

FIGHTING FOR FREE EXPRESSION ACROSS CALIFORNIA

By David Loy, Legal Director

The fight for freedom of speech begins at home. In a time of great threats to First Amendment rights across the country, FAC fought harder than ever before for free expression and press freedom in our home state, winning key victories throughout California.

In Alameda County, FAC represents Jose Feroso, Oaklandside’s road safety reporter, in challenging a law that criminalizes journalism by making it unlawful to be anywhere within 200 feet of a sideshow, or street takeover, for the purpose of observing the sideshow. FAC secured a victory in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which affirmed that newsgathering and recording events in public are protected speech and that one cannot report or record the news without first observing it. The court held the Alameda County law likely violates the First Amendment as a content-based restriction on speech.

In San Benito County, (see cartoon at right) FAC protected the First Amendment rights of anonymous authors of a satirical news outlet published on Facebook. When the *Benito Beet Beat* published a cartoon mocking a decision by the county’s board of supervisors, the board retaliated by issuing a subpoena to Meta demanding the authors’ identities. On the same day that FAC filed a lawsuit on behalf of the authors to defend their right to anonymous speech, the court ordered the county to withdraw the subpoena. Soon afterward, the county agreed to a settlement under which it is prohibited from seeking to identify the authors based on the cartoon.

In San Mateo County, FAC successfully defended the public’s First Amendment right of access to a hearing on a topic of extraordinary public interest: whether the county’s sheriff should be removed from office. The county and the sheriff had intended to keep the hearing secret, but after FAC objected and threatened to sue, they agreed to

open it to the public, allowing the press to cover testimony from the hearing extensively.

In Shasta County, FAC defended press freedom against retaliation by the registrar of voters, who deprived the small nonprofit news site Shasta Scout of access to press releases sent to other members of the media. After FAC threatened to sue, the county’s board of supervisors rebuked the registrar, and he agreed to make all press releases available to the public.

In Los Angeles, FAC joined with others to defend free speech in southern California. FAC is participating in a federal lawsuit challenging Los Angeles Police Department’s detention and assault of journalists who were covering protests against federal immigration enforcement. The court issued a preliminary injunction requiring the department to follow both the First Amendment and a California law specifically designed to protect journalists at protests.

In Orange County, FAC was also part of the team that won a victory enforcing California’s Freedom to Read Act against Huntington Beach, which had attempted to deprive anyone under 18 of access to library books or materials with so-called “sexual content,” an undefined and vague

term that could include the Bible or Romeo and Juliet. The court issued an order prohibiting the city from restricting access to such materials.

Above: FAC protected the First Amendment rights of a satirical news outlet from the county’s board of supervisors.



BECAUSE THE TRUTH MATTERS

By Ginny LaRoe, Advocacy Director

Should Oakland police get to pick and choose which journalists get to cover their news conferences? Should a Redding politician be able to exclude a newsroom whose coverage he doesn’t like from receiving news releases about an upcoming election? Should Modesto police be able to arrest reporters for wearing safety gear to cover a protest?

In 2025, we worked to ensure public institutions heard a loud “no” when journalists faced these kinds of obstacles. We worked with partner press rights and civil liberties organizations to champion freedom of information and freedom of the press in communities across California.

Californians rely on local journalists to shine a light on government decisionmaking, to bring facts and informed commentary to the people

those decisions affect — you, your family, your neighbors. We need a press corps free to report on public-safety issues, to scrutinize how elections are run, and to safely document protests and cover everyday issues without facing unnecessary or unlawful obstacles.

FAC’s advocacy work is rooted in the understanding that local journalists are pounding the pavement all over California, doing the important work

of keeping us informed about issues big and small. And when they face policies and practices that threaten their rights, they need advocates who have their backs.

Right: FAC Advocacy Director Ginny LaRoe appeared on a keynote panel at the Society of Professional Journalists conference in San Francisco. Called “Free Press Under Fire,” the panel was moderated by New York Times’ Heather Knight, and also featured David Greene of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and journalist Tom Peele.



A Message from our Executive Director:

2025. Where to even start?

Last year brought some of the most serious challenges to First Amendment rights in living memory. Journalists, universities, law firms, and everyday people felt the pressure. It all happened so fast, and with such intensity, that the chaos coming from Washington often distracted from free-speech and free-press violations closer to home.

Across California, local and state officials ignored – or at times openly violated – core First Amendment rights. Taking cover in the constant turmoil coming out of Washington, they tested the limits of what they could get away with.

But because of you, the First Amendment Coalition was ready.

With our community of supporters behind us, FAC responded with renewed strength. Our expanded staff – FAC's largest ever – was in court, fighting for your rights. We were training journalists across the state. We showed up in towns, cities, and counties across California to push back when free expression and access to information were under threat.

FAC is stronger than ever, and none too soon. If history is any guide, the next three years will be rough.

But with you at our backs, FAC enters 2026 stronger than ever – prepared, determined, and ready to fight.

For that, we thank you.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Snyder'.

David Snyder
FAC Executive Director



Veteran journalists Paloma Esquivel (left) and Thadeus Greenson (right) joined FAC in July 2025 as its first press education specialists.

Q&A: HOW VETERAN JOURNALISTS AT FAC ARE EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION

Communities need journalists. And journalists need support systems to overcome barriers to information. That's why FAC has invested in growing its press education program, creating new tools and training opportunities. Veteran journalists Paloma Esquivel and Thadeus Greenson are leading those efforts after joining FAC in July 2025 as its first press education specialists. They had this to say about their first few months on the job.

What surprised you most about stepping into this role?

Thadeus: The breadth of the need for it. As a local reporter, one can fall into a myopic view, wondering why this agency makes records requests so difficult or that city can't follow the Brown Act. But I now see clearly that agencies throughout California are regularly violating transparency laws, and reporters need support navigating obstacles to bring light to dark places and hold governments to account.

What's one thing you prioritized in the first 90 days, and why?

Paloma: When our team decided to launch a series of field guides for reporters, I knew that I wanted to focus first on creating a guide to covering immigration enforcement. Raids and arrests were exploding across the state and as a journalist I had experienced firsthand how difficult it is to report on this issue because there is such little transparency from the agencies involved. It was important to me to support reporters who were navigating these challenges as they worked to inform the public.

Where have you already seen impact, big or small?

Thadeus: I see impact in the dozens of journalists who have told us our Reporter's Field Guides and workshops have helped them understand their access rights and the government's transparency obligations. And I see it in the reporting our advice helps generate, like the story in El Centro about the police shooting of a 14 year old that, thanks to our help, named the officers involved and compared their actions to departmental policy.

Explain how your role advances FAC's mission?

Thadeus: Our role is critical to helping FAC fulfill its mission of educating, advocating and, when necessary, litigating to advance government transparency and First Amendment protections for all. On the front lines of that effort is and has to be an educated Fourth Estate that understands its rights and is ready to use them to access the information necessary to build and maintain an informed electorate.

What are you most excited to build or change next?

Paloma: I'm excited about continuing to build on the work we've started, offering support, educational materials and training for journalists in various ways. At a time when local journalism has been so diminished, it's vital that reporters feel supported and well-prepared to do their work. It's wonderful to be in a position to offer that help.

Q&A: FAC RAMPS UP PUBLIC RECORDS LITIGATION WITH NEW SENIOR STAFF ATTORNEY AARON FIELD

What surprised you most about stepping into this role?

I have long believed in the importance of FAC's work. But since joining FAC I have been surprised and impressed by the sheer number of people and organizations we are able to support, not only through litigation, which is my focus, but also through our hotline, our community and journalist education programs, and our tireless policy advocacy efforts.

Where have you already seen impact, big or small?

Since I joined FAC, we have ramped up our Public Records Act litigation efforts, bringing and litigating several new Public Records Act cases. These new cases present important issues of first impression. By advocating that these issues be resolved in favor of access, we hope to benefit not only the individual and organizational clients that we represent, but also other California journalists and members of the public.

I have already contributed to important First Amendment victories. For example, I played a central role in FAC's successful advocacy for openness in San Mateo County's hearings regarding whether its then-Sheriff, Christina Corpus, should be removed from office.

I have also already worked with FAC to launch new Public Records Act cases aimed at improving transparency with respect to jail deaths, use of force incidents involving so-called "less-lethal" weapons, and traditional police shootings. For example, I helped FAC file a Public Records Act lawsuit to enforce Senate Bill 519, a California law requiring the disclosure of public records related to deaths that occur in the custody or under the supervision of local detention facilities. I also wrote a "friend of the court" brief for FAC advocating for greater public access to federal wiretap application materials in a case before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

What are you most excited to build or change next?

I am excited to continue to ramp up FAC's Public Records Act litigation practice. By litigating access cases, I hope to resolve important issues in favor of access and to pave the way for greater transparency for all Californians moving forward.



FAC's new Senior Staff Attorney, Aaron Field, is already making an impact across California.



Above: In Riverside County, we are working to disclose records related to deaths in county jails

Right: We persuaded the AG's office to disclose records related to the killing of a 15 year old girl by sheriff's deputies.



BATTLING FOR GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

During 2025, FAC fought for open government from one end of California to the other.

We persuaded the California Attorney General's office to disclose records of its investigation into the killing of a 15-year-old girl by San Bernardino County sheriff's deputies, and we convinced the city of Redding to release body camera videos of a controversial arrest in which officers broke a man's ribs.

We filed six new lawsuits to enforce the people's right to public records. In Riverside County, we are challenging the sheriff's refusal to disclose numerous records related to deaths in the county's jails. In San Diego and Solano Counties, we are suing to compel disclosure of body camera videos and other records depicting controversial uses of force and shootings by police.

With co-counsel, we're fighting for access to videos depicting the actions of deputy sheriffs at an immigration enforcement operation in Ventura County. And we are challenging San Joaquin County's unlawful and excessive fees for copies of autopsy reports as well as the California Department of Food and Agriculture's refusal to disclose the locations of dairies under quarantine for bird flu.

ADVANCING TRANSPARENCY AND FREE EXPRESSION STATEWIDE

- 1** In **Shasta County**, we demanded the county's top election official stop discriminating against a local news outlet over coverage he didn't like. The official relented and was reprimanded by the county.
 - 2** In **Mendocino County**, we successfully protested high fees being charged to inspect trial court records at courthouses.
 - 3** In **Sebastopol**, we opposed the mayor's policy to restrict press access, a policy that made it more difficult for journalists to report on the city. Following our opposition, the city backtracked.
 - 4** In **Berkeley**, we opposed police ending public access to scanner traffic. Full encryption hurts journalists' ability to keep the public informed and takes away an important police oversight tool.
 - 5** In **San Francisco**, we pushed back on police treatment of press at protests following arrests of and interference with journalists at anti-ICE demonstrations.
 - 6** In **Redwood City**, we objected to a plan that would have allowed removal proceedings against San Mateo Sheriff Christina Corpus to take place in secret. After FAC threatened to sue, the proceedings took place in public.
 - 7** In **Modesto**, we advocated for repeal of a local law that bans masks or safety gear at protests. The ban threatens the ability of the press to safely cover demonstrations.
 - 8** In the **San Joaquin Valley**, we partnered with Central Valley journalists for custom trainings and support to obtain public records.
 - 9** In **San Jose**, we held workshops for student journalists attending the Northern California conference of the Journalism Association of Community Colleges.
 - 10** In **Fresno**, our legal team ensured a local reporter did not have to testify in a criminal trial the journalist was covering, invoking California's journalist shield law in response to a city prosecutor's subpoena.
 - 11** In **Los Angeles**, we spoke out against censorship, opposing the City Council's word ban that allows it to evict or silence speakers if they use one of two specific words, regardless of intent or context. We also hosted multiple journalist trainings, including for the Daily Bruin, the student newspaper at UCLA, and for Los Angeles Public Press and CALÓ News.
- In Northridge, we held workshops for student journalists attending the Southern California conference of Journalism Association of Community Colleges.



SPOTLIGHT ON EXPANDED JOURNALIST TRAINING INITIATIVES

By Ginny LaRoe,
Advocacy Director

Shining a light on federal immigration enforcement activities.

Using public records to provide communities with more context about police shootings.

Preparing to safely cover protests and other public assemblies.

Those were among the transparency and press rights topics FAC staff covered during 43 educational programs and appearances in 2025, including more than 30 for journalists. In partnership with the Coachella Valley Journalism

Foundation, FAC provided training for dozens of reporters, photographers, editors and journalism students in a single all-day, in-person training in October in Palm Desert.

“What set this workshop apart was the instructors’ deep expertise combined with their commitment to practical application,” said Julie Makinen, a veteran newsroom leader who serves as secretary-treasurer of the Coachella Valley Journalism Foundation. “They understood the challenges journalists face and equipped attendees with tools to overcome them.”

Makinen added: “The First Amendment Coalition’s investment in supporting journalism in the Coachella Valley, an area that has one of the lowest per-capita numbers of journalists of any region in the state, demonstrates their genuine commitment to press freedom and government transparency at the local level.”

NEW REPORTING TOOLS

Responding to news coverage priorities around the state, FAC recently launched a series of Reporter’s Field Guides and rolled out related workshops. The first three guides cover immigration enforcement (available in English and Spanish), police shootings and election day access.

Supporting the work of local journalists has never been more important. Journalists are working tirelessly to bring news and informed commentary to their readers, viewers, and listeners. And FAC has stepped up its efforts to provide additional resources and advocate for press rights and government transparency to help journalists do their important work of keeping communities informed.

GETTING INVOLVED

If you want to work with FAC to bring an educational program to your newsroom, classroom or community, contact education@firstamendmentcoalition.org.

We offer California Public Records Act training in English and Spanish, conduct Brown Act training and offer presentations on various First Amendment and newsgathering topics.



Above: Our first Reporter’s Field Guide, focused on Immigration Enforcement, helps reporters understand access to state and local public records, immigration courts, and detention centers in California.

Bottom Left: More than two dozen reporters, journalism students, and newsroom managers representing TV stations, newspapers, local schools, and other outlets participated in an all-day training FAC led in partnership with the Coachella Valley Journalism Foundation on Nov. 13, 2025.

Bottom Right: FAC press education specialist Thad Greenson co-led a session on how to incorporate records-based reporting into all stories and beats.





CAMPAIGN ANNOUNCEMENT:

FULL COURT PRESS FOR DEMOCRACY

As attacks on individual rights, the press, and the rule of law intensify, FAC is launching Full Court Press for Democracy, a bold \$3 million, three-year campaign to strengthen press freedom and free expression across California.

At this critical moment, journalists and the public face increasing barriers to information, growing restrictions on speech, and uncertain access to legal support. FAC is expanding its services to ensure accountability journalism can not only survive, but thrive. With nearly 40 years of experience defending the

public's right to know, FAC is uniquely positioned to meet this challenge — yet doing so requires new and sustained investment.

FULL COURT PRESS FOR DEMOCRACY

will expand FAC's capacity to serve every journalist who needs help, enforce public-access laws so Californians receive the information they are entitled to, and defend free expression wherever it is threatened. The campaign also focuses on building a stable financial foundation that will power FAC's work for the next 40 years.

FAC enters this campaign from a position of strength, with consistent budget surpluses, \$1.9 million in net assets — the highest in our history — and a rapidly growing operating budget. With a new endowment and its first completed audit, FAC is ready for the decades ahead.

Our vision is clear: a California where transparency and First Amendment rights are a given, not a fight.



Scan for Survey Results

LISTENING, LEARNING, LEADING:

FAC'S DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH TO INCLUSION

In 2020, as part of a five-year Strategic Plan, the First Amendment Coalition made a clear commitment to embed diversity, equity, and inclusion into all of our work. This commitment guides how we deliver programs, expand access, and serve the individuals and communities that rely on FAC to protect press freedom and government transparency.

We began by establishing a board-level DEI Committee, examining the makeup of our Board of Directors, and adopting an intentional approach to recruiting representative leadership. Four years later, these efforts have resulted in a reshaped board with board strategic recruitment goals. Staff share regular updates with the board on its DEI-informed programming, ensuring our services reflect a shared value and strategic priority.

A major step forward came in 2024, when the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation made a generous investment to support a three-year, data-driven approach to DEI. Led by Jiquanda Nelson and People Decoders, this work includes a Culture of Belonging survey launched in 2025, along with internal staff and board surveys, and ongoing "pulse surveys" of the journalists, activists, attorneys, and community members

we serve. Together, this feedback helps FAC listen more closely, act more intentionally, and build a stronger, more inclusive future.

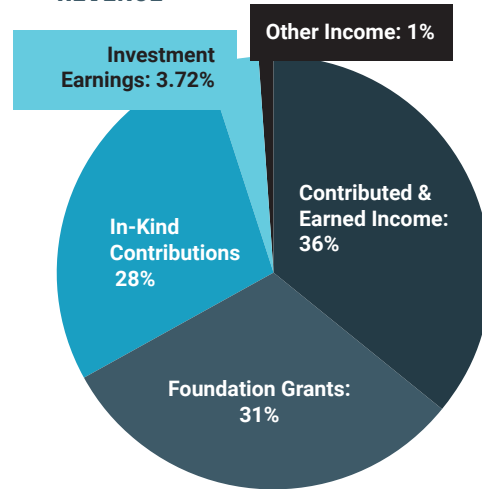
FINANCIALS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024

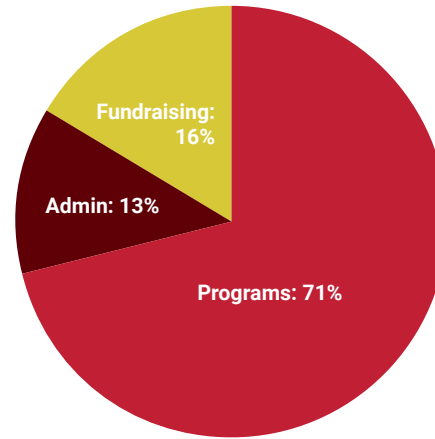
BALANCE SHEET AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2024

Cash and cash equivalents	\$1,068,720
Pledges and grants receivable	\$320,648
Investments	\$213,122
Prepaid expenses and deposits	\$25,317
Property and equipment	\$2,601
Intangible assets	\$15,400
Total Assets	\$1,645,808
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Liabilities	\$55,197
Net Assets	\$1,590,611
Without donor restrictions	\$1,250,940
With donor restrictions	\$339,671
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$1,645,808

REVENUE



EXPENSES



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LEGAL HOTLINE
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695

NEWS STORIES AND
BROADCASTS FEATURING
FAC'S LITIGATION, ADVOCACY,
OR COMMENTARY



12 LEGAL ACTIONS
FILED BY FAC



EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

Including custom workshops,
classroom appearances and conference
presentations and panels.

CALIFORNIA BILLS
INFLUENCED



Affecting government
transparency or First
Amendment protections.

OUR MISSION

The First Amendment Coalition protects and promotes a free press, freedom of expression, and the people's right to know. Nonpartisan and nonprofit, FAC believes that engaged and informed communities are essential to the health of our democracy, and that the values expressed by the First Amendment provide a blueprint for an inclusive, equitable society, and a responsive, accountable government. To that end, FAC educates, advocates, and litigates to advance government transparency and First Amendment protections for all.



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