



## AT A GLANCE: September 2021 Edition

### Outreach and Community Engagement around Magisterial District Judges

This past primary election was the first time that we engaged in voter education efforts around the [magisterial district judges \(MDJs\)](#). While we concluded our voter education efforts around the MDJs after the primary, we will use the rest of the year to educate community members across the state about the roles of MDJs and their impact on the cash bail system. In addition to educating community members, we will conduct outreach efforts to have meetings with current and newly elected MDJs to discuss our agenda around bail practices and reform. We are also in the process of planning trainings for MDJs around bail practices and processes.

### City of Philadelphia Launches Pilot Program to Reduce Racial Bias in Police Use of Stop-and-Frisk; ACLU-PA Launches Education Campaign in Pilot District

On August 1, the [Philadelphia Police Department \(PPD\) launched a pilot program](#) in the racially diverse 14th police district to change how Philadelphia police interact with individuals who are committing minor offenses, such as carrying open alcohol containers, public smoking of marijuana, noise complaints, and disorderly conduct. For three months, police in the city's 14th police district in Northwest Philadelphia will simply ask people who are engaged in these petty offenses to stop what they are doing. Only if a person refuses to comply will police forcibly stop, frisk, and question that individual. The pilot program is the most visible of several reforms ordered by the court overseeing our decade-long class action challenging the PPD's use of stop-and-frisk as legally flawed and racially discriminatory. To raise awareness of the pilot program, garner community buy-in, and ensure police accountability, we launched an outreach and education campaign in the 14th police district. The results of the pilot will be studied, after which we expect to argue for its expansion to other police districts.

### Divestment in Pittsburgh Police Department

In Pittsburgh, we are working with a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, Ralph Bangs, to push for reforms laid out [here](#) (the reforms include not enforcing low-level offenses, moving money out of the police budget and redirecting it to social programs, and holding police accountable for wrongdoing). We are convening Black leaders in the area to come together to develop a policy agenda and advocacy efforts that can be adopted to ensure that resources are being reallocated to Black and brown communities as part of police divestment efforts. Black and brown community members are impacted by police at a greater degree than their white counterparts.



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### PA Sham Election Reviews

The ACLU-PA is mobilizing to oppose anticipated legislative subpoenas from Republican Senators to Philadelphia, York, and Tioga counties seeking hardware and documentation related to the November 2020 election. Sham reviews are dangerous not only because they fail to produce honest results (and will be used to feed the Trumpian “big lie” narrative). They also taint the voting machines and other election apparatus, rendering them unusable, and thus jeopardizing the counties’ ability to conduct fair elections in November and maybe even next year. This will cost taxpayers money to replace the necessary infrastructure. We are also asking supporters like you to [tell your state senator that it's time to get back to the business of solving Pennsylvania's real problems and to end this anti-voter scam](#). The commonwealth's elections officials deserve our praise and thanks for carrying out the 2020 election under immense political pressure, in the midst of a global pandemic. But Harrisburg politicians want to litigate the election over and over again.

### Case Challenging Overbilling by Montgomery County Court Moves Forward

In January 2021, [we filed a lawsuit against the court of common pleas in Montgomery County](#) over its longstanding policy of over-billing defendants with unlawful court costs. Although state law permits only one set of costs per *case*, the court charges one set per *count*. As a result, a person who is convicted of three separate charges is hit with three sets of court costs. In addition, the court is not giving anyone notice of how much they owe in court costs. We spent nearly two years encouraging the court system to change its illegal practice, but their steadfast refusal forced us to sue. In August, Commonwealth Court Judge Ceisler rejected defendants’ preliminary objections, which asked the court to dismiss the case. We are moving forward with certifying this as a class action, with over 13,000 potential class members, and will also begin discovery.

### Driving PA Forward

The Driving PA Forward Coalition (DPF) continues advocacy and legislative efforts to move [HB 279](#) (Burgos). The coalition has obtained [43 co-sponsors](#) on the bill to date and is receiving bipartisan support. The bill aims to expand access to driver’s licenses for all people regardless of immigration status. In addition, the bill would add privacy protections for all Pennsylvanians in the PennDOT database. On June 21, 2021, the coalition held a successful Youth Lead Lobby Day in Harrisburg, securing additional Republican co-sponsors to HB 279. On August 11, 2021, the House Transportation Committee held a [public hearing](#) for the bill. [Muneeba Talukder testified](#) on behalf of the ACLU-PA at the hearing along with other panelists in support of the legislation.



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### **In Case You Missed It: Supreme Court Win! (*B.L. v. Mahanoy Area School District*)**

We filed a lawsuit on behalf of Brandi Levy in 2017 after she received a one-year suspension from the junior varsity cheerleading team at Mahanoy Area High School for posting a “snap” on the social media platform Snapchat. The “snap” was with a photo of Brandi and a friend at a local convenience store with their middle fingers extended, accompanied by the text “fuck school fuck softball fuck cheer fuck everything.” The case ended up all the way to the Supreme Court. On June 23, 2021, [the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in an 8-1 decision](#), that the speech of our client, Brandi Levy, was protected by the First Amendment, and reaffirmed the importance of free speech rights of young people and students across the country. If you'd like to show your support for our fight for free speech rights – including our young client's right to express herself – [you can do so in style with our new "Fuck Everything" Tee](#). Every dollar of your purchase will go to the ACLU's critical work to defend people's rights – and will be a valuable help in all that's ahead.