SOLITARY AT EL PUEBLO

ACLU of Colorado Fights to End Solitary Confinement of Children and the Mentally Ill

El Pueblo Residential Treatment Center is a facility ostensibly dedicated to helping at-risk children, many of whom have developmental and mental disabilities. Yet despite existing state laws, court decisions, and widely-accepted standards for the treatment of troubled youth, El Pueblo routinely forced children into solitary confinement for days and even weeks at a time in rooms they called “reflection cottages.” In reality, the “cottages” were nothing more than bare concrete rooms where teens in need of treatment and care were forced to spend hours on end reliving the past trauma that brought them to the facility.

While in the “reflection cottages,” children were denied socialization and exercise. Each child slept on a thin camping pad and had to ask permission to leave the cottage to use the bathroom.

When the ACLU of Colorado learned about the “reflection cottages” at El Pueblo, we immediately took action. ACLU lawyers contacted the Colorado Department of Human Services (DHS) and demanded that they end the illegal use of solitary confinement at the facility. We then initiated a media campaign resulting in widespread local coverage to put pressure on El Pueblo and DHS to quickly end the practice.

Less than a month after our initial contact with DHS, it released the results of an official investigation confirming the ACLU’s claims. It ordered El Pueblo to suspend operation of the “reflection cottages” until a clinical and educational foundation for their use is developed and approved by the agency.

Warehousing vulnerable populations in long-term solitary confinement is inhuman and can lead to serious consequences for public safety.

According to a new ACLU report, more than half of the prisoners who are currently housed in solitary confinement in Colorado’s prisons have significant mental health needs.

Through legislative campaigns and legal action, and by working closely with Colorado’s new Department of Corrections Director, the ACLU of Colorado is dedicated to ending solitary confinement, starting with children and the seriously mentally ill.
LETTER FROM NATHAN WOODLIFF-STANLEY

Is America making progress on civil liberties or moving backwards? Both, I would say. This newsletter is filled with examples of civil liberties successes by the ACLU of Colorado in recent months—in the legislature, the courts and the public arena. We have seen advances on freedom of speech, civil unions, due process, drug laws, immigration, voting rights, stopping discrimination, solitary confinement and much more. Nationally, we are seeing an historic shift in public opinion in favor of marriage equality, and there is at least a chance that national immigration reform is on its way.

At the same time, we are learning more every day about the growth of a pervasive surveillance state and drone attacks on American citizens in the name of national security, and we are facing unprecedented threats to privacy and Fourth Amendment rights. We have a long way to go toward equal pay, racial justice, reproductive freedom, privacy in an electronic age, ending the highest rates of incarceration in the world and protecting religious freedom while stopping discrimination in the name of religion. Although the first execution in 15 years in Colorado was halted, we have not yet ended the death penalty in our state.

We have come as far as we have thanks to engaged members and supporters, a strong nationwide ACLU network and the best ACLU staff and volunteer leadership I could ask for here in Colorado. When you support the ACLU, you get our best as we fight relentlessly for your civil rights and civil liberties.

—Nathan Woodliff-Stanley

MEET THE NEW MEMBERS OF OUR TEAM

JOHN KRIEGER is our new Director of Communications and Outreach. Prior to the ACLU of Colorado, he was a staff attorney, lobbyist, and Communications Director for the United States Public Interest Research Group in Washington D.C., where he directed a national grassroots campaign to create the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. He studied journalism and public relations at Flagler College and earned his law degree from the University of Richmond.

JESSICA HOWARD is our new Legal Assistant. Jessica received her Bachelor’s degree in Political Science from the University of Colorado and is currently pursuing her Certificate in Paralegal Studies. Jessica worked as the Legal Intern for Colorado Legal Services in 2009. She previously worked as the Legislative Intern for Colorado State Senator Gail Schwartz.

CHAPTER NEWS

The Boulder County Chapter is working with County election officials to revise their policies for polling places after a Catholic Church last November included an anti-abortion display that was intimidating to voters.

The Colorado Springs Chapter will host an outdoor forum on July 23rd to examine emerging privacy battles.

The Northern Colorado Chapter is planning a roundtable for this fall with panelists from law enforcement, the county jail, and the community titled “Criminalizing the Mentally Ill, Is Jail the Answer?”
The 2013 legislative session was truly historic for the ACLU of Colorado, with several major victories for civil liberties. Here are our top ten achievements from the session.

1. After seven hard-fought years, we won civil unions in Colorado, moving us one step closer to equality for same-sex couples.

2. Gov. Hickenlooper signed ACLU-backed legislation fixing several problems in our voting system and adding same-day voter registration.

3. The ACLU of Colorado helped repeal a controversial racial profiling law requiring law enforcement to report those suspected of being here illegally to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

4. Our legislative team defeated a bill that would have required anyone convicted of simple misdemeanors to submit DNA to the government.

5. We helped toughen Colorado’s anti-discrimination laws by giving wronged workers the ability to recover lost wages.

6. The right to legal representation for individuals who are facing jail time was strengthened, through a bill supported by the ACLU.

7. We helped pass legislation to give the wrongfully incarcerated more resources to rebuild their lives.

8. Juvenile delinquency records are now easier to expunge and drug sentencing laws were reformed to focus more on treatment and rehabilitation rather than incarceration.

9. New ACLU-backed privacy laws ensure that employers cannot access the social network sites of their employees and potential hires.

10. A new state law supported by the ACLU guarantees in-state tuition for Colorado high school graduates regardless of their immigration status.
CONGRATULATIONS

A CLU OF COLORADO HONORS TRAILBLAZERS OF LIBERTY

This year’s honorees at the Carle Whitehead Bill of Rights Dinner on Friday, October 11.

REP. CLAIRE LEVY will receive the Carle Whitehead Memorial Award for her lifetime work as a lawyer and a legislator defending and preserving civil rights and civil liberties.

KEVIN PAUL, whose career of legal advocacy for reproductive rights has positively impacted hundreds of thousands of men, women and teens throughout the state, will receive the Edward Sherman award.

KEVIN WILLIAMS, who directs the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition (CCDC) Legal Program, which has successfully litigated hundreds of disability rights cases, will receive the Ralph L. Carr Award.

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SAVE THE DATE >>

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2013

Carle Whitehead Bill of Rights Dinner
The Curtis Hotel
1405 Curtis Street, Denver

Join us in celebrating our victories and fueling our inspiration to continue the critical work of defending and preserving civil rights and civil liberties for all. The program will feature an inspiring speaker and will highlight the extraordinary work of our honorees, Claire Levy, Kevin Paul and Kevin Williams. The doors open for the cocktail hour at 5:30 pm.

For sponsorship and ticket information visit aclu-co.org/event/carle-whitehead-bill-of-rights-dinner