
National Impact from the Nation's Smallest State

Who We Are

The Lawyers' Committee for Rhode Island (LCRI) is a nonprofit public interest law firm founded in December 2024 to hold the federal government accountable to the law and to protect the people, organizations, and institutions of Rhode Island and, through them, communities nationwide. LCRI was built for this moment: a small, expert, rapid-response litigation team that pairs deep federal-court experience with authentic community relationships, which has repeatedly converted that combination into nationwide legal victories, and a pro-democracy project committed to public education and community organizing. Its model is deliberately lean and highly leveraged. Issue-specific working groups identify emerging threats; experienced full-time litigators coordinate strategy and supervision; and volunteer lawyers are trained and deployed to provide rapid, pro bono legal support and community engagement where the need is urgent and the stakes are high.

In just over a year, LCRI has become a consequential democracy-defense hub: restoring food assistance for 42 million Americans, protecting housing that keeps an estimated 170,000 people off the street, vacating discriminatory immigration policies nationwide, defending transgender young people's medical records from an unprecedented federal subpoena, securing release for dozens of unlawfully detained people, and helping protect or restore nearly \$14.9 billion in federal funding — all from a three-attorney office in Providence.

LCRI now seeks multi-year general operating support to convert rapid-response success into durable legal infrastructure.

Why Rhode Island — and Why It Works

LCRI's founders made a bet: that a nimble litigation organization embedded in Rhode Island's uniquely tight-knit civic fabric could deliver outsized national results. That bet has paid off. Rhode Island's size is an advantage. LCRI's attorneys are embedded in a civic ecosystem where nonprofit leaders, faith communities, municipalities, unions, lawyers, and public officials know one another and can move quickly when unlawful government action threatens their communities. That trust allows LCRI to assemble plaintiff coalitions in days, not months. And because many federal policies impose concrete harms on Rhode Island organizations and residents while also affecting communities nationwide, Rhode Island cases produce relief with national significance.

National legal organizations have taken notice: LCRI is now the trusted local litigation partner for Democracy Forward, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the National Education Association, Lawyers for Good Government, the Conservation Law Foundation, the Southern Environmental Law Center, RAICES, Muslim Advocates, and others. When the question is "where can this case be brought, and brought well?", the answer has increasingly been: Rhode Island, with LCRI.

Litigation Highlights

Restoring SNAP for 42 million Americans — *RI State Council of Churches v. Rollins*

When the administration announced it would withhold November SNAP benefits during the government shutdown, LCRI and Democracy Forward assembled a twenty-plaintiff nationwide challenge in four days. Within one day of filing, the court ordered benefits paid; within two weeks, the case was before the U.S. Supreme Court. The litigation kept food assistance at the center of the national shutdown fight and demonstrated that ordinary community institutions can stand up to unlawful federal action and win, and that courage is contagious.

Protecting the nation's flagship homelessness program — *NAEH v. HUD*

LCRI represents national housing organizations, Rhode Island nonprofits, and cities and counties from Boston to San Francisco in challenging HUD's unlawful ideological conditions on homelessness funding, conditions threatening to push an estimated 170,000 Americans into homelessness. The court granted preliminary relief, the First Circuit left that relief in place, and in June 2026 the court vacated the unlawful funding notice outright.

Vacating discriminatory immigration policies nationwide — *Dorcas v. USCIS*

On behalf of immigrant-serving organizations and national labor unions, LCRI and co-counsel challenged USCIS policies that halted asylum adjudications, froze benefit applications for people from 39 countries, and directed officials to weigh national origin against applicants. In June 2026, the court vacated the policies, restoring fair adjudication of work permits, green cards, asylum, and citizenship for thousands of families nationwide.

Defending medical privacy from federal overreach — *In re: DOJ Administrative Subpoena*

When DOJ sought years of medical records of transgender patients at Rhode Island Hospital, LCRI represented the state's Office of the Child Advocate in an emergency effort to block the subpoena. In May 2026, the court nullified it on multiple independent grounds — a national landmark against the weaponization of federal investigative power — and LCRI now leads the appellate defense of that victory.

Protecting Congressionally mandated funding

LCRI is among the country's most active litigators against the weaponization of federal grants:

- *RICADV v. Blanche* and *RICADV v. Kennedy* — successful challenges to unlawful grant conditions targeting survivors' services, homelessness programs, and foster youth.
- *RI AFL-CIO v. EPA* — challenging EPA's termination of the \$7 billion Solar for All program serving more than 900,000 low-income households.
- *NEA v. U.S. Department of Education* — challenging the ideologically driven cancellation of grants that train teachers of English-language learners in a dozen states.

Defending individuals against unlawful detention — *habeas corpus*

As immigration arrests and mandatory detentions have surged, LCRI has represented dozens of individuals detained at Rhode Island's federal detention facility in habeas petitions challenging

unlawful confinement. LCRI attorneys also serve as mentors for the Habeas Project of New England, multiplying LCRI's expertise into capacity across the regional bar.

Beyond the Courtroom

LCRI pairs litigation with front-end protection for civil society. Its Nonprofit Legal Protection Project connects nonprofits with federal-grants expertise, training, technical assistance, and volunteer lawyers; LCRI has delivered nearly 50 trainings and built a corps of more than 40 volunteer attorneys organized into working groups on immigration, nonprofits, education, and emerging issues. This preparation is what makes the litigation possible — the plaintiffs who stepped forward in the SNAP case were organizations LCRI had already counseled and equipped to be courageous.

LCRI is also building a state-level democracy firewall: providing testimony and drafting support for legislation responding to federal enforcement abuses — including a new state-law remedy against federal officials who violate constitutional rights — and successfully petitioning Rhode Island's federal court to open its doors to out-of-state habeas counsel, a general order now cited as a model for other districts.

Recognition

LCRI's work has been covered by The New York Times, The Boston Globe, and national outlets tracking litigation against the administration, and its cases have produced some of the most consequential — and most quoted — judicial opinions of this period. The Courage Project recognized LCRI as an organizational awardee, citing its work restoring nearly \$14.9 billion in federal funds, securing SNAP and other benefits, protecting domestic violence survivors, challenging unlawful detentions, and supporting LGBTQIA+ students.

Since launching in December 2024, LCRI has: represented more than 100 plaintiffs and their members; helped protect or restore nearly \$14.9 billion in federal funding; brought or supported nine major federal funding lawsuits; filed dozens of habeas petitions; delivered nearly 50 trainings for nonprofit and community leaders; and built a volunteer-lawyer network across immigration, nonprofit protection, education, voting rights, and emerging threats.

The Opportunity for Philanthropic Partnership

LCRI has achieved these results with three full-time litigators, a small counsel team, and a volunteer attorney network. We are now establishing LCRI as a 501(c)(3) organization with the institutional infrastructure to sustain and expand this work for the duration of this legal emergency and beyond.

In less than two years, LCRI has shown that a small, locally trusted, lawyer-led organization can protect billions in public resources, defend civil society from unlawful coercion, and produce national relief from a Rhode Island forum. Additional support would convert rapid response into durable capacity: litigation staffing, volunteer-lawyer coordination, nonprofit counseling, emergency filing capacity, communications, and statewide trainings. For funders committed to democracy, civil rights, economic security, immigrant justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, and the rule of law, investment in LCRI is unusually high-leverage, and a model other states can follow.