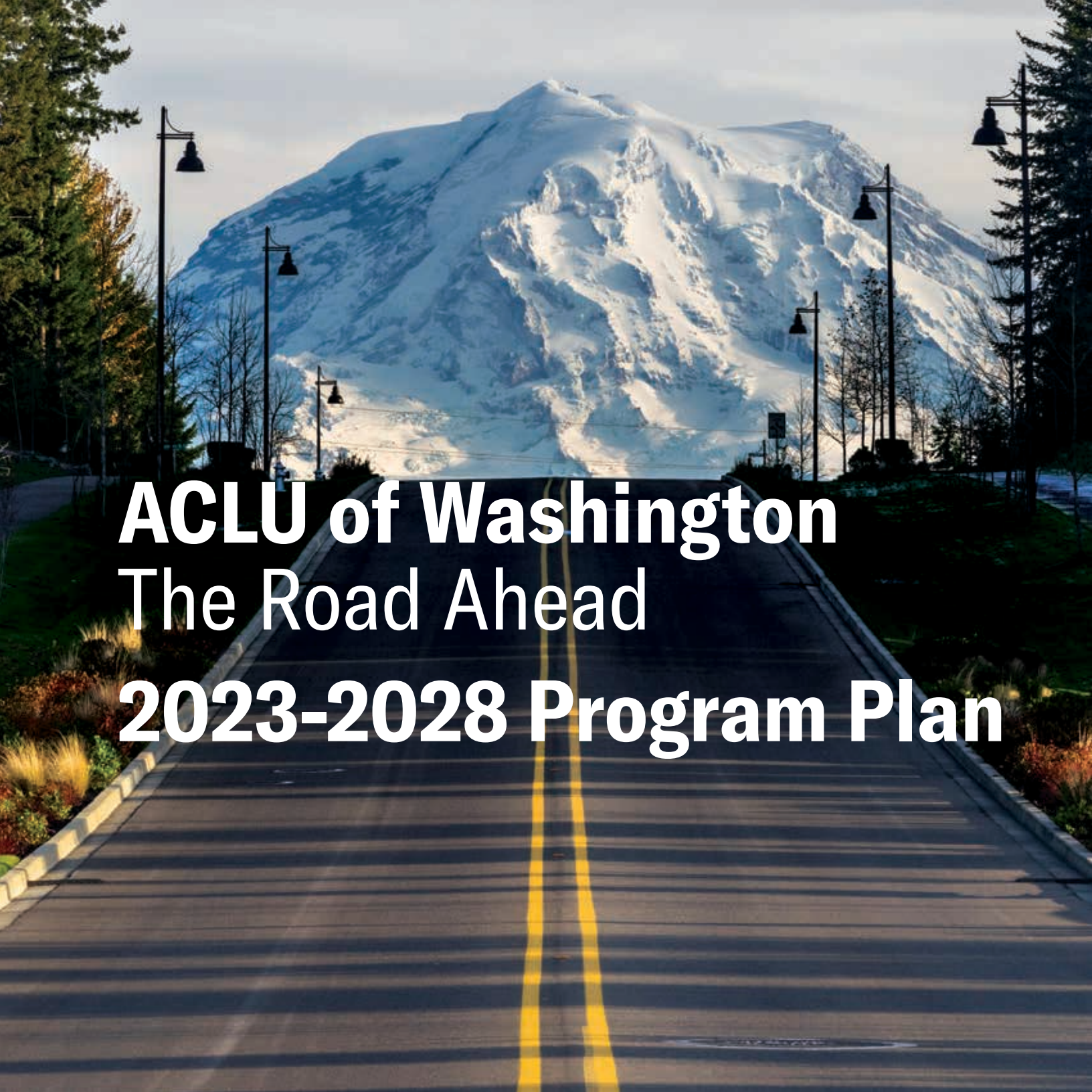

ACLU of Washington
The Road Ahead
2023-2028 Program Plan

Liberty. Equality. Due process. Freedom from cruel and unusual punishment. Freedom of speech and thought. The ability to participate in shaping our democracy.

These are the promises of the U.S. Constitution, but whether you experience them depends largely on who you are.

The ACLU of Washington's five-year plan is focused on ensuring the promises of the Constitution for everyone in our state. We seek to disrupt legalized oppression and build a thriving democracy that invests in the health and wellbeing of its communities and expands the protections of liberty and freedom.

To do this, we must work together and use all the tools available to us through our integrated advocacy framework. In partnership with impacted communities, activists, and allies, we will advocate for a better, fairer, and freer Washington through litigation, legislation, electoral engagement, media advocacy, and public education. We will invest our resources in four subject areas critical to the future of civil rights and liberties in Washington:

- **The criminal legal system**
- **Individual and personal rights and autonomy**
- **Racial and economic justice**
- **Democracy**

And we will reserve resources to defend against emergent threats to liberty, freedom, and justice in our state. The road ahead is challenging. With this program plan and our partnerships, the ACLU of Washington is ready.

CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

We seek to dismantle the current racially biased system which relies on over-policing, criminal punishment, incarceration, and debt, and replace it with a transformative and restorative system that invests in the healing, health, well-being, and safety of every person and community. We center the voices of formerly and currently impacted community members to advance a system dedicated to preventing harm and crisis.

To accomplish this, we will:

1. **Reimagine public safety**, reducing the harmful, oversized role that police play in communities of color and changing the public narrative in support of safety through community resources and healing.
2. **Fight mass incarceration**, advocating alongside incarcerated people to retroactively amend comprehensive sentencing laws responsible for expanding racially biased life and long sentences in Washington.
3. **Reduce overreliance on the criminal legal system** through expanding access to restorative and transformational justice programs, including violence prevention and alternatives to prosecution.
4. **Protect youth** by limiting the scope and negative impact of juvenile justice involvement.
5. **Reduce barriers to recovery** by challenging policies limiting access to public health interventions and expanding criminalization of drug use.
6. **End the criminalization of poverty**, by defending the rights of unhoused people and those with fewer economic resources.

Right: Mission Creek Corrections Pow Wow, September 15, 2023. In 2021, with Indigenous civil rights lawyer Gabe Galanda, we successfully advocated to restore access to traditional religious ceremonies for Indigenous inmates in Washington prisons, following months of disproportionately applied COVID-19 restrictions. Photo by Huy, an organization that supports Indigenous prisoners.

INDIVIDUAL AND PERSONAL RIGHTS AND AUTONOMY

We seek to build a state where people have the ability, resources, and rights to exercise self-determination and bodily autonomy. We combat historical and new forms of oppression and privacy invasion, with a focus on the liberation of people marginalized by identity or status, especially people impacted by intersections of multiple identities.

To accomplish this, we will:

1. **Expand health care access**, working alongside the most vulnerable communities in Washington, including undocumented immigrants, people who require reproductive and gender affirming care, and queer and trans BIPOC people.

2. **End the school to prison pipeline** and support preventative community-based interventions.

3. **Fight government surveillance and algorithmic discrimination** and protect personal control of data.

4. **Support disability justice** by building an analytic lens and relationships to better identify and combat ableism across our body of work.

5. **Support LGBTQIA2S+ communities** through developing relationships and supporting their defense of personhood and autonomy.

Right: ACLU-WA supporters in the Spokane Pride Parade, June 10, 2023. Photo by Margaret Albaugh.

RACIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

We seek to implement a community-informed and accountable approach to working alongside Black and Indigenous communities to dismantle systems that perpetuate racial inequity and share truth to the ongoing and historical violence of white supremacy. We work to close the racial wealth gap and ensure Black and Indigenous people have the economic agency to build thriving communities.

To accomplish this, we will:

1. **Support Black community-led efforts to secure reparations** for legalized oppression of Black Americans in Washington state.
2. **Promote Indigenous justice**, expanding relationships with tribal governments and the leaders of Indigenous nonprofits in support of their work to defend their rights and sovereignty over themselves, their people, and their land.
3. **Build internal community accountability structures** to better define how the ACLU-WA will work with impacted people to inform our advocacy work.
4. **Explore the ways taxation and revenue systems perpetuate systemic inequities** and undermine community exercise of civil rights and civil liberties.
5. **Support community efforts to challenge predatory debt collection and credit practices** that target vulnerable communities and impact civil liberties and personal autonomy.

Right: Building the future. Seattle-based Africatown Community Land Trust is "working for community ownership of land in the Central District that can support the cultural and economic thriving of people who are part of the African diaspora in the Greater Seattle region." Photo by Sara Zewde/Africatown Community Land Trust.

DEMOCRACY

We seek to transform our electoral and governance systems to be truly representative and ensure that those who have been historically and systemically marginalized have and exercise the power to determine the policies that affect their lives, communities, and freedoms. We protect the rights of Washington residents to dissent, free from government suppression and censorship.

To accomplish this, we will:

1. **Strengthen the voting rights of communities of color** to elect representatives of their choice through the Washington Voting Rights Act.
2. **Fight law enforcement extremism** through raising awareness about its scope and impact in Washington.
3. **Challenge governmental censorship** and limits to information access and public oversight.
4. **Build community knowledge**, resources, and power to assure that government remains accountable to the people it serves.

Right: Rosalinda Guillen at Marcha Campesina 2023 in Mount Vernon, walking in celebration of the workers in the community. Rosalinda is founder of Community to Community, advocating for participatory democracy, food justice and movement building. Photo by David Bacon.

THE ROAD AHEAD

This plan envisions a future where everyone in Washington, particularly those who have been historically and systematically denied full enjoyment of their promised civil liberties and rights, lives with dignity and equity, enjoying freedoms unimpeded by racial and economic injustice and other forms of oppression.

This is a radical vision – the United States' founding documents promote the ideals of freedom and equality, but the country was built upon the systemic theft of land from and attempted genocide against Indigenous people, the systematic exploitation and dehumanization of Black people, and the systemic exclusion and suppression of communities of color, women, and queer people. To undo that history requires more than a return to our founding principles, but also repair to address the continuing impacts of our historic failures to live up to them.

The ACLU of Washington's plan forges a path forward by focusing on the interplay between injustices – exclusion from democracy, under-investment in the resources that support personal autonomy and wellbeing, the growth of the carceral state, and the perpetuation of racial and economic injustices – that are historically rooted and longstanding. Our work in each of these issue areas is necessary to secure our ultimate vision of a future where everyone in Washington, particularly those who have been historically and systemically marginalized, lives with dignity and equity, unimpeded by racial and economic injustice and other forms of oppression.

Left: ACLU-WA in the Seattle Pride Parade, June 26, 2023. Photo by Nii Okaidja.

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Left: ACLU-WA in the Seattle Pride Parade, June 26, 2023. Photo by Nii Okaidja.

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