Our mission

Using legal advocacy to empower communities and create policy change in Texas.
In his farewell address, President Barack Obama urged Americans to “Show up. Dive in. Stay at it.” to fight for our democracy. Because of you, the friends and supporters of TCRP, in 2016, we were able to show up, dive in, and now, as 2017 begins, we will stay it - continuing our work to protect Texas communities, particularly those who have historically been marginalized.

2016 was a year of ups and downs, but overall, we saw a renewed interest in our work - from an increase in volunteer, pro bono and law clerk applicants to a growth in our financial support network. Texans, and Americans, are increasingly interested in fighting to advance racial and economic equality, reforming our broken criminal justice system, and expanding voting rights.

We are working on all of these issues at TCRP. Since I joined TCRP early in the year, we have seen victories for immigrant families, people who are incarcerated and workers whose wages had not been paid. We launched a nonpartisan election protection initiative to help ensure that every voter can cast a ballot that counts.

And through it all, our team at the Texas Civil Rights Project never wavered from our mission to use legal advocacy to empower Texas communities and create lasting change.

With increasing attention on our issues, we are also using new tools at our disposal, launching TCRP’s first-ever Communications Department to ensure that our legal advocacy also focuses on moving hearts, minds and policy in Texas through social media, press outreach and clear messaging.

After an unprecedented election full of hateful rhetoric, we committed to doubling down on our fight for equality, for fairness, and for other constitutional values we hold dear. Now, more than ever, we remain vigilant. Stepping in 2017, we are prepared to work even harder, hand-in-hand with our allies across the state.

Thank you,
Mimi Marziani
Executive Director, Texas Civil Rights Project
From the Board President

Pablo Almaguer, Board President

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as president of TCRP’s Board. I am immensely proud of what TCRP was able to achieve in 2016 - successes that were accomplished because of our dedicated staff as well as the support of my fellow board members, our donors and our volunteers - from pro bono attorneys to interns and more. Thanks to everyone’s efforts, TCRP’s achievements in 2016 have set the stage for even more success in 2017.

After an unprecedented election cycle full of hateful rhetoric targeting immigrant families, people of color, Muslims, people with disabilities, LGBTQ folks and women, 2016 left many of us worried about the future. At TCRP, we are allowing the urgency of the current moment to propel us to double down on our fight for our core issues - fighting to advance racial and economic equality, reforming our broken criminal justice system, and expanding voting rights.

Founded in 1990, TCRP has been doing this work for 26 years, and it remains just as important now as it was then. As an organization, we remain vigilant, and hold fast to our commitment to help low-income and otherwise marginalized Texans and widely advance equality and justice.

Under the wonderful leadership of Mimi Marziani, I know that TCRP will see even more victories in 2017. Thank you for your continued support and collaboration.

Pablo Almaguer
President, Board of Directors
Where we moved the needle in 2016

In 2016, Texas captured the national conscience and dialogue regarding the role and responsibility of the criminal justice system, the impact of harsh and discriminatory voter restrictions, and lasting institutional discrimination against millions of Texans.

While TCRP has fought for justice for over 25 years with thousands of strategic lawsuits, our efforts took on new energy with the growing winds of change in the state.

We renewed our mission and more accurately defined our work to focus on the most pressing social justice issues in the state; where legal advocacy can create concrete and lasting policy change.

We rebuilt our systems, staff, technology, and operations to create a hub of energy working to ensure fairness, promote safety, and strengthen communities.

With dozens of high-caliber attorneys and professionals in Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Houston and the Rio Grande Valley, and an extensive network of pro bono counsel and community allies, we took on challenges that have made us into one of the most influential civil rights organizations in the Lone Star State.
Protecting and expanding voting rights

In 2016, we launched our Voting Rights Program to challenge the systemic barriers which exclude millions of people from exercising their constitutional right to vote.
Our highlights

The right to vote is fundamental. Still, millions of eligible Texans remained shut-out of the democratic process during an important election year, a disparate number of whom are young, poor, and people of color, facing obstacle after obstacle in order to cast a ballot that counts.

From our bottom-of-the-barrel voter turnout to the complex system of voter registration laws, the need for democracy reform in Texas has never been more critical. We challenged systemic issues that suppress voting rights in Texas and began our fight to turn the tide on the state’s abysmal voting rights record.

Enforcing compliance with the federal “motor voter” law in Texas

In early 2016, we sued Texas for refusing to register eligible voters who update their information through the Department of Public Safety website, a practice that violates the U.S. Constitution and the federal “motor voter” law.

Along with our co-counsel, Waters & Kraus, LLP, we are representing several Texas voters who have been disenfranchised by the state’s unlawful practices. Currently, tens of thousands of voters, at a minimum, are impacted each election cycle.
“I felt that my voice was taken away from me when my vote wasn’t counted. Voting has always been something I value and is a right I have instilled in my children. Texas should not be able to take that away.”

Totysa Watkins, plaintiff in our case

Enforcing high school voter registration laws

In 2016, we partnered with the Texas Organizing Project Education Fund (TOPEF) on a multi-prong strategy to enforce a little-known state law that requires high schools to register eligible students twice a year. After much advocacy, the Secretary of State agreed to issue clear notices to principals and superintendents across Texas before the new school year.

We also published the first ever guide to help schools comply with the law. We are gathering additional data so that we can closely monitor compliance, especially in school districts that largely serve communities of color.
Leading election protection efforts across the state

This fall, we played a critical role in coordinated election protection in the State by connecting the national efforts of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights with local grassroots initiatives. We trained dozens legal volunteers in Texas to answer calls from a national hotline and help voters in select polling locations and reached over 1 million people with information about the State's voter ID law.

“Unfortunately, Texas has a long history of voter suppression and intimidation. With hundreds of thousands of Texas voters making their way to the polls. We need to ensure that these voters have the information and support they need to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

*Cassandra Champion, Staff Attorney with the Texas Civil Rights Project*
Reforming our broken criminal justice system

In 2016, we revamped our Criminal Justice Program to challenge both the front and back end of our justice system to end mass incarceration and win just treatment of prisoners.
Our highlights

With an incarcerated population of approximately 150,000, Texas locks up more people than any other state. Mass incarceration in Texas is fueled and perpetuated by the over-incarceration of minority and impoverished populations at early stages of the criminal justice system and their subsequent inhumane conditions.

This year, we challenged this system of mass incarceration in cities across the state by bringing strategic lawsuits and driving more public attention to the inhumane conditions faced by hundreds of thousands of prisoners every day.

Ending the unconstitutional practice of debtor’s prisons

Debtors’ prisons—locking up people for being too poor to pay criminal fines—are constitutionally impermissible. However, cities across Texas continue this unlawful practice.

This year, we filed a lawsuit in El Paso, Texas challenging its practice of incarcerating individuals for their inability to pay fines on Class C misdemeanors and joined forces with several legal, grassroots, and policy groups across Texas to expand our efforts to other jurisdictions and use media advocacy to build a public dialogue around debtors’ prisons in Texas and the systemic need for policy reforms.
In El Paso alone, fines for traffic and other low-level offenses brought in more than $11 million in each of the past three years — nearly 4% of the city’s general fund revenue.”

Buzzfeed News investigation into our lawsuit

Addressing inadequate mental health care in Texas jails

In Texas, an estimated 30 percent of jail inmates have one or more serious mental illnesses. County officials fail to adequately respond to these needs, both by over-incarcerating individuals with mental illness during the pretrial process.

This year, we brought three lawsuits on behalf of clients whose children committed suicide in custody in Harris, Travis, and Ochiltree County. These lawsuits are geared at bringing attention to these jail’s failures to respond effectively to inmates with mental illness through policies, training, and by allocating sufficient resources to this population.
Fighting for just treatment of incarcerated individuals

Since 1998, twenty individuals have died in Texas Department of Criminal Justice prison’s due to severe heat related issues due to lack of air conditioning.

In 2016, we moved the needle forward when U.S. District Judge Keith Ellison ordered the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to stop its practice of providing arsenic-laden drinking water to more than 1,400 mostly elderly and sick prisoners in the Wallace Pack Unit near Houston. TDCJ encouraged these prisoners, who have long withstood stifling indoor temperatures often well over 100 degrees, to drink the arsenic-laden water to “mitigate” the heat.

“I sometimes feel like I’m about to die of thirst even when I am constantly drinking water. All I can think of is cooling down somehow.”

Jackie Brannum, inmate in the Wallace Pack Unit
Advancing racial and economic justice

In 2016, we sought to empower marginalized communities by fighting discriminatory policies that create systemic barriers to achieving social and economic equity.
Our highlights

State officials have a notorious history of discriminating against Texas residents due to immutable and arbitrary characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation and physical disability.

This year, we redoubled our work to ferreting out discriminatory policies that restrict access to social and economic necessities and protecting the civil rights of historically marginalized communities - including immigrants, people with disabilities, and veterans.

Winning a landmark settlement on birth certificates for immigrant families

In the summer of 2016, we settled a lawsuit against the State for refusing to issue birth certificates to babies born in Texas to undocumented mothers. We represented dozens of immigrant families from the Rio Grande Valley as well as the community organizing union, La Unión del Pueblo Entero (LUPE).

Without these documents, families lived in constant fear of separation and could not receive access to basic education, health, religious and childcare services.
Without birth certificates, our clients lived in constant fear of having their families torn apart and their American-born children deported.

Efrén Olivares, Racial & Economic Justice Program Director with the Texas Civil Rights Project

Challenging discrimination against young deaf drivers

Representing young, deaf drivers, we challenged the Texas Education Agency’s failure to provide interpreters and other accommodations in state-mandated drivers’ education courses administered by private driving schools. The case had far-reaching implications for people with disabilities around the country, as it would clarify when states may be held responsible for discrimination when public programs are handed over to private companies.

After heading to the U.S. Supreme Court in the summer, the justices dismissed the lawsuit and vacated the judgment of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals - leaving open the possibility for further litigation in the future.
Recovering stolen wages for immigrant workers in the Rio Grande Valley

On Labor Day, workers and community members gathered to celebrate our successful case against a local restaurant chain involved in unpaid labor practices that recovered over $100,000 in unpaid wages to abused workers.

Our litigation, in partnership with Fuerza del Valle Workers’ Center, will help bring justice to workers in the Rio Grande Valley who continue to face abusive workplace practices and wage theft. It also sends a clear message to employers across the state that all workers, regardless of their immigration status, must be treated with dignity.

“This is a good step in the struggle for labor justice. We need to keep exposing labor abuses in the Valley and in all of Texas.”

Alejandro Garcia, restaurant worker and plaintiff in our case
Empowering immigrant survivors of violence

An estimated five million Texans have experienced family violence in their lifetimes and immigrants are even more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse than their citizen counterparts. In 2016 alone, our Immigrant Victims Services program delivered nearly half a million dollars in free legal services to immigrant survivors of violence and trained hundreds of local policymakers to ensure they create systems to protect immigrant families.

Our work created bridges between dozens of law enforcement agencies and immigrant communities across rural Texas and prompted press investigations into the failure of Texas’ Child Protective Services agency to properly protect immigrant families.

“Today that I am VAWA-Approved I feel very confident. I am very happy because I can finally get a job to provide for my son and also be eligible for financial aid to help me pay for college. I want for my son to be proud of me.”

21-year-old Immigrant Victims Services client
“We know we have difficult challenges before us: veterans who return with not only physical, but also mental and emotional wounds of war, and an imperfect government agency and criminal justice system for addressing veteran needs.”

Emma Hilbert, veteran’s rights attorney with the Texas Civil Rights Project

Serving those who served our nation

Texas is home to over 1.6 million veterans of military service, the highest number in the nation. Veterans returning from deployment sometimes have mental, emotional, and physical injuries stemming from their service. In 2016, we educated veterans and the community on the serious civil rights violations faced by veterans and how to fight back.

We held Know Your Rights trainings, provided legal assistance to veterans with disabilities, advocated for the expansion of Veteran Treatment Courts, and assisted veterans with applications for Veterans’ Affairs benefits.
In 2016, we launched our first ever Communications department and received extensive coverage. Our deep knowledge and expertise around issues of voting rights, criminal justice reform, and racial justice allowed us to spread our message and advocacy across the state and nationally.
We were covered in

The New York Times

BuzzFeed NEWS

Rolling Stone

Los Angeles Times

The Nation

The Monitor

Texas Standard

Austin American-Statesman

NBC News

Houston Chronicle

npr

The Texas Tribune

Texas Observer

The Dallas Morning News

and many more...
Our digital footprint by the numbers

We launched our brand new website and reached **38,325 unique visitors** to texascivilrightsproject.org in 2016.

We consolidated our Facebook presence and reached **10,098 fans** in 2016 with **XXX impressions**.

We revamped our twitter page and reached **XXX followers** and **XXX impressions** in 2016.

We launched our Instagram presence and reached **XXX followers** with **XXX impressions** in 2016.

We acquired a new email service and grew our list to **XXX subscribers** and reached **XXX readers** with our emails in 2016.
Educating millions of Texans on voting rights

In response to the enormous confusion among voters and election workers about the state’s Voter ID law, we partnered with the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and the Texas Association of Broadcasters’ Public Education Partnership Program to launch our own public service announcements throughout the state.

The English and Spanish language radio and television ads reminded voters about their rights and what they need to bring to the polls in order to cast a ballot that counts.

Our ads generated over 1.5 million impressions across the state.
Our supporters

In 2016, we derived our strength from our steadfast supporters. Over the past 25 years, hundreds of people have provided their time, resources, and expertise to make sure that we can advance our mission to use legal advocacy to empower Texas communities and create lasting change.
Thank you, to the 19 talented law students who interned with us last summer or during the school year

Our law clerks are a critical part of the TCRP family. Law clerks assist our attorneys with every aspect of our work, from investigating potential cases, crafting strategic advocacy plans and preparing complaints to assisting with discovery, briefing dispositive motions and trying cases in federal and state court.

“As a Muslim woman in the post 9/11 era, I feel the urgency for protection against abuse and discrimination growing. As a former teacher, I am also interested in combating structural violence in the education system. History has shown the legal system to be a tool for structural and societal change—and that is what brought me to law school and to TCRP.”

Saadia Hashmi, law clerk from the University of Texas School of Law
Thank you, to our 96 volunteers and interns who passed through our doors in 2016.

Volunteers and interns in all of our offices drove a wide variety of projects — from cataloging mail from prisoners to digitizing our personnel records to photographing community events to helping keep our offices tidy. Each task made us stronger as an organization and better equipped to fight for equality and justice.

“I really enjoy the environment at TCRP. Everyone has been extremely welcoming and engaging. The motivation and passion for helping the most disadvantaged members of our society is abundant. This is the most satisfying job I’ve ever had and I truly appreciate the opportunities that I have been given here.

Josh Campbell, legal intern with the Texas Civil Rights Project’s Austin Office
The Pro Bono difference

TCRP depends heavily on pro bono partnerships to expand the reach of our legal advocacy. Our pro bono opportunities are diverse, ranging from research projects to civil rights trials to appellate work.

Our 2016 Pro Bono Partners

XXX

Volunteers

XXX

Hours donated

XXX

Values of services donated
The 26th Annual Bill of Rights Dinner

In the face of so much uncertainty and fear, we hosted our 26th Annual Bill of Rights Dinner for hundreds of our supporters just two days after the election. At the dinner, advocates, community leaders, and our supporters committed to be bolder and more strategic to protect the civil rights of all Texans.

Congratulations to Renato Ramirez, Jim Harrington, Nik Sallie Franklin, Tim League, and Burt Neuborne, awardees at the 26th Annual Bill of Rights.
Major Donors

Corporate & Institutional Donors

XXX

Foundations

XXX

Individuals

XXX
Financial Overview

Total Income

$2,059,028

Total Expenses

$2,107,088
Texas Civil Rights Project 2016 Staff

Mimi Marziani, Executive Director
Stephanie Schweitzer Garza, Development Director
Krissi Trumeter, Finance Director
Zenén Jaime Pérez, Communications Director
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Brian Jacobi, Regional Legal Director, El Paso
Hani Mirza, Regional Legal Director, North Texas
Efren C. Olivares, Regional Legal Director, South Texas
Glenaan O’Neil, Director of Immigrant Victims Services, Austin
Jaimes Ortiz, Director of Immigrant Victims Services, South Texas
Abby Frank, Senior Staff Attorney
Cassandra Champion, Staff Attorney
Emma Hilbert, Staff Attorney
Wallis Nader, Staff Attorney
Hannah Herzong, Equal Justice Works Fellow/Attorney
Julia Burke, Immigrant Victims Advocate
Amelia Furrow, Immigrant Victims Advocate
Yessica Gonzalez, Immigrant Victims Advocate
Severine Kale, Immigrant Victims Advocate
Karla Quiñonez, Immigrant Victims Advocate
Rolando Pérez, Legal Manager
Megan Garcia, Accounting and Human Resources Assistant
Sandra Arzate, Paralegal/Office Manager
Sister Moira Kenny, Paralegal/Office Manager
Chris Rainbolt, Paralegal/Office Manager
Christofer Rivera, Paralegal/Office Manager
Aura Valdez-Payan, Executive Assistant
Mandy S. Price
Alan Schoenbaum
Former Staff:
James C. Harrington, Founder & Executive Director
Wayne Kraus-Yang, Legal Director
Amin Alehashem, Regional Legal Director, Houston
Portia Brown, Staff Attorney
Isaak Harrington Flores, Immigrant Victims Services Director
Christina Esquivel, Accounting and Human Resources Assistant

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