



# NYCLU NEWS

WINTER 2021

Photo by Donna Aceto

## A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DONNA LIEBERMAN

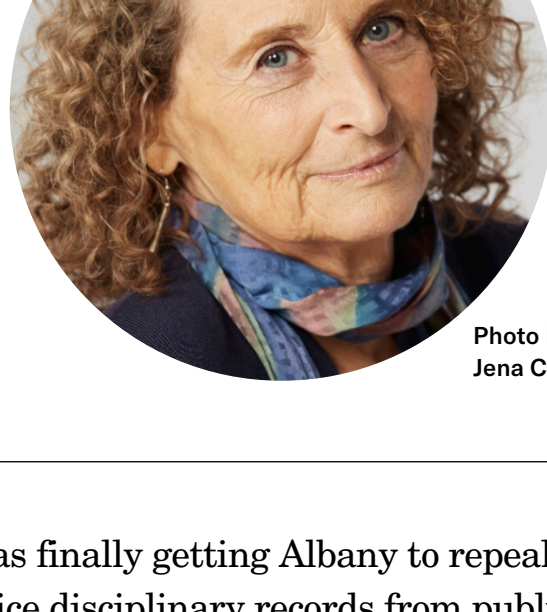


Photo by Jenna Cumbo

We've survived a nightmare. But there's still work ahead.

I am finally exhaling a little bit. I'm sure many of you will know what I mean when I say that I was a nervous wreck about the election. But we've made it through a very dark and dangerous passage. You sticking with us these past four years means everything to me and to everyone here at the NYCLU. The Trump presidency is over—and that's a very good thing.

Still, it's too clear that he did real damage. He and his enablers attacked our elections and our right to vote. They chipped away ceaselessly at the rights and dignity of Black and Brown people, women, immigrants, Muslims and LGBTQ folks. The unbridled power of the police, and ICE's inhumane treatment of people held in custody, has been shocking and a very justified cause for outrage and protest. Even on Trump's way out, he instigated an attack—a failed coup attempt—on the U.S. Capitol to prevent the orderly transition of power, leading the ACLU to call for his impeachment...again.

So now we have a more humane administration taking shape. But even still, restoring our rights will require time, effort—and your continued support. And it'll happen on the heels of a year filled with extraordinary pain and uncertainty. COVID-19 has hit communities of color so much harder—and exposed just how deeply white supremacy is baked into our systems and institutions. We've grappled with blatant racism from elected officials, the police and other bigots. We've lost loved ones from the pandemic—and we've lost Black people to racist violence, including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and too many more.

But we're New Yorkers—and we never give up. Despite the risks, you masked up to march for Black lives, monitor protests, sign petitions—and vote. Together, we logged hard-fought wins

for police accountability, such as finally getting Albany to repeal 50-a, the law that shielded police disciplinary records from public scrutiny. After the repeal, the NYCLU published a database of every NYPD officer complaint going back to the 1980s. We followed that up by filing numerous FOIL requests to get comparable information from other departments around the state.

On other fronts, we were busy. We joined the ACLU in a lawsuit to withhold from the Census citizenship questions designed to intimidate immigrants from participating. And we fought successfully for teenagers to be registered to vote come their 18th birthday, along with opt-out automatic voter registration for anyone who comes in contact with a state agency.

In LGBTQ rights, we forced a settlement in a case against a county that guarantees that people in police custody are housed and given medical care in ways consistent with their gender identity. And in a key step towards blocking the school-to-prison pipeline, we worked with community groups to remove police from schools in Rochester.

Please visit our website for more on our accomplishments. In 2021, our work continues. We'll fight for fairer elections and for expansion of the right to vote. To enshrine in our state constitution the fundamental principle that women, people of color, LGBTQ people, immigrants—everyone—has true equality. And to end racist policing and reinvest in marginalized communities.

Most of all, we'll fight to keep New York a beacon of hope for people nationwide. So please continue to support us as we put 2020 behind us and work to build a brighter new decade ahead.



### NOTICE REGARDING BOARD ELECTION

The annual meeting of the members of the NYCLU will be held on Wednesday, June 23rd, 2021 for the purposes of electing directors and receiving the annual report. Visit [NYCLU.org/boardelections](https://www.nyclu.org/boardelections) for more information.

## A PASSION FOR ORGANIZING

Karen Jarrett, NYCLU's new director of field organizing, is ready to take a lifetime of labor organizing and movement building to a whole new level.

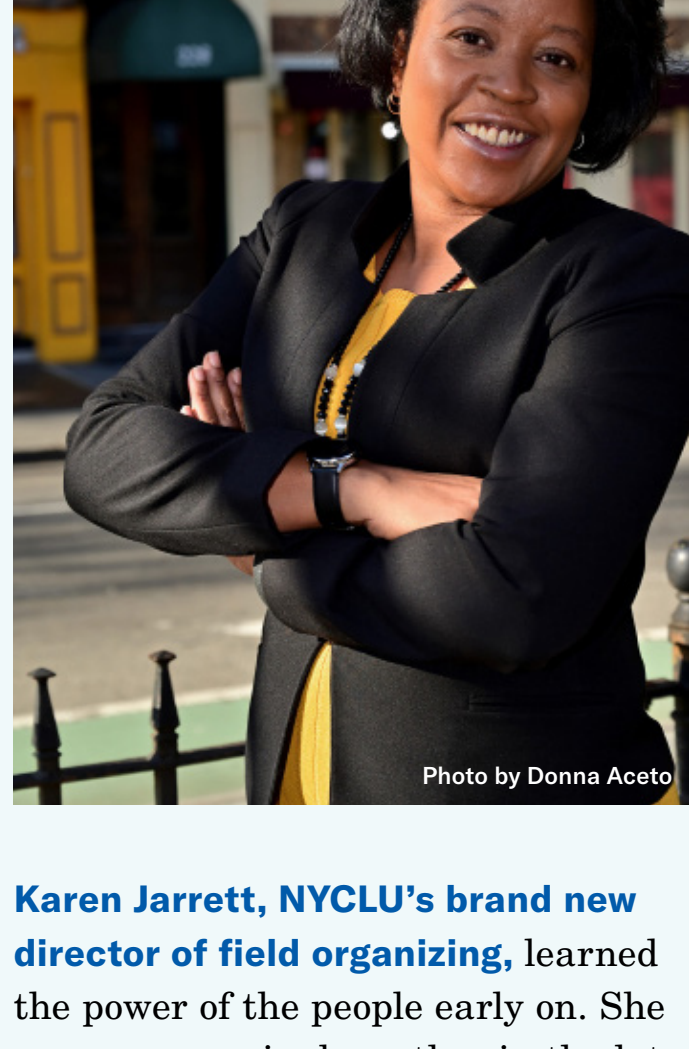


Photo by Donna Aceto

Karen Jarrett, NYCLU's brand new director of field organizing, learned the power of the people early on. She was a young single mother in the late nineties, working at a nonprofit in her native Newark, New Jersey, when she was fired for union organizing. The nonprofit, in fiscal disarray, stopped issuing paychecks. She could've slunked quietly away—but instead she and her colleagues organized a lunchtime picket outside the office and blanketed the area with leaflets saying that the nonprofit, a community mainstay, didn't pay its staff.

"My ex-boss was so embarrassed, she called me asking me to come back," says the warm Jarrett. "She begged, 'Just make the protests stop!' Right then, I understood the power of collective action and mobilization. We shifted power from her to us. For me, it was like a lightbulb turning on and it never shut off."

And hence a career was born. Jarrett went on to work for the local chapter of the Communications Workers of America union first as a shop steward and eventually as an elected vice president. After nearly ten years she moved on to healthcare unions joining fights to save hospitals and services

before joining the New York State Nurses Association at a time when the union was branching out from protecting its members' benefits into broader issues of patient equity in healthcare—and into training its own members to run for office on healthcare issues. "Extending and deepening our work by engaging in coalitions with other organizations made sense to us not just from a union but a community perspective," she says. "We ran the gamut of community engagement from marching in parades to engaging with communities around social justice issues. Every space we joined or created, communities and impacted people were happy to see that the nurses cared and were engaged."

One of her proudest moments at NYSNA was working on a campaign to prevent the privatization of chronic dialysis care. Private vendors were a few years deep into wresting away chronic dialysis care away from the public hospital system, whose services boasted high rates of survival. "Officials told us they couldn't afford to keep the services," she recalls, "and

Now at NYCLU, Jarrett says she hopes to continue to "deepen our community engagement and relationships in a meaningful way. NYCLU is well known as a litigation partner, but I want to further help it be viewed as a strategic campaign partner" on issues where we can be of service to impacted communities including defunding the police, racial justice, and immigrants' rights.

Of course, in the COVID era, much of that organizing will be happening over Zoom, at least in the first half of 2021. "I'm nervous and excited to see what field organizing and movement-building look like in the virtual space," said tech-savvy Jarrett.

Meanwhile, Jarrett, who recently moved back to Newark after years in nearby suburbs "because I have a deep and abiding love for the place where I was born and raised," is riding out COVID as best she can. "Normally, I'd be traveling to see my sons a lot"—Khari, 25, is in grad school in New Hampshire, and Khashari, 23, is outside Dallas—"and I'd be observing

**"You can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good."**

we said, 'You can't afford to keep people alive?' Privatization would take the services away from hospitals in the city's poorest areas. So, we organized patients, labor and advocacy groups, researched and published a white paper, mobilized impacted communities, lobbied city and state legislators—and then we won." The vendor's service could not stand up to the scrutiny. "I'm proud of that campaign because the union did not have to go beyond protecting their members, but they did. Those vital, life affirming services remain in the public health domain, where they belong."

elections in South America," something she's done often in recent years because "it's satisfying to see life outside our country—and because I love arepas, which I discovered in Venezuela."

But instead she'll continue to do fix-up jobs on her new home. "Before COVID, I was living out of boxes, but now I've been repainting and caulking tiles," she says. "Home improvement and organizing are alike in that they both require focus, and no project is ever as easy as you think. That's why I don't sweat the small stuff. You can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

## PROTECTING PROTESTERS



Photo by Donna Aceto

As summer streets erupted with outrage over police brutality, we fought politicians who tried to use COVID to suppress dissent.

It was not just the summer of the pandemic—it was the summer of worldwide protest against police brutality. In New York, the NYCLU was there to make sure that activists were not silenced with COVID as an excuse.

In May, as public gatherings were banned to prevent COVID spread, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed new executive orders that allowed groups of up to 10 people to commemorate Memorial Day or religious events—all the while upholding orders banning protest and First Amendment-related activity. We filed suit against the inconsistency, and Cuomo quickly reversed the protest ban.

Just in time, it turned out. At the end of the month and into June, protests exploded in New York City and state, as well as worldwide, in the wake of police killings of Minnesota's George Floyd and Kentucky's Breonna Taylor,

plus the racist murder of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia. The NYCLU's protest monitoring program proved to be crucial as we trained more than 100 monitors to document police responses to demonstrations and be a resource to protestors if needed. Local governments and law enforcement officials around the state responded with even more police violence and arrests, packing jails—which threatened to further spread COVID. We demanded that leaders like NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio prioritize de-escalation as opposed to more police involvement.

And we immediately condemned curfews set in NYC and other cities statewide, insisting that they would inevitably be enforced mostly against Black and Brown New Yorkers. We were right. After nearly a week of curfews in NYC that only ratcheted up police violence in the midst of a

pandemic, we warned de Blasio that we'd sue if he decided to extend the curfew. Under pressure, he lifted the curfew a day earlier than originally planned.

In October, once the city had calmed down, we partnered with the Legal Aid Society in filing a lawsuit against the city, NYPD leaders and several individual officers for their roles in the attacks on protesters. On NY1, NYCLU head Donna Lieberman, discussing the suit, said that incidents of officers "wielding their batons and charging at peaceful protesters" were "brutal, an assault and illegal."

In 2021 and beyond, the NYCLU will continue to alert our supporters to civil rights issues, organize direct actions and create public demonstration opportunities. Why shouldn't we? It's our right.

## MARATHON MAN

The pandemic couldn't stop Brooklyn's Joseph Logan from running to raise more than \$20,000 for the NYCLU.



Joseph Logan as he ran his personal marathon.

In the past four years, not only has Joseph Logan, a 48-year-old Brooklyn graphic designer, become ever more horrified at the Trump administration's attacks on civil rights—he's also morphed from a casual to a competitive long-distance runner. So perhaps it was just a matter of time before those two things came together.

That's what began to happen in late 2019. Logan was already planning to be one of five NYCLU runners participating in the 2020 TCS Marathon—better known as November's annual iconic, 26.2-mile New York City marathon. Each NYCLU runner was tasked with raising at least \$5,000. It was to be Logan's first marathon.

"The last four years, I've felt an increased urgency to be politically active," he says. "And the marathon was supposed to happen two days before the election, so I felt I could have more visibility that way."

But then came COVID—and suddenly marathons worldwide were getting canceled. But that didn't stop Logan's training. "I couldn't get to the gym, so running became my antidote to all my COVID anxiety," he says.

Finally, he called the NYCLU and told them he still wanted to run a marathon—solo—as a one-man fundraiser, working via his Instagram account and group emails. The NYCLU gave Logan the green light—and by the time November came, he'd raised \$22,000, a big chunk of it via a work associate who generously matched \$6,000 in smaller donations.

Then the day finally came. In order to avoid stoplights, Logan had designed his own, mostly waterfront 26.2-mile route, making his way from central to northern Brooklyn, then over the Williamsburg Bridge to lower Manhattan, then over the Brooklyn

Bridge, all the way south along the water to Sunset Park, then looping back up to central Brooklyn. He did it in two hours and 57 minutes, meeting his goal of coming in under three hours. At stops along the way, his partner and friends cheered, captured him on Instagram and handed him off water.

"I never hit the wall, thankfully," he said. "I felt very supported the whole way." Mostly, he says, he felt good knowing he was handing over a big check to the NYCLU. "Doing this was so important to me because it was this synthesis of this horrible political moment we've been in and the chance to do something I've always wanted to do, which is run a marathon," he says.

He's ready to do it again next year for the NYCLU, hopefully in the context of the traditional marathon. "All the fights that the NYCLU is engaged in are so vital and urgent, especially given how Trump has packed the federal courts," he says. "That's the heart of the ACLU's court battles to uphold people's civil rights and liberties are going to be going on forever."

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## THE PARTY GOES ON...VIRTUALLY

Online versions of our Sing Out for Freedom concert and our annual LGBTQ Rights cocktail party were both big hits.

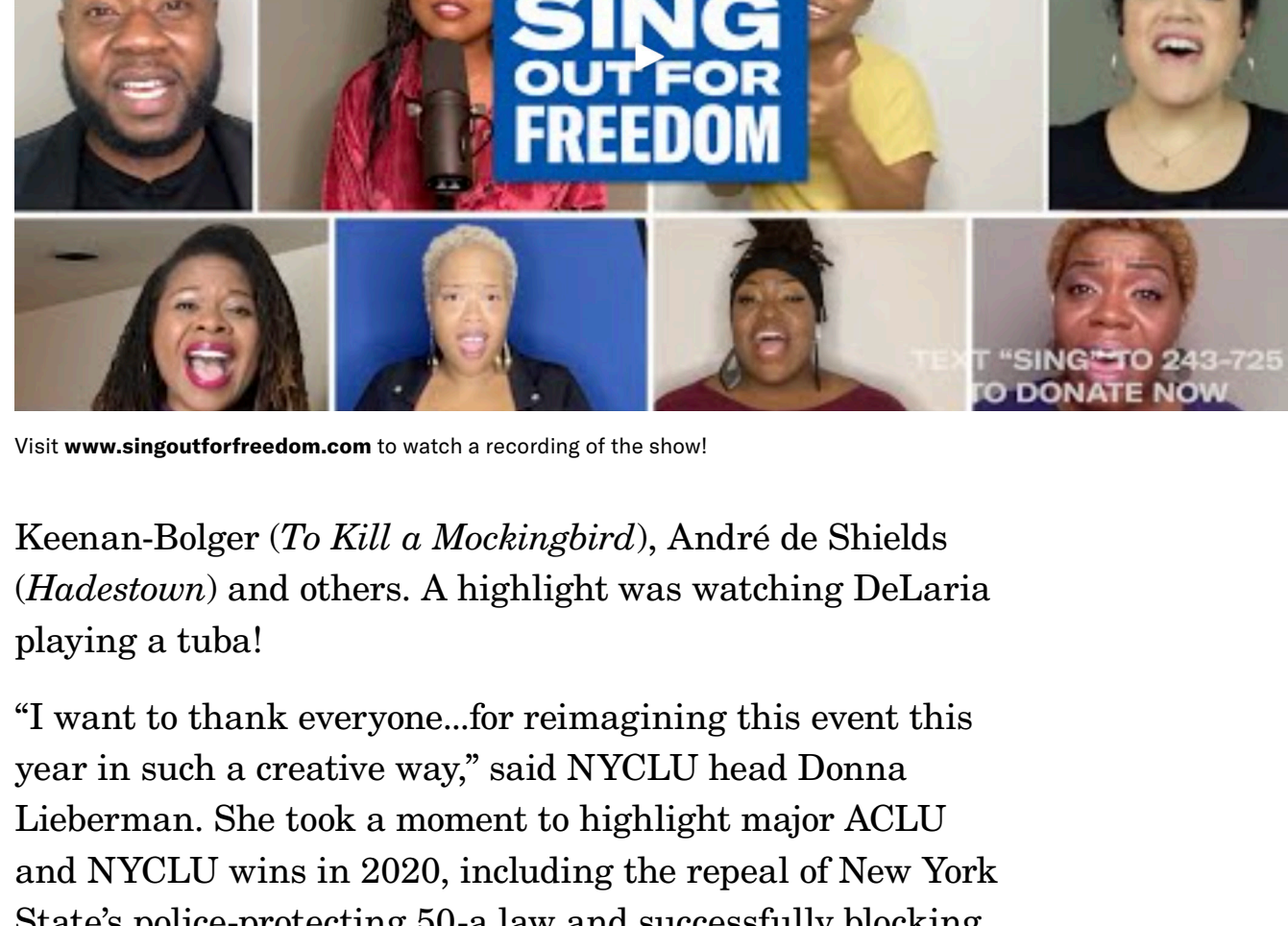
In 2020, we were determined to still celebrate culture and community despite COVID—so we went virtual!

On July 15, we turned to the streaming platform Hopin to host an online version of our annual LGBTQ Rights Reception, which featured breakout sessions following a panel discussion. Speakers included NYCLU Executive Director Donna Lieberman; James Essekes, ACLU Director of the LGBT & HIV Project; NYCLU Policy Counsel Allie Bohm; and Chase Strangio, ACLU Deputy Director for Transgender Justice, LGBT & HIV Project, who successfully argued this summer's Supreme Court ruling that extended workplace and other protections to LGBTQ people.

The event also featured a tribute to Aimee Stephens, the ACLU client who died in May, not living to see the Supreme Court rule in her favor in June, in her case against a Detroit-area funeral home that fired her because she was transgender. Performing at the event was Broadway star Adrienne Warren, Tony-nominated for *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*.

Then, the night before the election, we hit the screens again for our Sing Out for Freedom concert (the new name for our long-running Broadway Stands up for Freedom), centered around the history of voting rights, which honored and celebrated the contributions of Rep. John Lewis and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, both of whom died in 2020, as well as suffragists.

The event was directed by Tony nominee Liesl Tommy, hosted by *Orange is the New Black's* Lea DeLaria and featured appearances and performances by Rachel Brosnahan (*The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*), Phillipa Soo (*Hamilton*), Celia



Visit [www.singoutforfreedom.com](https://www.singoutforfreedom.com) to watch a recording of the show!

Keenan-Bolger (*To Kill a Mockingbird*), André de Shields (*Hadedtown*) and others. A highlight was watching DeLaria playing a tuba!

"I want to thank everyone...for reimagining this event this year in such a creative way," said NYCLU head Donna Lieberman. She took a moment to highlight major ACLU and NYCLU wins in 2020, including the repeal of New York State's police-protecting 50-a law and successfully blocking Trump's attempt to cut immigrants out of the Census. And she ran down key goals for 2021 and beyond, including digital privacy protection and New York State-level efforts to legalize marijuana and pass an equal rights amendment.

Still managing to produce a full extravaganza in the middle of a pandemic? Now, that's entertainment!