

Ira Glasser's 1982 Draft Statement Describing the ACLU

The American system of government is built on two basic principles: (1) the principle of majority rule, by democratic elections of temporary representatives; and (2) the principle that even democratic majorities must be limited in order to assure individual liberties.

This second principle is codified in the Bill of Rights and in federal and state legislation implementing the Bill of Rights. While the rest of the Constitution authorizes the government to act, the Bill of Rights limits the government's Authority to Act. It sets the ground rules for individual liberty, which includes the freedoms of speech, association and religion, freedom of the press, and the right to privacy, to equal protection under the laws and to due process of law.

The ACLU exists solely to defend and secure these rights and to extend them to groups that traditionally have been excluded from their protection.

Our work can be summarily categorized as follows:

1. First Amendment—The rights of speech, free association, and assembly, freedom of the press and freedom of religion, including the strict separation of Church and State.
2. Equal Protection of the Laws—The right [to] not be discriminated against on the basis of certain classifications, such as race, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, physical handicap, etc.
3. Due Process of Law—The right to be treated fairly, including fair procedures when facing accusation of criminal conduct or other serious accusations that can lead to results like loss of employment, exclusion from school, denial of housing, cut-off of certain benefits or various punitive measures taken by administrative regulatory agencies.
4. Privacy—The right to a guaranteed zone of personal privacy and autonomy which cannot be penetrated by government, or by other institutions with substantial influence over one's life, such as employers.
5. Special Groups—The extension of all the right[s] described above to individuals traditionally denied the full protections of the Bill of Rights, such as mental patients, prisoners, soldiers, children in the custody of the state and other confined populations, as well as certain groups who are not confined but who nonetheless have not enjoyed full protection of the Bill of Rights: The handicapped, American Indians, homosexuals, women, and racial minorities.

Draft By
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