

ACLU of Wisconsin: Hires Ott as executive director

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As statewide membership doubles, civil liberties organization brings the national experience of a Wisconsin native to its statewide office in Milwaukee.

MILWAUKEE — The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin has hired Christopher Ott as its new executive director, starting in late March. Ott, a native of Wisconsin, has served as the communications director for the ACLU of Massachusetts in Boston for 10 years, and led the state LGBT rights organization Fair Wisconsin in the early 2000s. Ott will succeed the ACLU of Wisconsin's longtime executive director Chris Ahmuty, who retired at the end of 2016.

"At a time when Americans across the political spectrum worry about threats to civil liberties and civil rights, the chance to work for the ACLU in my home state of Wisconsin is an honor," Ott said. "My predecessor Chris Ahmuty hired a strong staff that takes on influential and important work and punches above its weight. The ACLU of Wisconsin also has a rapidly growing membership of more than 14,000 statewide, as well as Board leadership throughout the state. I'm really excited to join them."

"Over the last several months, the ACLU of Wisconsin has doubled its membership. Thanks to a unanimous vote by our Board of Directors, we are excited to have Chris at the helm as Wisconsin starts this new chapter," said Mary Jo McBrearty of Kohler, ACLU of Wisconsin Board president. "We received 80 applications for this position, which were considered by a diverse search committee that included members of our Board and other community leaders."

At the ACLU of Massachusetts, Ott has worked on issues including the need to address racial bias in policing, open government, protecting the rights of immigrants, challenging government spying on ordinary people, and fighting racial and religious profiling in the aftermath of the 2013 attack on the Boston Marathon.

“We felt that with his diverse occupational background, his Wisconsin roots and deep understanding of Wisconsin issues, and his communication and leadership style, Chris is going to hit the ground running as our Executive Director,” said James Hall, one of the search committee members from Milwaukee.

Born in Milwaukee, Ott, 46, is a graduate of Ozaukee High School in Fredonia and Brown University in Providence, R.I.

“The ACLU fights for the rights of everyone in our country, and though we have experienced unprecedented growth, we are still David compared to some Goliath threats to fundamental American rights and freedoms that we face today,” Ott said. “Whether you care about longstanding problems such as racial injustice or obstacles to voting rights, renewed threats to reproductive freedom, free speech and the freedom of religion, or the continuation of NSA spying and harsh immigration policies, the ACLU is fighting for you and others in court, communities and capitals. If you haven’t already, now is a great time to join us.”

The ACLU of Wisconsin has taken on groundbreaking recent work on issues such as discrimination in education, housing and policing; the cruel treatment of children in juvenile detention; the state’s cumbersome and restrictive voter ID law; free speech rights; marriage equality and discrimination against LGBT people. The ACLU has a staff of 10 in Wisconsin, and about 1,100 nationwide, including 300 attorneys. The ACLU of Wisconsin is an affiliate of the national ACLU, founded in 1920. Annual dues begin at \$20.

Learn more here: <http://bit.ly/ACLUWelcomesChris>