LatinoJustice PRLDEF

2026

Legislative Round



A Report by LatinoJustice PRLDEF

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

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Introduction

In more than five decades of existence, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has complemented its impact litigation with policy and legislative advocacy, in our communities and in the halls of legislative power. Fighting discriminatory laws and unconstitutional policies in the courts cannot by itself bring about a just and inclusive society. Shaping laws that defend and expand rights for all, and working to stop laws that harm people has been an important part of our work for at least the past decade.

Thanks to a growing advocacy team, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has built up a strong legislative advocacy program in the past 10 years, with a strong focus on legislation related to criminal justice and voting rights, as well as involvement with bills related to immigrant rights, access to education and economic justice.

With a decades-long effective deadlock in Congress, our efforts have focused on state legislatures, including developing model legislation, where we can more effectively leverage our experience, capacity and resources.

Geographically, our advocacy efforts cover states where our organization has a presence – New York, Florida, Texas and California – as well as neighboring states where we have joined legislative campaigns related to our priority issues of interest.

Voting rights, given the Supreme Court decision in *Louisiana v Callais* and the impending midterms, was a huge advocacy focus for LatinoJustice this year. We deepened our influence in the voting rights movement by drafting, in coalition with LDF, AALDEF, Campaign Legal Center and the Election Law Clinic at Harvard, a model state voting rights act that includes an innovative tiered threshold structure for improving language access. We were also called upon as experts to consult on the language access provisions of various new state VRAs, including Rhode Island, Arizona and Vermont.

2026 also saw the historic passage of the NJ Voter Empowerment Act, which includes one of the strongest language access provisions of any state VRA in the country!

Overall, we were able to vociferously express our opposition to harmful bills across the country, primarily in Florida, and advance some opportunities in New York and California that will lay the groundwork for more progressive work in 2027. Texas was not in active legislative session this year, so advocacy work was more limited.



Criminal Justice Legislation and Advocacy

LatinoJustice supports abolitionist principles and works to dismantle the very structures that oppress and discriminate against our minority communities. We assess and seize opportunities to eradicate the prison industrial complex and the abusive policing mechanisms that have terrorized our Latinx and allied communities for generations.

LatinoJustice continues to bridge the gap between legal strategy, public education, and legislative advocacy. Our work this session reflects a strong emphasis on community-driven policy change, the centering of directly impacted voices, and building long-term infrastructure to dismantle systems of mass criminalization.

We also deepened our engagement with parole reform on a national level, and have partnered with the Prison Policy Initiative and the MacArthur Foundation to develop model policies and best practices on parole reform initiatives that can be replicated throughout the states. We are hosting bimonthly national parole reform coalition calls and lead on the parole reform policy working group, which is developing model parole reform legislation and protocols.

Federal

Legislation– Ending Forced Labor in Prisons

LatinoJustice is part of the steering committee of the End the Exception coalition, chaired by Worth Rises. The Abolition Amendment, sponsored by Jeff Merkley, Cory Booker, Nikema Williams, Celeste Molloy aims to close the loophole to the 13th Amendment that allows for forced labor by those convicted of crimes, disproportionately Black and brown individuals.

Status: The bill will likely be re-introduced on Constitution Day, September 17, 2026.

California

Policy – Ending the Death Penalty in California and elsewhere

As part of a targeted coalition to end the death penalty in the state with the largest death row in the country, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has participated in public activity and lobbying to urge Gov. Gavin Newsom to end the death penalty in California and commute the sentences of nearly 600 people currently on death row.

Status: LatinoJustice PRLDEF will continue to work as part of this coalition to keep pressing the Governor to do the right thing before he is slated to leave office in January 2027. We participated in a day of action on June 30, 2026, which included a press conference and lobbying meetings with the Governor's staff to urge clemency for the individuals on California's death row.

Legislation – SB 672 (Susan Rubio SD22) - Youth Rehabilitation and Opportunity Act

This state bill would allow some people currently serving life without parole who were sentenced for a crime committed when they were 25 or younger to become eligible for a Youth Offender Parole hearing after serving 25 years. California law already allows Youth Offender Parole hearings for many people in the same age bracket but currently excludes those serving life without parole.

Working with partners the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, National Life without Parole Leadership Council, Human Rights Watch, 1Community, the Prism Way, USC Gould School of Law, Friends at Work, Actum, and New Momentum Strategies, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has advocated/lobbied to pass this bill.

Status: LatinoJustice pivoted to focusing on narrative work to generate more pervasive partner and public support of this bill when it is re-introduced in 2027.



Criminal Justice Legislation and Advocacy



Legislation – AB2064 (LaShae Sharp-Collins HD79) – Designating formerly incarcerated status as protected class

This landmark bill would add "conviction or arrest record" to the list of protected characteristics under state civil rights laws covering access to housing and employment.

Status: This legislation was held in suspense by the Appropriations Committee at a May 14 hearing, killing the bill for this session. We will work to support reintroducing an amended version of the bill in the next legislative session.

Texas

Policy – Parole Reform

LatinoJustice met with the Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP) officials to discuss certain changes mandated by legislation passed during the 89th Texas Legislative Session, as well as ongoing issues with implementation and where BPP can be more progressive with parole reforms.

We also co-organized and co-led the Parole Advocacy Coalition of Texas's first strategic convening in Austin, Texas, which resulted in a shared understanding of focus areas for advocating and organizing around parole in Texas, as well as the strategies and tactics needed for success. We guest lectured for a Police, Prisons, and Inequality class at UT-Austin, where we discussed how parole works in Texas, the challenges and barriers, and potential solutions, and were also invited to speak with the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission staff members about why civil commitment in Texas should be abolished.

Lastly, our staff were selected to participate in a pilot program with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), involving a consortium made up of two advocates, one member of the public, and various leaders within TDCJ to address challenges facing the agency.

New York

Legislation – Intro 798 (NYC Council Althea Stevens) Abolishing the Criminal Group

LatinoJustice PRLDEF has been a leading partner in the coalition supporting this bill, which seeks to eliminate the NYPD's gang database, a tool widely criticized for its lack of oversight and racial bias.

The database has disproportionately affected Black and Brown youth, often labeling individuals as gang members without sufficient evidence, transparency, or due process protections.

During our first ever Youth Advocacy Development Week, we trained ten young Black and Latinx high school students to lobby their New York City Council members in support of this bill.

Status: The bill currently holds majority support within the New York City Council and is anticipated to be brought to a vote by the end of 2026, so we continue to pressure the City Council and Mayor Mamdani to vote in support.



Criminal Justice Legislation and Advocacy

Advocacy – Disciplinary Reform in the Case of Allan Feliz

In partnership with the Justice Committee and other groups, LatinoJustice has been demanding that Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch fire Lieutenant Jonathan Rivera, who fatally shot Allan Feliz during a traffic stop in 2019. In collaboration with the Feliz family, LatinoJustice and its partners have spoken at rallies, press conferences, and city council hearings seeking justice for the Feliz family as part of a larger campaign to improve discipline within the NYPD.

Status: After Police Commissioner Tisch rejected the recommendation of her own Deputy Commissioner for Trials that Rivera be fired for using excessive force, LatinoJustice and partner organizations filed a first-of-its kind lawsuit claiming that the decision was arbitrary and capricious and asking the Court to strike it down and require Tisch to fire Rivera. The case was argued in May and a decision is forthcoming. In conjunction, we are developing a campaign directed at the City Council to expand the rights of victims of police misconduct to challenge these decisions.

Legislation – S.321 (Julia Salazar SD18) / A.1283 (Latrice Walker AD55) – Second Look Act

The Second Look Act would allow individuals who have served at least ten years in prison to petition for resentencing. The bill advances our sentencing reform goals, challenging the long-standing reliance on excessively punitive sentencing practices.

LatinoJustice support of community education and personal storytelling provided critical tools to showcase the inhuman impact of prolonged incarceration.

Status: Senate version referred to Crime Victims, Crime and Correction Committee. Although the bill did not reach the floor for a vote, the number of legislative co-sponsors increased.

Legislation – S.1209A (Zellnor Myrie SD20) / A.1297A (Demond Meeks AD137) – Mandatory Minimum Sentencing Relief

This bill would eliminate mandatory minimum sentences and restore judicial sentencing discretion.

Status: The Marvin Mayfield Act (S.1209A/A.1297A) did not pass during the 2025–2026 legislative session. LatinoJustice participated in coalition advocacy supporting the legislation alongside criminal justice reform partners as part of the Communities Not Cages campaign.

The Earned Time Act proposes to expand

Legislation – S.774A (Jeremy Cooney SD56) /A.1128A (Anna Kelles AD125) – Earned Time Act

and retroactively apply good time and merit time credits, allowing incarcerated individuals to reduce their sentences through participation in educational, vocational, and rehabilitative programs. The goal is to incentivize personal growth, reduce prison populations, and support successful reentry into society.

LatinoJustice and its partners led efforts that included testimony at parole board hearings, community education forums, and direct lobbying of lawmakers to promote the bill's passage.

Status: Although the bill did not pass during this session, it gained new legislative champions.



Education and Economic Justice Legislation and Advocacy

LatinoJustice is invested in supporting educational and economic justice legislative advocacy that protects and preserves all avenues to financial stability for Latinx communities. Protecting equitable pathways to educational opportunities ensures that no child is left behind.

New York

Legislation – S2237 (Andrew Gounardes SD26) / A2125 (Latrice Walker) — Fair College Admissions

This bill would prohibit universities from including information about where an applicant's relatives attend college in that applicant's admissions file and would impose a civil penalty of $50,000 on colleges who are found to violate the law.

The New York Coalition for Fair College Admissions is leading the advocacy effort for this bill. LatinoJustice is a member of the coalition, along with dozens of educational, community based and civil rights groups.

Status: The bill sat in the Senate Committee for Higher Education and did not make it to the floor for a vote prior to the end of the legislative session.



Immigrant Rights Legislation and Advocacy



Immigrant rights is a core pillar at LatinoJustice and intersects with all of our other work on criminal justice, voting rights and economic justice. While many of the states in which we work are openly hostile to immigrant rights, particularly in the South, there were some opportunities for progressive change in New York, as evidenced by the legislation highlighted below.

New York

Pro-Immigration and Immigrant Rights Legislation Passed in New York State

Governor Kathy Hochul signed a comprehensive slate of laws as part of the FY27 Enacted Budget, including the Dignity not Detention Act, and other measures to keep New Yorkers safe from aggressive and sweeping federal immigration enforcement.

Provisions signed into law include termination of agreements by local jails with ICE detention contracts and a ban on future agreements, ban on law enforcement wearing mask, bans on various 287g agreements, holding federal law enforcement liable for constitutional violations under New York State law, keeping immigrant authorities out of sensitive locations and preserving the integrity of polling locations, and preserving access to education for immigrant children, among others.

The laws include:

Section 170-K Local Cops, Local Crimes Act

No state or local government, agency, or correctional facility can enter or extend any 287(g) agreements or contracts that support the detention of individuals for federal civil immigration violations pursuant the Immigration and Nationality Act. This act also makes any existing contracts or agreements void until July 1, 2029.

Article 8-A NT Bivesn Act

Establishes a right to sue federal officers that parallels a federal civil rights law (Civil action for deprivation of rights). Defines that the Federal Tort Claims Act and Westfall Act do not protect federal officers if they violate a NY citizen's Constitutional rights.

Article 15-AA Section 319-A Restriction on Immigration Enforecement by State Employees

Prevents state employees from disclosing/collecting information, assisting, investigating, and providing access to non-public areas to immigration authorities, unless presented with a judicial warrant or court order.

Article 19-D Duties of Municipal Governments and their Employees Pertaining to Immigration Enforecement

Repeats Article 15-AA, but specifies Municipal government and employees.

Article 10 Prevent Law Enforecement from Wearing Mask

Officers performing their duties cannot cover their face unless using a medical mask, sunglasses, tactical equipment or undercover. They must also have a form of identification and at least one form of declaring their agency.

Article 5 Section 63-D Establishment of the Office of Immigration Trust

This office under the NY Attorney General is in charge of investigating any potential violations of Article 15-AA, Section 170-K, or Article 19-D.

Section 3201-B Denial of a Free Public Education Prohibited; Additional Prohibited Practices

This law states that no child shall be denied or deterred from free public education or programs on the grounds of their citizenship or immigration status. Additionally, no school employee shall assist in immigration enforcement or collect data regarding their citizenship status unless there's a judicial warrant or court order.

Immigrant Rights Legislation and Advocacy





New York

Legislation – A8318 (Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas AD34) / S7789 (Cordell Cleare SD30) – New York CARES Act

This bill would allow undocumented noncitizen survivors of crime to apply for and receive public benefits for themselves, their spouse and unmarried children under the age of twenty-one for such time as their immigration application is pending.

Once the application is granted, the crime survivor would be eligible for the benefits available to refugees. Under current law, there is no eligibility to receive public benefits if you are undocumented, even if you have experienced a crime as a noncitizen. California and Illinois have passed similar legislation, protecting thousands of immigrant crime survivors, and New York should be next.

LJP leads this coalition in close collaboration with Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, who previously sponsored the bill in the Assembly, and Senator Cordell Cleare, who introduced the initial Senate version of the bill in 2024.

Status: While the bill was amended to allow for additional agency flexibility in determining applicant eligibility and was reintroduced in the Assembly and Senate by the same champions, our budget ask of $80 million did not make it into the NYS FY27 budget, and the bill did not progress to the floor for a vote in either chamber.

Voting Rights Legislation and Advocacy



This year saw the devastating *Louisiana v. Callais* Supreme Court Decision that gutted a key section of the federal Voting Rights Act and has since paved the way for partisan gerrymandering and blatant redistricting across the country. While our democracy has weakened by these developments, LatinoJustice remains deeply committed to the preservation of a functioning democracy that enables access to the ballot for all eligible voters. Much of our legislative advocacy work is centered on preserving this access and ensuring that once voters make it to the ballot box, they can cast their vote in a meaningful way.

LatinoJustice has played a leadership role in advancing state voting rights acts across multiple states and was part of a small coalition of five organizations that drafted a historic model state voting rights act that is being adopted and introduced around the country.

Cada Voto Cuenta: In recognition that we are in the fight of our generation to preserve what remains of our democracy, we have recently hired two consultants in Pennsylvania and Georgia to increase our field capacity in certain Latino-populated counties in those states. Our consultants will focus on building new and deepening existing relationships with civil society organizations, including immigrant rights, civic participation, and disability rights organizations, to ensure that all eligible voter constituencies have meaningful access to the ballot. They will also work closely with our existing Voting Rights Advocacy staff to serve as linkages between volunteer poll monitors and elections officials, so we may identify, report and mitigate language access violations in real time on election day in November.

Florida

Legislation – Florida Voting Rights Act - Laying the Groundwork for the Florida Voting Rights Act

We are supporting a multi-year campaign to advance the Florida State Voting Rights Act. While current political conditions in the state make passage unlikely, our focus has been on messaging, public education, and coalition-building to prepare the ground for future legislative success when the political landscape becomes more favorable.

Status: The bill did not make it to a floor vote during the 2026 legislative session and will be reintroduced in 2027.

Legislation HB 991/SB1334 (HB Persons-Mulicka, SB Grall)

Document requirements for voters. We oppose these matching bills that in many ways mirror the federal SAVE America Act, requiring voters to verify documents proving US citizenship as part of the voter registration process.

Status: While these bills unfortunately passed, we continue to provide testimony in opposition to similar bills and build a legislative record that can set the stage for future litigation when the time is ripe.

Legislation SB132 Restoration of Voting Rights (SB Tina Polsk)

LatinoJustice supports this bill, which would create a database that advises formerly incarcerated Floridians of their voter eligibility. This would reduce overall confusion and increase meaningful access to the polls for those eligible to vote.

Status: The bill was approved by the Appropriations Committee on Criminal and Civil Justice 8-0. The bill ultimately died in the Senate Fiscal Policy Committee in March 2026.

Georgia

Legislation – SB536 (SB Martin) Henry McNeal Turner Voting Rights Act

Named after a reconstruction-era Georgia legislator, this legislation would establish the Georgia Voting Rights Commission - as well as the Georgia Voting and Elections Database and Institute, to help develop standards for evaluating voter suppression and voter dilution.

Status: The legislation was introduced in February and faces a difficult path to passage. While it did not make it to the floor for a vote, we are gearing up for reintroduction in 2027.

Maryland

Legislation – Voting Rights Act (SB Sydnor & Harris)

LatinoJustice joined a coalition advancing a comprehensive package of bills known as the Maryland Voting Rights Act. We participated actively with bill language and submitted testimony supporting the entire package, emphasizing the critical need for stronger state-level voting protections and equitable language access for Limited English Proficient voters.

Status: Governor Wes Moore signed SB 255 of the multi-bill Maryland Voting Rights Act into law on April 28. This legislation prohibits the imposition of voting methods in county and municipal elections that impair the ability of members of protected classes to elect representatives of their choice. One of the other bills in the package, HB 983/SB685, which establishes the Language Assistance Program for voters and enhances language access, was signed into law last year. Another bill, HB219, which boosts transparency about election changes, did not pass, but we are planning for reintroduction in 2027.

Voting Rights Legislation and Advocacy

New Jersey

Legislation – Voting Rights Act, A1715/S282 (HB Reynold-Jackson, SB Scutari) John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey



LatinoJustice has been a consistent supporter of the New Jersey Voting Rights Act (NJVRA), which similarly to other state voting rights bills we have supported, helps protect voters of color and expands language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency. Throughout the session, LatinoJustice engaged in sustained advocacy, submitting testimony in support and maintaining ongoing conversations with Senate allies to secure a hearing and advance the bill.

Status: Our National Advocacy Manager of Voting Rights Isabelle Muhlbauer provided testimony in support of this bill, which follows our model state voting rights legislation, at a May 14 hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill passed the Assembly in March 2026 and was approved in a floor vote in the Senate on June 30, 2026. Governor Sherrill signed the bill into law on July 2, 2026!

New York

Legislation – T2026-1546 (NYC Council Oversight Hearing (no prime sponsor) Voting in Rikers

Our Northeast Justice Advocacy Coordinator Robert Willis offered testimony in support of opening up a polling place at the Rikers Island jail at an April 14 City Council oversight hearing. While a 2021 law restored the right to vote for individuals not currently serving a sentence for a felony conviction, few eligible voters in detention are able to register, request ballots or vote.

Status: To date, there are still no polling sites at Rikers, which was previously set to close in August 2027. We continue to champion our Free the Vote bill, which would establish polling sites in incarceration facilities across New York State. We are aiming for bill introduction in 2027.



Rhode Island

Legislation – H8334 (HB Kazarian) Rhode Island Voting Rights Act

Our National Advocacy Manager of Voting Rights Isabelle Muhlbauer submitted a letter in strong support of this bill, which adopts several provisions of our model state legislation, as part of an April 16 hearing of the Government & Elections Committee.

Status: The committee decided to hold the bill for further study.

Vermont

Legislation – S298 (SB Hinsdale & White) Vermont State Voting Rights Act (VTVRA)

LatinoJustice testified in support of this bill, which was heard before the Senate Committee on Government Operations on February 6. The VTVRA incorporates the model State Voting Rights Act language that LJP drafted, in partnership with LDF, AALDEF, Harvard Election Law Clinic and Campaign Legal Center.

Status: This bill ultimately did not pass this session.

Project – Model Legislation for State Voting Rights

LatinoJustice is a principal drafter of the language access provisions in the model State Voting Rights Act developed with the Legal Defense Fund, Campaign Legal Center, the Election Law Clinic at Harvard Law School, and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

This model legislation offers a comprehensive framework to counter discrimination and expand access to the ballot. LatinoJustice led the creation of a novel system for determining when and how jurisdictions must provide language assistance to limited English proficient voters, moving beyond older, static formulas to establish a more flexible and inclusive standard.

The model includes six core provisions: prohibitions on vote dilution and suppression, preclearance requirements, expanded language access mandates, a statewide elections database, protections against voter intimidation and deception, and a democracy canon to guide courts in favor of broad participation.

Status: The model legislation was completed and launched during a national webinar in January, and can be accessed here.



Voting Rights Legislation and Advocacy

Project – Multiracial Democracy Project

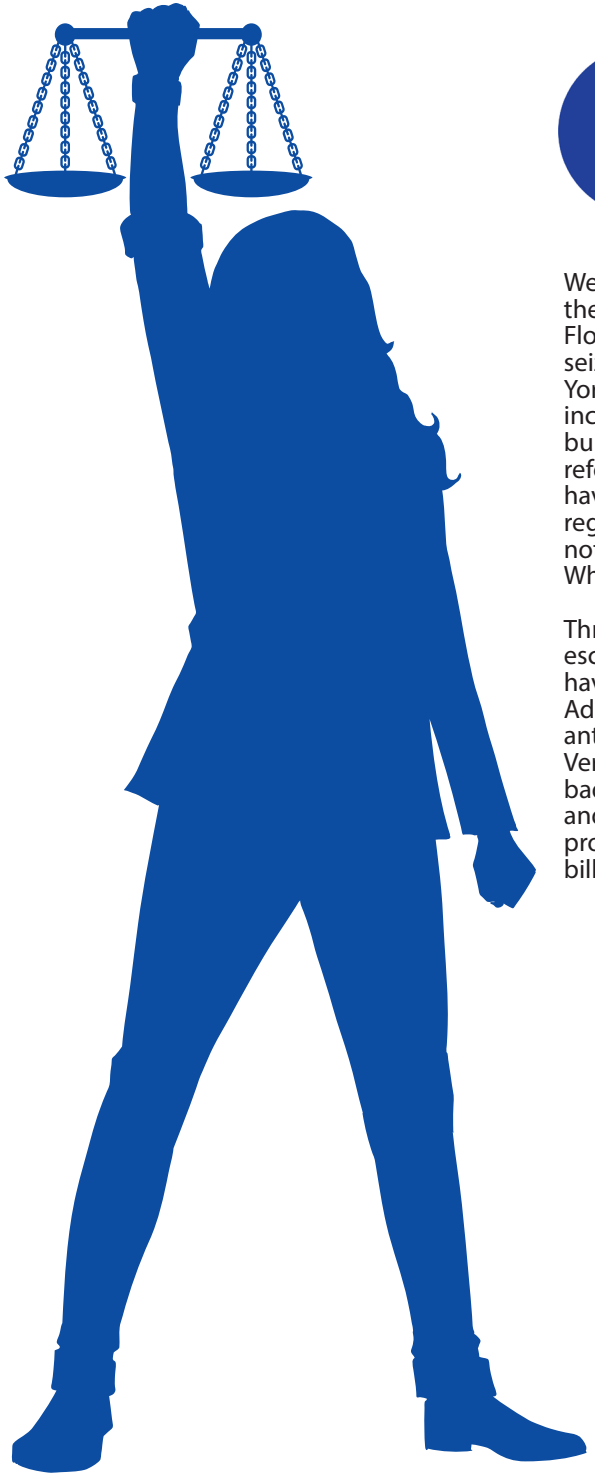
LatinoJustice is participating in the Multiracial Democracy Project, based at George Washington University Law School, which brings together scholars, litigators, organizers, and advocates to explore electoral reforms that can create a more inclusive democracy.

We have been participating in various convenings and funder briefings, during which we examined alternative election systems as tools to reduce polarization and ensure that communities of color have a meaningful voice in the political process.

The project builds on foundational scholarship by leaders such as Spencer Overton and Lani Guinier to explore how electoral systems shape who holds power and whose perspectives are reflected in public decision-making.

LatinoJustice's involvement in this work is guided by the conviction that reforms must center racial equity and address the specific barriers Latino voters and other historically marginalized communities continue to face. The project is rolling out thematic working groups for policy and partnerships, communications and education, and research and litigation; LatinoJustice will be represented in all three.





Where We Go Next

We will continue holding the line in the conservative-majority states of Florida and Texas, while continuing to seize opportunities for progress in New York, California and other states. Our incrementalist approach is carefully building the foundation for full scale reforms in the years to come, when we have a more workable Congress and regulated state governments that are not operating under threat from the White House administration.

Threats to immigrant rights are escalating and spreading, as we have seen in states that the Trump Administration deems hostile to its anti-immigrant agenda, i.e. Minnesota, Vermont and Maine. We are identifying bad immigrant rights bills to oppose and searching for opportunities to pass protective, progressive and humane bills that center human dignity. The slate of bills passed in New York is a good start.

We will continue to draft and introduce progressive and comprehensive state Voting Rights Acts in favorable jurisdictions across the country, with a special emphasis on protecting and enhancing language access rights for all. This is particularly critical in the wake of *Callais*, and the speed with which we are seeing partisan redistricting that prohibits communities of color from electing the candidates of their choice. To be clear, LatinoJustice opposes all forms of partisan gerrymandering, regardless of which political party may stand to benefit. At its core, that practice disenfranchises eligible voters and must not stand.

Most importantly, we will continue to prioritize the civil and human rights of Latinx demographics across the country and across all facets of life (immigrant rights, voting rights, criminal justice, economic justice and more) and build stronger and deeper relationships with our partner communities, policymakers and advocates to ensure we are taking advantage of every opportunity to build people power for the future and beyond.



Advocacy Partners

Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC
ACLU of NY, FL, PA, NJ, MD, TX, MI
All Voting is Local
Anti Recidivism Coalition
Brotherhood Sister Sol
Campaign Legal Center
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Harvard Election Law Clinic
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Legal Defense & Education Fund
MacArthur Foundation
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
New York Civic Engagement Table
Parole Advocacy Coalition of Texas
Pennsylvania Voice
Prison Policy Initiative
Responsible Business Initiative for Justice
Texas Civil Rights Project
Texas Coalition for Parole Reform
The Brennan Center
The Sentencing Project
Worth Rises

*(This is not an Exhaustive List)



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