



January 10, 2025

Dear Members of the General Assembly,

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont I write to congratulate you on your election, and to welcome you to the start of a new legislative biennium. Founded in 1967, the ACLU of Vermont is one of the 53 affiliates of the ACLU, working to advance and defend the civil rights and civil liberties of everyone who calls Vermont home. We are excited to work with all of you to protect and strengthen the rights and liberties of the people of Vermont.

As we look to the coming year, many of our priorities remain the same, while some have taken on new urgency. In recent years, Vermont has taken a number of proactive steps to better protect residents' civil liberties, but there is still more that must be done. Below are some of the issues we urge you to prioritize this session.

Do not permit Vermont resources to go towards federal and state activities that threaten civil liberties: To safeguard the rights, privacy, and dignity of all Vermont residents, we must not allow the use of state resources to support any attempts by the federal government and/or other states to attack or violate civil liberties. This includes any activities aimed at “mass deportation”, the prosecution of individuals engaged in protected First Amendment activities, or targeting of providers and patients accessing legally protected health care services. One step the legislature can take is to update existing laws to limit to the greatest extent possible the sharing of Vermonters' sensitive information held by the state.

Fund threatened health care services: We are likely to see federal action to limit access to reproductive and gender affirming care by cutting off federal funds and rewriting administrative rules to target providers of essential health care. To ensure access to patients here in Vermont we must be prepared to financially support providers and ensure all Vermonters can get the care they need—as we have done in the past.

Enact stronger privacy protections: Vermonters across the political spectrum deeply value their privacy and want their government to enact stronger protections. That includes new protections for publicly and privately held personal data, which could be used to target and surveil local community members. It also includes bans on practices like dragnet “reverse warrants” that wrongfully sweep people into law enforcement databases if they happen to be in a particular place or use a certain search term. Finally, we need to limit what sensitive information is collected in the first place, as well as how and when that data can be shared.



Adopt a Housing First approach: Vermont has the fourth highest per capita rate of homelessness in the country, and the lack of emergency housing has put lives at risk. Building on our ongoing advocacy to protect the rights of unhoused people in this state, we urge lawmakers to pursue a Housing First model for new housing policy reforms and investments, so that everyone can access housing without preconditions or restrictions. This includes funding an expansion of General Assistance Emergency Housing Program so that we don't see the deaths of any more Vermonters left out in the cold.

Implement Smarter Stops on our roadways: We face renewed efforts to deputize state and local law enforcement to target vulnerable communities and aid in mass deportations. To guard against this, address persistent racial disparities in traffic stops, and to enhance the safety of everyone on Vermont roadways, we need to limit unnecessary interactions with law enforcement. A growing number of jurisdictions are doing this by prohibiting roadside stops for violations that don't directly relate to public safety, like a broken taillight or out of date registration.

Fund education equitably: Vermont has a longstanding commitment to guaranteeing access to high-quality public education and ensuring that our public education system is well-funded, equitable, and rooted in democratic values. Any efforts to revise how we fund our schools must preserve equitable access to the common benefit of public education for all Vermont students, consistent with the Vermont Supreme Court's holding in *Brigham v. State*.

Advance economic justice: When those who can most afford it pay their fair share, we can address the state's most pressing needs in housing, social services, infrastructure, education, and the environment to build a better state for all of us. We are among a group of organizations supporting initiatives like the Fair Share for Vermont proposal—to institute an income tax surcharge on Vermont residents earning more than \$500,000 a year—as well as other efforts to ensure our state has the resources we need and that new revenue is generated from those who can most afford it.

Thank you for your consideration of these priority issues. Please contact me or our policy advocates Alex Karambelas and Jordan Souder with any questions, and we look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Falko Schilling". The signature is written in a cursive style with a loop at the end.

Falko Schilling
Advocacy Director
ACLU of Vermont