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## THE 153<sup>RD</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY: SUMMER 2025 MAJOR WINS & MORE WORK AHEAD

**Meera Devotta**, Campaign Communications Manager

**The first leg of the 153rd General Assembly** has come to an end. Since January, we've been working hard on issues like immigrants' rights, probation reform, and gender justice. Here's a quick snapshot of what we accomplished, what is left to be done, and ways you can stay involved.

As we continue the fight in the second half of 2025 and prepare for the 2026 legislative session, we want to say thank you. Thank you for sending messages, showing up, and making your voice heard — our work is not possible without civil liberties advocates like you.

With your continued support, we're more ready than ever to keep pushing forward to protect and expand civil liberties for all.

From nationwide crackdowns on public protest to infringements on students' speech and privacy, the Trump administration continues to engage in massive anti-free speech actions that violate the very foundation of our democracy. Now more than ever, we will not waver in our commitment to defending our First Amendment rights.

This session, the **Freedom to Read Act (HB 119)** passed and is awaiting the Governor's signature. This bill will help protect books in public libraries and schools from being unconstitutionally censored. HB 119 outlines that books may not be banned due to the origin, background, or views of the person who created the material, nor can it be banned because of partisan, ideological, or religious disapproval of the material. All public libraries and school libraries must create policies that adhere to these principles, and ensure that any challenge to library materials follows those policies.

WE THE PEOPLE DARE TO CREATE A MORE PERFECT UNION.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SHOWING UP FOR DEMOCRACY  
by Shawn Coulter

I was one of the youngest people in attendance that night, and I want to see more young people at these events. I know college students and recent graduates have a lot to say, and I know that they have a lot to ask, too. It seems we have relegated these interactions largely to the online sphere, where they can be regulated, erased, manipulated, and so on and so forth.

When we show up in a communal place such as a local church and look each other in the eye, filling a real space with our voices and hearing them echo up to the highest point in the ceiling, watching the day turn to dusk through the beautiful stained-glass windows, there is a sense of empowerment. The mythology begins to dispel, and what you are left with are people recognizing each other in a human way: speaking about humanity and the issues we can address to alleviate the threats against it, in a place that you can return to.

Someone might be able to get the information that Brickner and Jennings shared online or via a combination of other sources—maybe. But our community leaders won't know that they've reached you, and you will not have as much input as you could. After the event was over, people spoke directly to Jennings and Brickner, and a plethora of other ACLU-DE staff. Representatives and members of various

organizations recognized each other and made new acquaintances.

Show up for even a few moments and get to know the people in your community and the spaces where important conversations are being held.

As a fellow community member, I ask that you please keep an eye out for these events. Even if you think the topic is not particularly relevant to you, I implore you to show up for even a few moments and get to know the people in your community and the spaces where important conversations are being held.

Despite walking past this church multiple times a week, I had never taken note of it. Without this event, I may never have been aware of these initiatives within the community.

How many people and places do you walk past every day that could change your life and the lives of many others? 🗣️

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

Dear Friends —

When Donald Trump was elected, we pledged to make Delaware a Firewall for Freedom, to protect our state against the worst impulses of the federal government. Due to your advocacy, I am happy to report that we have made considerable progress.

In this issue of *Connect!*, you'll read about some amazing Firewall for Freedom victories we've had in the legislature over the last six months. Victories that advance our goals for **immigrants' rights, gender justice, and free speech** in Delaware.

You'll also learn more about some tremendous steps forward on our mission to reform the criminal legal system. Several new bills have been passed and more are moving forward that will help create a more equitable system for all, including legislation for compassionate release of elderly or infirmed people in prison, probation reform, and an end to the death

penalty once and for all in Delaware.

These successes are the direct result of **your** support for our work and the people doing grassroots advocacy here in our state.

I know that the news can feel overwhelming and depressing at times, but the collective power we have built in Delaware is creating real change. The work is not over—join us as we continue to make the First State a beacon for freedom and liberty in our nation.



Mike Bensing

BECOME A PART OF  
DELAWARE'S  
FIREWALL FOR  
FREEDOM

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF SHOWING UP FOR DEMOCRACY

Shawn Coulter, ACLU-DE Volunteer



Photo by Shawn Coulter

**At the start of the summer**—as ICE raids surged, Donald Trump’s stack of executive orders grew, and the courts were inundated with challenges—the ACLU of Delaware gathered the community. Mike Brickner, ACLU-DE executive director, and Kathy Jennings, Delaware’s attorney general, hosted a town hall on “Protecting the Rights of Delawareans and Saving Democracy.”

It was exactly the kind of event Delaware needed, and that showed in how our great state’s residents piled in. I had never been inside First & Central Presbyterian Church before. It was far more spacious than I imagined. Pew after pew filled with guests, and before long the attendees had reached the back row.

There was a wealth of good conversation. Brickner spoke about the progress the ACLU had made, the importance of resisting Trump’s executive orders, and touted the work that led Camden police to rescind

their 287(g) agreement with ICE.

Jennings came ready to inspire. She talked about the difficult abnormalities and chaos that lay ahead in her duties as the attorney general and the importance of being aware as a Delawarean. Yet the true value of the night was when she fielded questions from the audience.

As a Delawarean, I go to these events not just to hear what our leaders have prepared, but also to engage and speak back to them. One audience member asked a hard-pressing question about immigrants’ rights in Delaware that Kathy Jennings may not have expected. She answered earnestly and to the best of her ability, and perhaps she left with something to consider when she walked into her office the next day.

CON’T FROM FRONT PAGE... *THE 153<sup>RD</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY: Major Wins & More Work Ahead by Meera Devotta*

Trump’s anti-immigrant policies are tearing apart families, communities, and the fabric of our nation. The situation is dire. That’s why we must act now to push back against Trump and his anti-immigrant agenda and ensure that our state’s immigrant communities are given the support, security, and opportunity they need to thrive.

On the last day of the legislative session, the General Assembly passed **House Bill 182** (HB 182), legislation that bans 287(g) agreements with ICE. Governor Meyer officially signed HB 182 into law on Monday, July 14, ending 287(g) agreements in Delaware once and for all!

This victory is a direct result of collective action led by community leaders who made their voices heard after the Camden Police Department entered into a 287(g) agreement in early May. HB 182 prevents Camden and other municipalities from attempting to enter into these agreements in the future, ensuring our state stands firmly as a beacon of hope and freedom for people all over the world.

On June 20, Governor Meyer signed **Executive Order #11** to protect gender-affirming care in Delaware from attempts by the federal and other state governments to criminalize patients and providers. This action comes after months of pressure from ACLU-DE, the public, and several LGBTQ+ and civil rights organizations in the state. The order mandates that State agencies are not to impose any sanctions on anyone who “provides, receives, inquiries about, responds to, or assists with gender-affirming care that is or would otherwise be lawful in Delaware.”

**House Bill 205** (HB 205), legislation that protects all legal medical procedures and shields healthcare providers from out-of-state actions and penalties, passed the General Assembly and is heading to the Governor’s desk to be signed into law. This bill ensures that Delawareans and those seeking care in Delaware can access the healthcare they need to thrive without fear or barriers.

Last year, when lawmakers missed a critical opportunity to take steps toward repairing our broken probation

system through Senate Bill 4 (SB 4), we reaffirmed our commitment to making probation reform a reality in 2025. This year, thanks to the tireless efforts of our Smart Justice staff, ambassadors, coalition partners, and advocates, we’ve taken steps towards fulfilling that commitment.

With just days left in the legislative session, **Senate Bill 7 (SB 7)**, the most significant change to how probation conditions are set in Delaware in decades, passed the General Assembly and has now been signed into law! SB 7 tailors special conditions of probation to the individual, reducing the risk of people on probation being subjected to overly burdensome and unnecessary requirements. Meaningful reform must center individual need — SB 7 will make conditions tailored to individual circumstances the norm in Delaware.

The most significant change in decades to how probation conditions are set in Delaware has been signed into law!

**Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 10 (SS 1 for SB 10)**, legislation that allows for compassionate release for sick or long-term incarcerated individuals, passed the General Assembly and awaits the Governor’s signature. For decades, Delaware has incarcerated unprecedented numbers of adults, many of whom are serving long sentences that may result in death behind bars. SS1 for SB 10 spares the state from cruelly and unnecessarily incarcerating those who pose little or no risk to public safety and promotes justice, equity, and humanity throughout our state.



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CON’T ON NEXT PAGE...





The rapid expansion of digital surveillance and collection of sensitive personal information poses a serious threat to individual privacy and civil liberties. This legislative session, we laid the groundwork for legislation that will protect sensitive personal information and ensuring it cannot be weaponized against our most vulnerable communities.

**House Bill 145 (HB 145)**, legislation that protects the Fourth Amendment rights of Delawareans and people across the country by prohibiting both reverse location and reverse keyword searches and warrants in Delaware, was introduced. HB 145 is an important step to ensuring Delaware remains a state that rejects unconstitutional government overreach and ensures every person can carry a smartphone, use social media, and rely on internet search engines to access information without fearing being caught in large scale, unconstitutional dragnet searches. We remain committed to ensuring its full passage in 2026.

The right to vote, and to have one's vote accurately and fairly counted, is a fundamental right of all American citizens — and one that underpins the rest of our civil liberties. That's why, as attacks on voting rights continue to grow, Delaware must take strides to bring our state into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and become a beacon of democracy.

This year, our **Every Vote Counts (EVC)** campaign was successful in getting four constitutional amendments covering all our campaign goals — protecting early

in-person voting (**SS 1 for SB 2**), no-excuse absentee voting (**SS 1 for SB 3**), same-day registration (**HB 88**), and fighting felony disenfranchisement (HB 180) — introduced and moving forward.

SS 1 for SB 2 and SS 1 for SB 3 cleared the Senate and now await consideration in the House. HB 88 and HB 180 also await consideration in the House. The four amendments have cleared every hurdle they have faced so far. Our campaign to amend Delaware's constitution is a multi-year effort, and with the help of our campaign volunteers and coalition partners, we're off to a strong start. During the legislative off-season, our EVC campaign will continue advocacy and community engagement efforts across the state to prepare to see these bills through the next phase in 2026.

**Gifts made to support EVC are eligible to be DOUBLED through a grant opportunity with the Longwood Foundation. Please consider supporting our most fundamental democratic right—the right to vote: [action.aclu.org/voter-donation](https://action.aclu.org/voter-donation)**

The fight is far from over, and this is only a portion of the diligent work we were able to do in the first half of this year, alongside all our partners and fellow advocates. **For more details on our legislative work, including how to get more involved, visit: [aclu-de.org/legislation](https://aclu-de.org/legislation)!**



**Each year, we remember Gerry Kandler, former president of the ACLU of Delaware, and honor those who exemplify his tireless commitment to the defense of all Delawareans' civil liberties.**

Typically, we honor a few select Delawareans each year for their contributions to civil liberties. This year, on the 40th anniversary of the Kandler Celebration, we are making a big change: *we are honoring everyone.*

**And that's why this year we are making tickets to the Kandler Celebration FREE to everyone who wants to attend: [aclu-de.org/kandler-2025](https://aclu-de.org/kandler-2025)**

2025 has proven to be a difficult year already, and we need to be in community with one another now more than ever. Join us in celebrating our collective community action with an evening of hors d'oeuvres, beverages, and an online silent auction to support civil liberties work in Delaware!

