

Operation “Safe” Streets

Read our latest story to learn how Delaware’s most secretive police force plays fast and loose with our communities.

On an otherwise peaceful day, Sharee Congo’s home was raided by Operation Safe Streets officers, her son was tasered and beaten, and she was handcuffed and thrown down the stairs — all while her other children and young grandchild watched in terror.

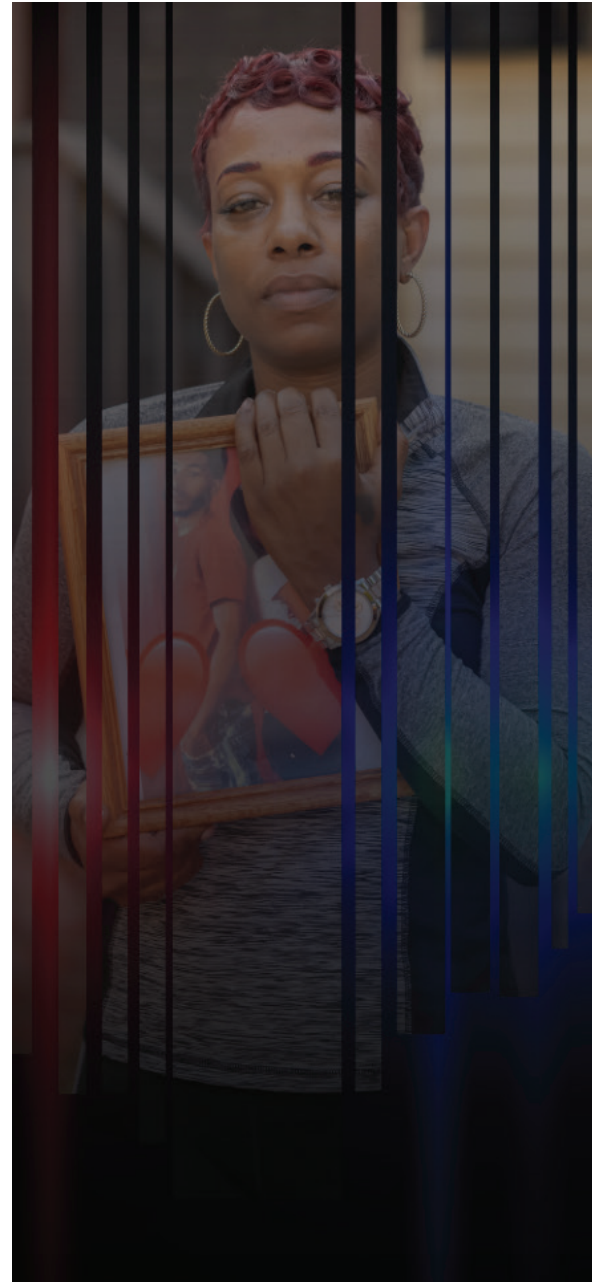
The reason? Her son, Armani, had been suspected of a probation violation.

The Wilmington Police Department’s Operation Safe Streets (OSS) is a partnership with the Delaware Department of Correction (DOC) that allows police and probation officers to jointly police those on probation and, by extension, their family, neighbors, coworkers, and friends. OSS has been operating in Wilmington

since 1997, ruling the streets and instilling fear into the residents in Delaware’s largest city.

We conducted an extensive research project into the history, operations, and effectiveness of OSS, and compiled our findings into a story that paints a clear picture: OSS’s extreme tactics fail to improve public safety while causing deep and substantial damage to Wilmington’s Black and Brown communities.

Sharee and Armani’s horrifying story is just one stark example of OSS’s abuse of power. In our story, we highlight several case examples of people – both on probation and not on probation – who have been victims of harassment at the hands of OSS officers. We



Sharee Congo’s son, Armani, was targeted by Operation Safe Streets officers who raided their home, beat and tased Armani, handcuffed and threw Sharee down their stairs, and ultimately left their home in shambles. Photo by David Heitur.

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KYR: A GUIDE TO

**THE FIRST
AMENDMENT**

FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH IN DELAWARE



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Dear Friends —

2022 was an historic year, though not always for the right reasons. Following nearly five decades of precedents, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed *Roe v. Wade*, upending the federal constitutional right to abortion care. Yet, in the wake of the leaked court decision, Delaware advocates came together to push for passage of House Bill 455, which expanded the qualified medical professionals who can provide abortions,




Letter from the ED

and instituted legal protections from out-of-state criminal and civil actions levied against patients and providers.

That is how I like to think of the people of the First State: in the wake of unprecedented struggle, we come together to do what is right and just. We are going to need a whole lot more of that in 2023.

In the legislature, we will continue our push for a statewide right to representation in eviction proceedings, as the housing crisis continues to mount in Delaware. Our

Campaign for Smart Justice will prioritize significant reform of our probation system, as it is one of the greatest drivers of mass incarceration in our state. And even though the midterm elections are behind us, we will continue our mission to make voting more accessible, and to ensure every voter casts an informed ballot in the spring school board elections.

Thank you for being with us in 2022, and we're going to need you more than ever in 2023. 

Mike Brickner

IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED:

Police violence
Unreasonable search of home or car
Being pulled over without cause
Being stopped for no reason
Evidence tampering

We want to hear your story.

Share your story confidentially online at [ACLU-DE.org/get-help](https://aclu-de.org/get-help).

OPERATION "SAFE" STREETS,
CONT. FROM FRONT PAGE

review court cases, reveal interviews and FOIA requests, and analyze the questionable tactics carried out by officers under the OSS umbrella of impunity.

Even worse, OSS lives beyond the boundaries of Wilmington: The program has been duplicated by New Castle County and Dover Police Departments, and a copycat program through the Delaware State Police, known as the Governor's Task Force (GTF), operates in Kent and Sussex counties under the same framework.

OSS/GTF have been touted as a great success, yet by any measure they've not only failed as tools of crime prevention and community service, they've been moral and institutional failures, as well. Wilmington's communities

They're cowboys. They make vice cops look like choir boys. These guys play fast and loose ... **They're simply using their job title to violate the Fourth Amendment.**

— Tom Foley, Local Defense Attorney

deserve to live without fear of surveillance, harassment, and abuse by police and probation officers. In our story, we build a case for what we've come to know with certainty: we must end the abuse of power that fuels OSS.

Read our full story at aclu-de.org/oss. 



Jeffrey Rose was illegally stopped, searched, and arrested by Operation Safe Streets officers in 2019. Photo by David Heitur.

2022 was a Whirlwind for Voting Rights. Here's What We'll Do About it in 2023.

ARTICLE BY: MEERA DEVOTTA,
ACLU-DE CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

The 2022 election season began with what many saw as the most influential legislative sessions for voting rights in Delaware's recent history. The Delaware General Assembly passed Senate Bill 320, the vote-by-mail bill, less than a week after they passed House Bill 25, the same-day registration bill, and just over a year after passing Senate Bill 5, the automatic voter registration bill.


However, just months later, the Delaware Supreme Court overturned vote-by-mail and same-day registration just weeks before the General Election.

Despite these last-minute changes, our Voter Campaign continued to educate voters about how, where, and when they could cast their ballot.

Our campaign hub, VoteDelaware.org, made it easy to stay engaged and informed. Throughout election season, we worked

to elevate candidate promises with our 2022 Candidate Questionnaire covering critical issues like justice reform, renters' rights, and abortion access. We targeted key districts via issue-specific mailers, digital advertising, phone calls, texting, direct community outreach, community-organized voter education events, canvassing, and Spanish-language materials. Finally, to combat voter confusion, the Delaware Voting Rights Coalition published bilingual Voter Guides for the Primary and General Election.

Voting is a right—not a privilege. With the 2023 legislative session looming, we are reaffirming our responsibility to advocate for reforms that broaden access to the ballot for all eligible voters. At the forefront of this fight is our ongoing commitment to ending disenfranchisement of voters with felonies and voters who are incarcerated.

Read our full voting rights platform at VoteDelaware.org. 

Wilmington Learning Collaborative Becomes Official

Identifying and closing opportunity gaps for Wilmington's students is the primary objective of the Wilmington Learning Collaborative — and it's gaining traction.

ARTICLE CONTRIBUTED BY: AMY SOLOMON,
S.A.F.E. SCHOOLS DELAWARE MEMBER

The Wilmington Learning Collaborative (WLC) is a real time, fluid, and voluntary effort to gather community stakeholders, school district leaders, elected officials, educators, and parents to do what has eluded state legislators and various structures within the Delaware State government prior to and following desegregation.

The task is to identify and close opportunity gaps and improve proficiency outcomes at grade level milestones in participating Wilmington City schools. Two years of planning and delays will now give way to fast, quick movements.

Three participating school districts (Red Clay, Christina, and Brandywine) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that establishes WLC as an official initiative on November 1, 2022, at the Wilmington Public Library.



Photo by CDC on Unsplash.


Many excellent articles, including a recent article from Delaware Public Media's Larry Nagengast, detail the outlined structure and managed expectations attached to the WLC.

As of this article's drafting, at least half of the twelve open seats for WLC have been filled, with an Executive Director appointment expected as early as December — and they're hitting the ground running.

WLC is required to submit its first needs assessment before an overall action plan can be submitted by the March 31, 2023 deadline. The primary driver for all this activity is rooted in school-based decision-making with strong input from teachers and community members.

Will Charter Schools start to participate? Will volunteer parents on the WLC Council be listened to and their time schedules

accommodated? Can 60 years of delayed work appear in a constructive format within 5 months?

What the WLC has going for it at the moment is a core group of dedicated Wilmington City school board member voices who have safeguarded the integrity of the WLC's MOU through organized action. Whether or not the WLC produces desired results will depend on effective community engagement. 

CLEAN SLATE DELAWARE

CLEAN SLATE HELPED DELIVER SECOND CHANCES IN DELAWARE THIS YEAR

Article By: John Reynolds,
ACLU-DE Clean Slate Delaware Campaign Manager

After legislative wins in 2021 that expanded expungement eligibility and committed Delaware to an automatic process for certain forms of expungement, the Clean Slate Delaware campaign has been hard at work on next steps. ACLU-DE and our Clean Slate DE campaign partners have been providing answers to communities' questions about expungement, connecting people to resources, and working to ensure everyone has access to record clearance and a clean slate.

And the work continues! In 2023, keep your eyes peeled for new legislation that will (1) make all cases terminated in an individual's favor eligible for expungement and (2) eliminate fines and fees as a barrier to record clearance. These needed tweaks to existing laws will ensure more equitable access to the state's current petition-based expungement system and support the implementation of automatic expungements in Delaware scheduled to begin in August 2024.

Check out CleanSlateDE.org to learn more.


Meet Katie!

In our last newsletter, we shared the exciting news that former staff attorney Dwayne Bensing would be our next legal director and we introduced you to Jasmine, our new paralegal. We are now excited to introduce you to Katie Prevost (she/her), our staff attorney (not yet admitted to practice in DE)!

Coming from the Greater Kansas City area, Katie recently relocated to Delaware to be on the East Coast — and she's loving her new state. Here's a note from Katie on moving to Delaware and joining the ACLU-DE team:

"Becoming an empty-nester during the COVID-19 lockdown allowed me time to dream about what my next chapter in life could be. After much research, I chose to move to Delaware because, in addition to its geographical beauty and proximity to historic sites and national destinations, Delaware is a state that is continuing to move the country forward toward a more perfect union. The Delawareans I have



met since my arrival have only confirmed that the First State is full of thoughtful people who are trying to ensure dignified lives for all citizens. With the recent passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, Assault Weapons Ban, and Youth and Schools Mental Health Laws, Delaware serves as a role model to the nation. In the same vein, the ACLU's mission to preserve and advance civil liberties and civil rights fits perfectly with the causes I want to spend my time fighting for. Like the trailblazer Pauli Murray proclaimed, 'I want to see America be what she says she is in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. America, be what you proclaim yourself to be!'" 

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

AG's Abortion Legal Helpline

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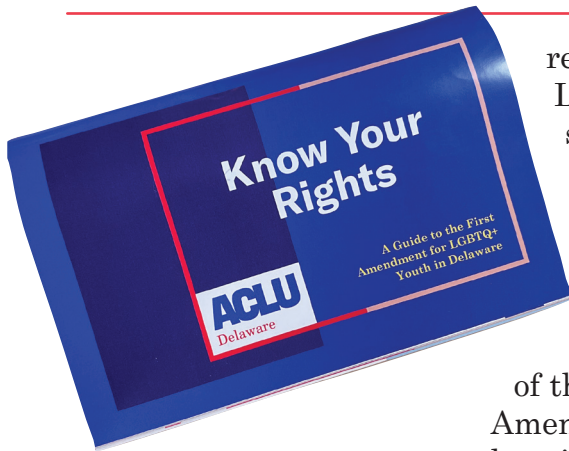
(877) 312-2366

de.gov/abortionhelpline



Know Your Rights: A Guide to the First Amendment for LGBTQ+ Youth in Delaware

In November, we launched a new resource that aims to help students learn their rights when it comes to LGBTQ+ expression in schools.



ARTICLE CONTRIBUTED BY: SEPH VALOREN,
ACLU-DE POLICY INTERN

Every student – regardless of their identity – deserves a safe, inclusive environment to learn.

Being a kid in the LGBTQ+ community can often be intimidating, and schools aren't always inclusive of these students.

That's why we launched a new resource guide that aims to help students, parents, and educators learn their rights when it comes to LGBTQ+ expression in schools.

Know Your Rights: A Guide to the First Amendment for LGBTQ+ Youth in Delaware is packed with information

related to LGBTQ+ students' rights, including:


- A digestible outline of the First Amendment and how it applies to LGBTQ+ students' expression in schools;
- Language and definitions that are commonly used in conversations about LGBTQ+ communities and issues;
- A full list of rights that LGBTQ+ people are promised in schools - regardless of individual school policies;
- A list of ways that students can use the First Amendment to express themselves in schools;
- Information about the role that school boards play in policy-making for schools, and how

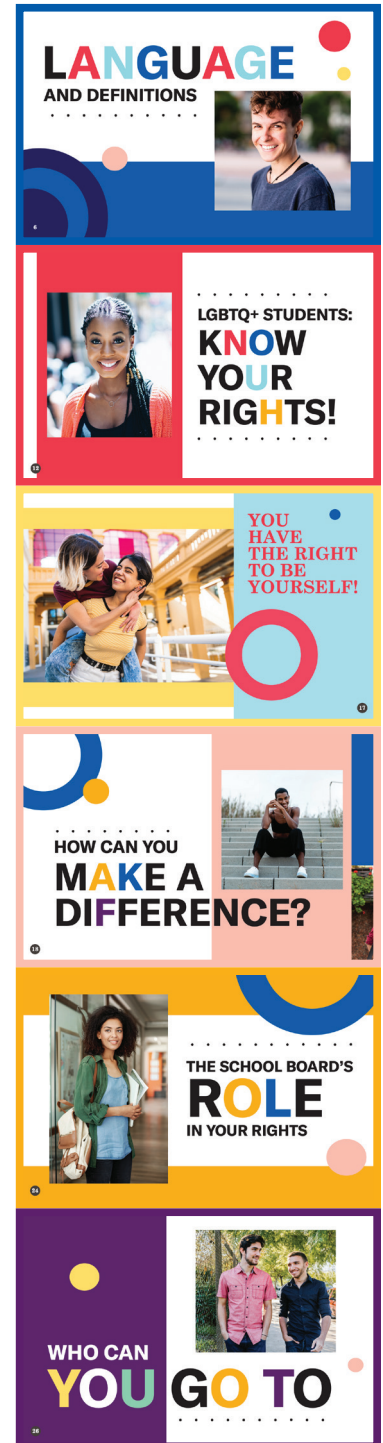
students can make their voices heard even if they can't vote; and

- A list of resources for LGBTQ+ students in Delaware.

When schools are inclusive of LGBTQ+ people, all students have better educational experiences.

We hope students will use this guide to learn their rights, and parents and educators will use it to support the LGBTQ+ students in their lives.

Any school or community organization that wishes to have hard copies of the handbook can reach out to Melissa Bryson to request copies at no charge: mbryson@aclu-de.org. 



Check out and share this guide online! Scan the QR code or visit: bit.ly/kyr-lgbtq-students.



Thank You for Our Best Kandler Yet!

ARTICLE BY: MELISSA BRYSON,
ACLU-DE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR


In October, we celebrated our 37th Annual Kandler Awards Celebration, returning to a large in-person gathering for the first time since 2019, with additional gathering options in Sussex County and virtually.

During the event, we honored two Delawareans who are fierce advocates for social justice: Corie

Priest, Community Engagement Program Administrator for the Delaware Department of Justice, and Rebecca Lowe, Adult Program Coordinator and Development Director at the Lewes Public Library and Co-Founder of Women's March Sussex-DE.

This year's celebration was co-hosted by Mike Brickner and ACLU Social Media Ambassador Nyemade Boiwu, with over 200 people in attendance.

Musical entertainment was provided by singer/songwriter and executive director of New Beginnings-Next Step, John Flynn. Our robust online auction, left open to the public so those who weren't able to join the event could still participate in the celebration, included the largest selection of auction items we've ever presented, and bidding wars went right up until the last minute on the night of the event.

We want to extend a special thank you to our event planning committee, event sponsors, silent auction donors, and all those who spread the word and attended this year's incredible event. **Because of your support, we're thrilled to announce that this was our most successful fundraiser to date** — raising a total of over \$73,000 in support of the protection of civil liberties! 



Delaware

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A Note from Melissa, our Development Director:

It's the time of the year when generosity blows in the wind all around us. Many are celebrating holidays, spending time with loved ones — and often thinking about making end of year gifts to missions they care deeply about.

As a recipient of this newsletter I am hopeful that the ACLU of Delaware is high on your list, along with other community organizations that lift up the issues that matter most to you.

This year when considering how you're able to support the ACLU of Delaware, please visit our website to learn about all the ways you can contribute now and throughout the year.

ACLU-DE.ORG/DONATE