



July 29, 2025

Governor Greg Gianforte
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Governor Gianforte and Members of Criminal Justice Oversight Council,

I'm writing on behalf of Disability Rights Montana and our partnered organizations to raise serious concerns about the recent replacement of the ACLU of Montana with Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) as the Council's designated civil rights advocate under § 53-1-216(1)(a)(ix)(D), MCA.

When the Legislature created this seat, it clearly intended for someone with demonstrated expertise in protecting civil rights within the criminal justice system to serve. The ACLU of Montana, an affiliate of the national ACLU, was founded in 1972 and has actively spent over fifty years advocating for Montanans in our courts and communities on exactly these issues.

By contrast, ADF has overwhelmingly centered itself around religious liberty litigation, with little to no record in core criminal justice civil rights work and no on the ground presence serving Montanans on criminal justice issues. Effective oversight of Montana's criminal justice system demands subject matter expertise in correctional practices, data analysis, and systemic reform, gaps that ADF cannot fill.

Montanans who have historically been marginalized, including people with disabilities, Indigenous people, and people of color, continue to be disproportionately represented and often underserved in our jails and prisons and they depend on a civil rights designee, like the ACLU, who has proven they are deeply connected to the people of Montana and will advocate for their rights every step of the way.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Council pause any actions until a representative with the appropriate experience protecting the civil rights of Montanans involved in our criminal justice system is appointed. Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to a fair, equitable, and effective justice system for all Montanans. This request is joined by the following organizations and individuals underscoring the broad coalition supporting this call for expertise.

Sincerely,

David Carlson
Executive Director
Disability Rights Montana



Ability Montana

Scott Birkenbuel
CEO

Area V Agency on Aging

Joe Gilboy
Executive Director

Big Sky 55+

Trent Bolger
Executive Director

Catalyst Montana

Nicole Gomez Patalano
Justice Initiative Director

Forward Montana

Alice Boyer
Executive Director

Job Connection, Inc.

Diane Reidelbach
Executive Director

Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow - LIFTT

Carlos Ramalho
Executive Director

Montana Budget & Policy Center

Heather O'Loughlin
Executive Director

Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Kelsen Young
Executive Director

Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities

Deborah Swingley
CEO

Montana Innocence Project

Amy Sings In The Timber
Executive Director

Montana Speech-Language Hearing Association

Shelby Midboe
Past President

National Federation of the Blind of Montana

Jacob Krissovich
Advocacy and Public Policy Chair

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Montana

Quinn Leighton
Director of External Affairs

Western Native Voice

Keaton Sunchild
Government and Political Relations
Director

Alanah Griffith
State Representative
House District 60

Bob Carter
State Representative
House District 96

Connie Keogh
State Representative
House District 92

Jacinda Morigeau
State Senator
Senate District 46

Jane Weber
State Representative
House District 19

Kelly Kortum
State Representative
House District 64

Peter Strand
State Representative
House District 63