

WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN AFFAIRS

OVER 50 YEARS ON THE FRONT LINES

Dismantling
Injustice

Pursuing
Lasting
Change

The Washington Lawyers' Committee has been working for racial justice for over 50 years. It has brought some of the most significant cases in the nation to address housing segregation, to open up federal employment to persons of color and women, to seek equity in education, to ensure legal protection for immigrants, to fight for the rights of person with disabilities, and to address inequity in the criminal legal system.

Combating racial inequity that infects every aspect of the **criminal legal system**, the Washington Lawyers Committee litigates against police brutality and cruel prison conditions, and works to secure the responsible release of prisoners and an off-ramp to success after prison. Our most recent victory was to force the Small Business Administration to remove a ban on persons with a conviction from the Payroll Protection Program. The court victory opened up credit to thousands of applicants and, in turn, protected tens of thousands of jobs.

The fight against racial housing segregation has been another long-standing priority. We have fought and won scores of cases to stop discriminatory leasing, lending, advertising, and racial steering practices. The Committee has led the fight to establish that discrimination against holders of vouchers, which allow families of color to rent in opportunity neighborhoods, is race discrimination. Our litigation has opened up housing opportunities to thousands.

Since its founding, the Washington Lawyers Committee has brought scores of cases to fight employment discrimination. It was our cases that changed hiring and promotion practices at the Government Printing Office, the Library of Congress, the Federal Marshall's Service, the Fair Housing Administration, and others. That work continues today.

Immigration policy has long been a priority. This year, our case was the first to order the restoration of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) Program.

The demand for our services is at an all-time high. Because of the Committee's record of success, Black Lives Matter retained the Washington Lawyers Committee to sue President Trump and other government officials for unlawfully injuring demonstrators at Lafayette Square.

But our resources cannot meet the demand. Normal funding channels, including but not limited to foundations, are stretched thin meeting the basic needs of the millions of people thrown out of work by COVID-19. As a result, the Committee's annual budget of \$4.5 million has become increasingly hard to meet.



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A DOCKET THAT MATTERS

Illustrative Cases and Projects

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FIGHTING FOR RACIAL JUSTICE IN POLICING

Protecting Anti-Racist Demonstrators:

On June 1, 2020, Black Lives Matter demonstrators were violently removed from Lafayette Park by federal and District of Columbia police forces. Rubber bullets, tear gas, pepper spray, and batons caused significant injuries. The rights of those demonstrating for racial justice were trampled on. On behalf of Black Lives Matter DC and a class of demonstrators, we sued the President, other officials and the United States to ensure that the right to protest is protected.

FIGHTING A RACIALIZED IMMIGRATION SYSTEM:

Challenging Racially Motivated Federal Immigration Policies:

We sued the administration for the elimination of the DACA program and won a victory in the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals re-instating the program. Following the Supreme Court's recent decision on DACA, an order was entered in our case requiring that the Department of Homeland Security put the program back in place. In addition, we are in active litigation against the administration over the withdrawal of the Temporary Protected Status for Salvadoran Refugees. Our complaint identifies the racial and xenophobic animus that underlies the efforts to remove Salvadoran refugees who have lived in the United States for decades and contributed to their communities.

FIGHTING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Fighting for the Right of Persons with Disabilities to Vote:

We have several active cases to eliminate roadblocks for persons with disabilities to vote privately and independently. Mail in ballots are often not accessible to blind or low-vision people, or people with dexterity disabilities. We represent the National Council of the Blind in Virginia and a coalition of disability rights groups in New York. Through our advocacy in West Virginia, the state recently has instituted electronic voting.

Successfully Challenging the Federal Government's Inaccessible Services:

The Social Security Administration (SSA) moved to a system of kiosks in all of its offices for visitor intake that are inaccessible to the blind. As a result, visitors required a third party to enter private information such as social security numbers. Representing the National Federation of the Blind and two blind individuals, the Committee successfully won a suit requiring the SSA to retrofit their system with accessible interaction at all locations across the U.S. In another case representing the American Council of the Blind and three blind federal contractors, the Committee prevailed in establishing that the General Services Administration's (GSA) online portal for federal contractors was not accessible to the blind. The inability to access this portal meant that blind federal contractors could not maintain their active status, severely hindering their livelihoods. GSA addressed the issues and committed to working with the blind community going forward when reviewing or updating their systems.



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FIGHTING FOR RACIAL JUSTICE IN HOUSING

Addressing Overly Aggressive Criminal Records Screening for Housing Applicants:

The Committee sued Mid-America Apartments and Kay Management, two national housing providers, for racially discriminatory policies excluding persons with criminal convictions. Both cases settled with an agreement to significantly change the screening policy. These settlements open up housing opportunities for thousands of individuals and families across the country.

FIGHTING FOR RACIAL JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE IN PRISONS

Protecting Vulnerable Federal Prisoners from COVID-19:

The Committee, in partnership with FAMM and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers lead the Compassionate Release Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse identifies counsel for federal and District prisoners who are terminally ill, have a disabling condition or other special circumstances, including being at high risk for COVID-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have placed more than 400 federal cases and more than 90 DC cases with private counsel for representation.

Working to End Solitary Confinement:

The federal prison in Colorado holds prisoners in some of the most extreme and cruel solitary confinement in the nation. Prisoners can go for decades with little human interaction in tiny cells causing emotional and psychological damage, often leading to horrific self-harm. The Committee sued the Bureau of prisons and secured a consent decree to remove prisoners with mental illness from solitary and to reform the conditions.

FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE IN EMPLOYMENT

Preserving Jobs by Making Credit Available to Businesses Run by Returning Citizens:

When the Payroll Protection Program was created by Congress, there was no limitation on access to the loans for returning citizens. The Small Business Administration issued a regulation excluding thousands of mostly minority owned small businesses if the owner had a record of conviction. The Committee successfully sued the Small Business Administration. The Court found the rule arbitrary and capricious and it was changed.

Addressing Racially Hostile Environments in the Federal Government:

The Committee represented a Native American senior civil rights official at the Department of Energy. She was subjected to retaliation after raising concerns about the use of the Washington professional football team's name and mascot in the workplace. As a result, she had her job duties reduced, was denied promotion and banned from educating employees on the impact of racialized Native American Indian imagery. The case settled for a substantial judgment.

Ensuring Same-Sex Spouses Receive Health Insurance at Walmart:

The Committee brought a class action lawsuit against national retailer, Walmart, for denying same-sex spouses health insurance despite offering this to other employees. The case successfully settled for \$7.5 million and a policy change giving thousands of employees healthcare for their spouses.

MAKE A GIFT TO THE WASHINGTON LAWYERS COMMITTEE

Invest in the Civil Rights Work of Our Time

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Every dollar donated to the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs is leveraged several times to create more social impact. When you invest in the Washington Lawyers' Committee, we use your dollars to sustain a robust civil rights litigation docket fueled by thousands of hours of pro bono legal help. We like to think of it as your social impact dividend — and that's smart philanthropy.

YOU CAN MAKE A GIFT IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

- **Electronic transfer of funds or stock donation:** Instructions can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/yygudtgx>
 - **Online Gifts** can be made here: <https://tinyurl.com/yy8q2ah8>
 - **Checks** made out to "The Washington Lawyers' Committee" sent to:
ATTN: Gregg Kelley
700 14th Street, NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005
 - **Gifts of \$1,000** and more will be recognized in our Justice Society program which can be viewed here: <https://tinyurl.com/y4mw6sft>
 - **To make a pledge**, or if you need further information, please contact Gregg Kelley, Director of Development & Communications, at Gregg_Kelley@washlaw.org or (202) 319-1070.
- The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs is a tax-exempt

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