and donations, and supported in spirit by your advocacy. I know what you read here will confirm your time and money as a member of ACLU-MS is well spent. Tell your friends, tell your families: the passionate and talented staff of ACLU-MS needs your support, and every day they validate your decision to give it.



Abram Orlansky
Board President

A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's okay to not be okay. Almost weekly, since March 2020, I have reminded myself of that truth. The last 18 months have tested both our mental and physical health. But for our nation itself, our democracy and the very concept of truth, have been under assault.

Whether it's our personal wellbeing or the health of our democracy, we cannot afford to ignore problems when we see them. We cannot grow numb to depression or choose to just "move on" from an armed insurrection at our nation's capitol.

There is power in acknowledging something is not right. That something is not okay.

I wanted to recognize the difficult road we have and continue to travel. But I want to especially thank the staff and board at ACLU of Mississippi. Like everyone, our team has faced personal trials during the pandemic, but we have also gone to work to carry out our mission to promote, defend, and extend civil rights and civil liberties to all Mississippians.

In short, we have worked to level the road for underserved Mississippians while trying to stay healthy, taking care of our loved ones, and maintaining a sense of hope as political leaders embrace authoritarianism and bigotry.

The responsibility the ACLU of Mississippi carries means that we must be deliberate in our work. Through 2021 our team and board members have taken on the methodical task of developing a strategic plan that will guide our efforts through 2025. We have prioritized securing and expanding voting rights, protecting the most vulnerable Mississippians, and holding our state government accountable through advocacy and litigation.

As we carry out our agenda, we are working to build a stronger fiscal foundation.

In 2021, our affiliate was awarded over \$1 million in grants from 5 different foundations (not including ACLU National).

Further, our team worked with an outside firm and our national office to complete a review of our fundraising capacity and implement a new development plan. Both of these steps are part of our effort to ensure we have the organizational endurance to continue meeting our mission even when faced with changing circumstances.

Increasing our overall capacity has allowed us to bring in exceptional people to our advocacy, legal, and communications teams. As a result, we were able to launch the LGBTQ Justice project to extend greater legal resources to LGBTQ identifying people in issues related to family law, civil rights, consumer law, housing, and employment discrimination.

The ACLU of Mississippi is leading a coalition of advocacy organizations to build a statewide civic engagement infrastructure that will organize, educate and engage Mississippi voters and young people. As Rev. William Barber would put it: Mississippi isn't a red or blue state. Mississippi is an unorganized state.

We are standing up to voter suppression. Ahead of the 2020 election, the ACLU of Mississippi and our legal partners successfully fought to allow voters at risk to COVID to cast absentee ballots. Moving forward, our team is pushing for fair redistricting maps that will increase or maintain black voting strength.

We have much more to do. We continue to need your support. Most importantly, Mississippi needs you to continue to speak up and actively acknowledge when something is not okay.



Jarvis Dortch
Executive Director

WELCOME



OUR TEAM

We've grown!

This year we welcomed several new staff members to our advocacy, legal and communications teams. Each addition has played an integral role in their respective department, allowing ACLU of Mississippi to expand our impact in the legislature, in the courtroom, and in the community. Our success in integrated advocacy efforts is a reflection of this staff's commitment to teamwork.



Alicia N. Netterville
Deputy Director



Joshua Tom
Legal Director



Candace Coleman
Communications Director



Tabuthia Bell
Finance Officer



Vara Lyons
Policy Counsel



Jacquelyn Agho
Policy Analyst



Delana Tavakol
SMART Justice Advocate



Landon Thames
Staff Attorney



McKenna Raney-Gray
*LGBTQ Justice Project
Staff Attorney*



Cynthia Goodloe Palmer
*Director of Operations
& Administration*



Lakyn Collier
Law Clerk



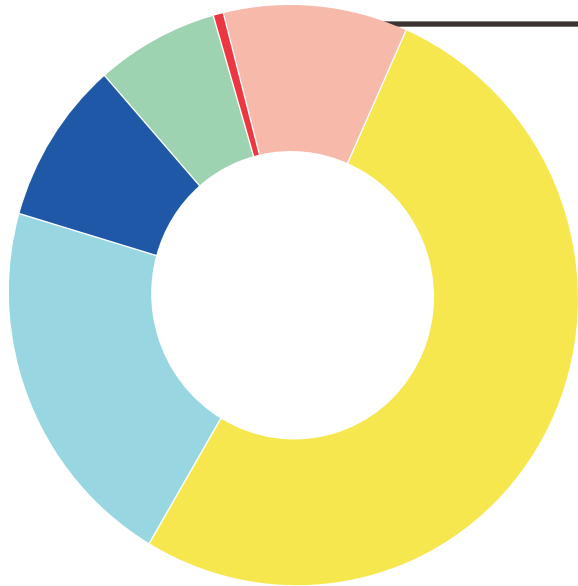
Neely Mullen
*Digital Communications
Strategist*



Maisie Brown
Advocacy Intern

OUR FINANCES

by the numbers

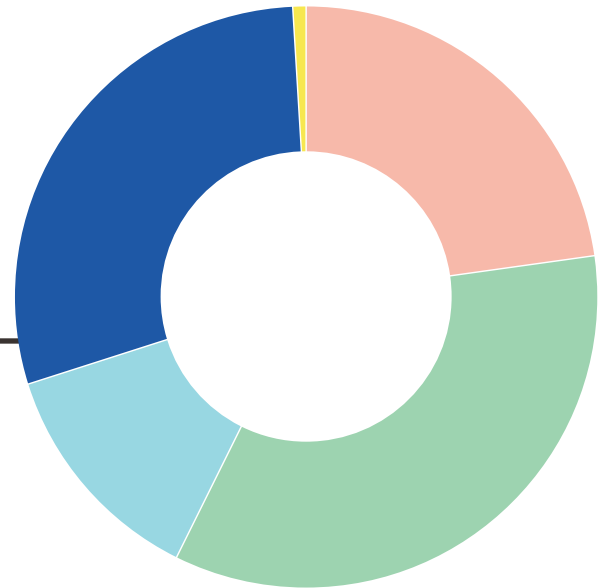


Total Income: \$2,284,770.15

- Gifts to Affiliate: \$11,504.54
- ACLU Guaranteed Monthly Income: \$240,000
- Grants to Affiliate: \$1,187,500
- Support from National: \$478,534.00
- Passive/Investment: \$203,556.06
- Other: \$163,675.55

Total Expenses: \$1,097,778.48

- Management/General: \$250,176.23
- Advocacy & Policy: \$379,119.59
- Communications: \$140,194.42
- Legal: \$326,719.52
- Development: \$1,563.72





LEGAL

highlights

Fighting for Rights in a Pandemic

During the peak of COVID-19 cases in Mississippi, we brought two related lawsuits to the State of Mississippi. We sued the Mississippi Secretary of State to ensure that absentee voting was more accessible during the pandemic. This yielded an expansion of eligible excuses for an absentee ballot. Additionally, we successfully sued the Mississippi Department of Corrections to ensure that incarcerated people were protected from the deadly coronavirus.

Protecting Freedom of Speech

Social media sites are the “town squares” of today’s internet driven world, and it is important that people be able to access these spaces in respect to elected officials. We engaged in a campaign to stop public officials from unconstitutionally blocking people on social media sites for criticism over these officials’ public actions. Governor Tate Reeves, Representative Steve Palazzo, the Jones County Sheriff, Mayor Hal Marx, Senators Roger Wick-er and Cindy Hyde-Smith, and the Town of Mize have all ceased blocking people on social media in response to our campaign.

After the murder of George Floyd, protests rightfully erupted across the country, including in Oxford, Mississippi. Weeks of protests there often focused on the Lafayette County Courthouse, which stands at the center of the town square and contains a confederate monument. People regularly came out to advocate both for and against moving the monument. We sued the Lafayette County Board of Supervisors for imposing unrea-sonable restrictions on use of this public forum, which overly burdened people’s ability to protest, assemble and speak there.

Protecting Freedom of Religion

The City of Horn Lake violated our clients’ right to religious freedom by unlawfully denying zoning approval for a proposed mosque due to anti-Mulsim bias. Longtime Mississippian and DeSoto County residents Riyadh Elkhayyat and Maher Abuirshaid, wanted to give back to their community by building the first mosque in Horn Lake, which has 13 churches. We sued the City of Horn Lake for denying their permit to build, even though the land they purchased was zoned “as of right” for houses of worship and the site plan for the mosque “met or exceeded” all requirements.

Fighting for LGBTQ Mississippians

For a list of outrageous reasons, legal representation is often difficult for LGBTQ Mississippians to obtain. This year we established the LGBTQ Justice Project with the goal to equip law offices statewide with tools that will cater to this oftentimes vulnerable community. The LGTBQ Justice Project includes a free legal clinic, offering service to LGBTQ identifying people in issues related to family law, civil rights, consumer law, housing, and employment discrimination. The project will also act as a resource for attorneys on LGBTQ issues, advocate for the rights of LGBTQ individuals, and bring impact litigation. We believe the LGBTQ Justice Project is the first of its kind in Mississippi, and certainly the first of its kind in Missis-sippi, and certainly fills an important need.





LEGISLATIVE

highlights

Fighting Voter Suppression

With the surge of voter suppression bills across the country, Mississippi was no exception. In coalition with our partners, we successfully defeated three of the most harmful voter suppression bills introduced—bills aimed at purging voters from the rolls. This success does not mean that we can afford to rest in our fight against voter suppression. Lawmakers who are vigilant in their efforts to preserve vestiges of Jim Crow election laws have introduced voter suppression bills every year. Until they rest from their mission, we must continue to remain vigilant in ours.

Fighting Modern-Day Slavery

We fought House Bill 747, which would have allowed sheriffs and judges to work in collaboration to sentence incarcerated persons to work for private companies and turn over all of their earned wages. HB 747 was ripe for abuse. We diligently worked with legislators to amend the bill to ensure that incarcerated persons hired by the private sector received their wages and were not subjected to the cruel practice of convict leasing.

Reducing the Prison Population

Our overall criminal justice goal is to promote policies that reduce the prison population and make successful reintegration a reality for formerly incarcerated people. We supported our coalition partners in their work to secure passage of Senate Bill 2795, which expanded parole eligibility to people who would not otherwise be eligible to receive a parole hearing. In doing so, we actively fought against any counterproductive policies that would have created new felony offenses. Senate Bill 2279 would have created a new felony for persons who missed probation appointments, and House Bill 83 would have created a vaguely defined new felony offense targeted at peaceful protesting, punishable by up to three years in prison.

Ensuring Dignity for Incarcerated Women

It was not lost on us that as we fight to reduce the prison population and make successful re-entry a reality, that people are still suffering in our carceral systems as they wait for this change. This is why we successfully fought for the passage of the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act which prohibits the practice of using restraints on incarcerated pregnant women and during childbirth, provides counseling and services tailored to the needs of pregnant women, permits more time for a mother to spend with her newborn child, expands visitation rights of mothers and children, and provides certain feminine hygiene products and pampers.

On-going Fights

With all these wins, there were some issues that ACLU of Mississippi will continue address:

- Mississippi's legislators were determined to pass an anti-transgender bill targeted at children by prohibiting transgender girls from participating in girls' sports.
- Lawmakers fell short of passing legislation to require transparency through a uniform reporting standard for jail census data by county sheriff's departments.



ADVOCACY

highlights

Breaking Ties Between ICE and Local Law Enforcement

Mississippi counties rank amongst the highest in terms of their involvement with ICE, inciting fear across Mississippi's immigrant communities and introducing a host of public safety hazards at the local level. We launched 'Unalienable' in March 2021 to address this issue. The campaign included three policy briefs and corresponding materials on the entanglement between local law enforcement and federal immigration officials in Mississippi.

Out of this campaign came widespread media attention, a public forum with U.S. Representative Bennie Thompson, and the inaugural episodes of ACLU-MS' podcast For All. We also sent three letters to federal leadership in partnership with local and national organizations in order to draw attention to poor conditions at the Adams County Detention Center, one of which prompted an investigation by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

Fighting for Fair Maps

Historically, politicians have used gerrymandering, packing and cracking to dilute the influence of Black voters. We seek to ensure that the current redistricting process allows Mississippi's Black voters the same opportunities as white voters to elect their candidates of choice, regardless of where they live in the state and for who they vote.

We have teamed with partners to host several redistricting trainings, where we taught community members how to identify unfair maps, prepare testimonies for redistricting hearings, and how to request a transparent redistricting process from legislators. These trainings will continue through the redistricting process. We also released a redistricting report and authored an op-ed on the history and lingering effects of racial gerrymandering in Mississippi. We still have work to do, and plan to take action against maps that perpetuate the dilution of Black voting power.

Building Power for the Future

We recognize the great strength and energy of young organizers and students whose mission it is to create a better Mississippi for the future. They are invaluable to movement building, therefore we've committed to connecting with and empowering young advocates, with an emphasis on our law school chapters, HBCUs, and local high schools. Since the summer, we've collaborated with dozens of students to educate and create actions on issues of voting rights, redistricting, abortion rights and LGBTQ justice.



Alcorn State students with Advocacy Intern Maisie Brown.



OUR REACH



this year, we...

- ✉ Sent 66,453 emails to supporters
- 📞 Made 288 calls to lawmakers
- 🖱 Generated 83,717 website visits
- 👍 Earned 1,253,936 social media impressions
- 👤 Gained 590 new social media followers
- 🎧 Reached 705 podcast downloads

For All Podcast

As digital advocacy continues to change the way we mobilize supporters, so do our storytelling tools. We launched the first season of our podcast series For All, to offer lessons for every Mississippian on how to build power for all Mississippians. Each episode of For All features stories from the ground and across the range of topical social justice issues for which we fight, but with the same thread – freedom and justice for all. So far, listeners have heard stories from immigrants coming face-to-face with ICE, and women who’ve had abortions and now advocate for others to have the same access. Listeners have also heard from guests about redistricting and the myths of critical race theory. For All can be found on 18 different podcast streaming platforms.





**LOOKING
AHEAD**



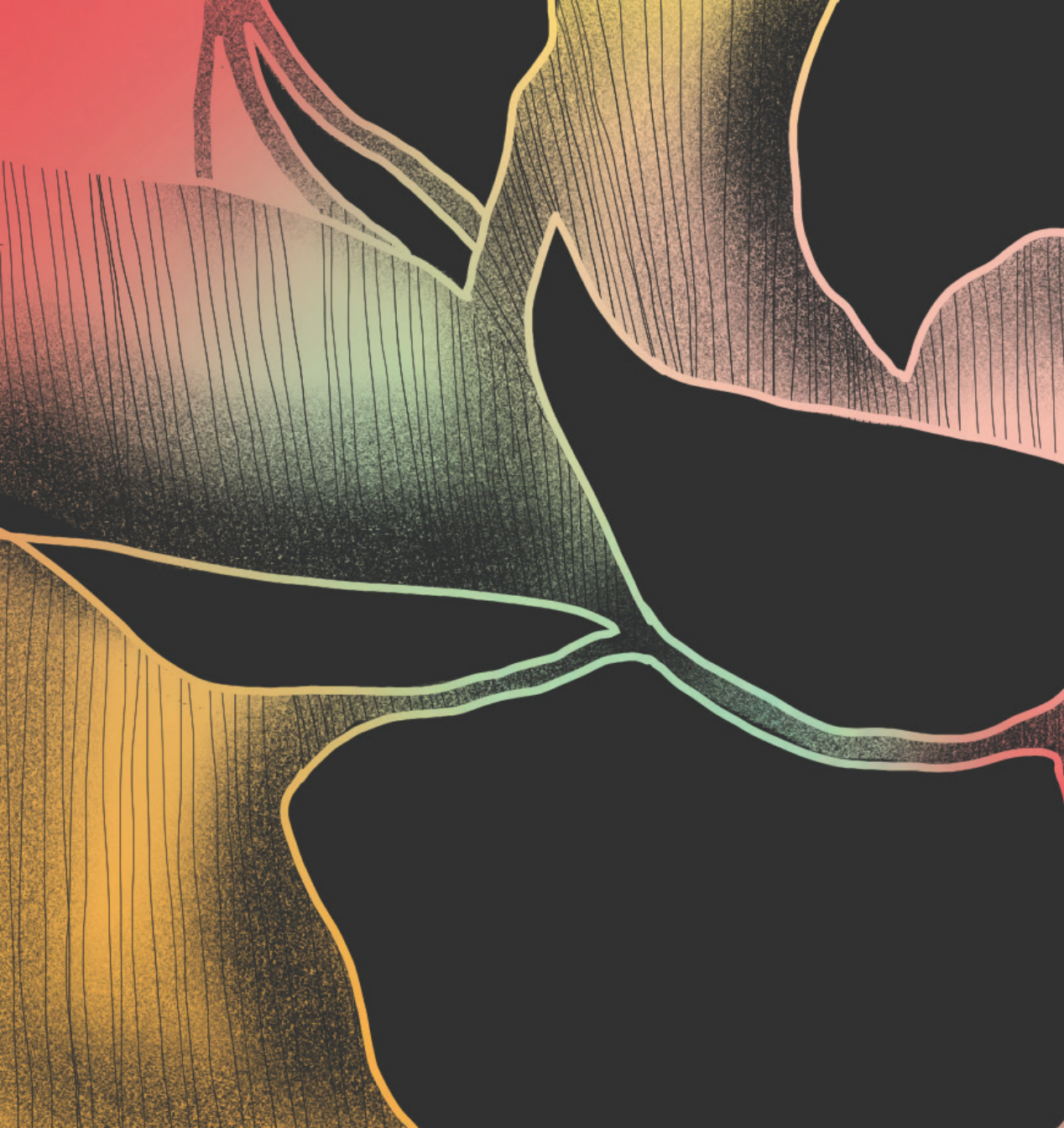
what's next

The later half of the year, our staff and board members have taken the methodical task of developing a strategic plan that will guide our effort through 2025. This plan reflects the awesome responsibility we have, as an affiliate, to protect and expand civil rights and liberties. With each priority we will employ our legal, advocacy and policy strategies in the most appropriate and impactful way to become closer to our goal of a just and equitable state free from discrimination.

Our 2021 - 2025 priorities are:

- Voters' rights and political participation
- Equality and equity
- Immigrant rights and immigration reform
- Criminal justice reform
- Organizational endurance

LOOKING AHEAD



Our Board

Abram Orlansky, *President*

Edgar Oliver, *Vice President*

Mary L. Figueroa, *Secretary*

Wendy Thompson, *Treasurer*

Melanie Deas, *National Representative*

Sam Edward Arnold

Cathy Johnson Garrett

Andy Guerra

Cristen Hemmins

Kuwasi Omari

Dr. Olga Osby

Dan Roach

Sherrin A. Roberts

Stephen Silberman

Dr. LeMia Jenkins Thompson

Cassandra Welchin

Marcus A. Williams

***Thank you for
supporting our
work!***