



## **AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF MISSOURI**

906 Olive Street; Suite 1130  
St. Louis, MO 63101  
Intake Complaint Unit (314) 652-3114  
[www.aclu-mo.org](http://www.aclu-mo.org)

## **HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT WITH THE ACLU**

### **What is the ACLU?**

The American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri (ACLU) is a non-profit public interest organization devoted to defending the principles of the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights, along with our state and federal laws, protects our fundamental rights against the power of the government, and will of the majority. We work to protect freedom of speech and religion, and the rights to equality, privacy, and fair treatment by government.

The ACLU provides information to thousands of people each year to assist them in asserting their rights. Sometimes we refer people to other organizations that may be able to help. Sometimes we act as advocates for individuals and take cases to court. The ACLU provides direct representation in a small number of cases each year that have the potential to set precedents for the preservation or advancement of civil liberties.

The ACLU is not a government agency or a general legal services organization. We are not a legal clinic. We do not dispense general legal advice or provide emergency services. The St. Louis office serves the state of Missouri.

The ACLU undertakes litigation in selected high-impact cases raising civil liberties or civil rights issues that will affect the lives of many people. Our Legal Department reviews all

of the complaints we receive each week, looking for issues with which the ACLU may be able to help.

The ACLU of Missouri does not have attorneys on staff to handle cases. When a matter requires an attorney, we call upon the services of volunteer attorneys in private practice all over the state who donate their time to ACLU-MO cases.

### **What Kinds of Cases does the ACLU Handle?**

Some of the issues we work on relate to freedom of speech, freedom of religion, government-sponsored religions activities, due process, privacy, police misconduct, discrimination, voting rights, censorship, students' rights, workplace privacy, and inhumane jail and prison conditions.

**In general, the ACLU does NOT assist with criminal defense, post-conviction appeals, divorce or custody disputes, complaints about the Division of Family Services, property disputes, tax problems, consumer complaints, landlord/tenant disputes, appeals of building code violation, or complaints against lawyers or judges.**

## How can the ACLU help you?

To obtain information or ask about assistance, please contact us by phone or letter. In-person interviews are generally not possible. We do not see people at our office. Please do not come to the ACLU office. The ACLU will try to accommodate individuals who cannot write or call because of a disability.

**By phone:** Trained complaint counselors take calls during business hours on our **Complaint Line at (314) 652-3114**. The ACLU cannot accept collect calls. Whether you have a question or complaint, you should talk with a complaint counselor to get an initial idea about your rights and whether the ACLU can help you. Please look over the questions below before you call—the counselor will need this information.

The complaint counselor may be able to provide general information about your rights over the phone. If your complaint raises issues that the ACLU wants to review, the counselor will probably ask you to send a letter detailing your complaint and supporting documentation. If the ACLU cannot provide direct assistance to you, the complaint counselor will try to refer you to someplace that can.

**By mail:** You can write us a letter, which should address all of the questions listed, and mail it to our office. Your letter should give a succinct chronological account of your difficulty, with an emphasis of the facts of the situation.

Attach to your letter copies of any important documents. **DO NOT SEND ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS.** Do not simply send us documents or copies of letters to or from other organizations without a cover letter written by you to us explaining what the problem is and how the documents are important. The ACLU does not review material not addressed to us; we must have a written statement from everyone who wants ACLU assistance.

We receive about 100 complaints a week; every letter requesting assistance is answered, but it may take some time. Depending on how urgent your matter is, we will let you know in about four to six weeks whether we can help you. If we cannot assist you, we will try to refer you elsewhere for help.

### To help you, the ACLU needs these facts:

- **What happened?** Describe in your own words what happened to you, including dates, places and the names of the people directly involved.
- **How were your rights violated?**
- **What explanation,** if any, was given for what happened?
- **Why** do you think this happened to you?
- **What steps have you taken** to solve the problem (filed an appeal or complaint with the parties involved or with any public agency or official, or any other organization)? Whom did you go to and where does the matter stand?
- **What documentation** do you have on the matter?
- **Do you have an attorney?** If you have consulted an attorney on this matter, and she or he believes there is a significant civil liberties issue involved, have your attorney contact us directly.

DATE:

**YOUR INFORMATION:**

**If currently incarcerated, please provide your MO DOC Inmate No.:**

Name:

Address:

City, St., Zip

Home Phone:

Work Phone:

If complaint is not about you, what is your relationship to complainant:

**DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT/COMPLAINT**

Date of incident:

Location:

Name of agency:

Do you have an attorney?

Your attorney's name/number:

**Nature of Complaint:** Describe your problem. What happened? (Use additional sheet if needed.)

**How do you believe your rights were violated?**

**Did you ask for an explanation? \_\_\_\_\_ From Whom? What explanation was given?**

**What steps have you taken to resolve the problem?** (i.e., have you filed an appeal, grievance or complaint with the parties involved or with any public agency, official or other organization?)

**Where does the matter stand? Did you receive a response? What was the response?**

**What documentation do you have on the matter?**

**Have you filed a lawsuit? If so, in what court? What is the status?**

**Are there any time constraints in your case?**

**How would you like the ACLU to help you?**