

THE RUTHERFORD INSTITUTE

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Protecting Liberty in a Year of Unchecked Government Power

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A Message from the President: John W. Whitehead

This past year marked a profound turning point for freedom in America.

In 2025, we witnessed a dramatic escalation in executive overreach, surveillance, militarized policing, and constitutional shortcuts. The federal government deployed the National Guard into civilian cities under claims of “emergency authority,” expanded domestic spying partnerships with Big Tech and the surveillance sector, strengthened predictive policing programs, targeted student activists for their political speech, doubled down on efforts to treat dissent as a national security threat, and pushed forward mass-incarceration policies that bypass due process.

Taken together, these developments signaled a decisive shift toward a government willing to bypass constitutional limits in the name of control, efficiency, and political expedience. Such power, once unleashed, rarely confines itself to its stated purpose.

Every branch of government seemed increasingly willing to treat constitutional limits as optional. This year also saw unprecedented efforts to federalize the National Guard, establish a standing domestic army under executive control, blacklist law firms and advocacy groups critical of administration policies, and shield government agencies and officials from accountability for misconduct. At the same time, the administration advanced policies that would effectively criminalize so-called “thought crimes,” punishing speech, association, and political viewpoints under the guise of national security.

Yet The Rutherford Institute remained steadfast in its mission: making the government play by the rules of the Constitution.

We defended students targeted for political speech, challenged the federal government’s use of troops against civilians, fought unconstitutional surveillance and police abuses, and stood beside individuals from all walks of life whose rights were trampled in the name of national security, public order, or political expediency.

This 2025 Annual Report reflects a year of unyielding advocacy, strategic litigation, and public education in defense of civil liberties.

Thank you for standing with us in this critical fight.

DEFENDING THE CONSTITUTION IN 2025: A YEAR OF IMPACT

The Rutherford Institute's mission is simple and uncompromising: to hold the government accountable to the U.S. Constitution and ensure that individuals retain the rights and liberties that define a free society.

This year, our work focused on five escalating threats. These threats touched nearly every area of American life, from speech and privacy to policing, due process, and the right to protest.

- Unchecked executive power and rule by decree
- Militarized policing and domestic troop deployments
- Government-Big Tech surveillance partnerships
- Retaliation, censorship, and intelligence-driven targeting of dissent
- The erosion of due process and Fourth Amendment protections

Across courts, legislatures, media, and communities nationwide, TRI fought back.

MAJOR LEGAL ACTIONS & CASEWORK

In courts across the nation, in Congress, in public debate, and through high-impact litigation, TRI confronted these abuses head-on. Our major areas of focus included the following:

1. TRI Defended Free Speech & Political Dissent

2025 was defined by a sharp rise in government targeting of political speech, especially on immigration, foreign policy, and policing.

Key Actions:

- We challenged ICE's unconstitutional, speech-based detentions of student activists. TRI worked with the ACLU, FIRE, Cato, the Knight First Amendment Institute and others to spotlight the government's efforts to punish dissent.
- Campus Free Speech Protections: We defended students and educators facing retaliation and censorship for expressing controversial or disfavored viewpoints.
- Opposing Government-Big Tech Censorship: TRI continued litigating and filing amicus briefs in cases challenging covert government pressure on social media companies to suppress lawful speech.
- Defending Law Firms Blacklisted for Their Advocacy: TRI pushed back against efforts by the Trump administration to informally blacklist or economically retaliate against law firms representing disfavored clients or viewpoints. These heavy-handed tactics threatened the independence of the legal profession and the constitutional right to counsel.
- We defended the right of whistleblowers and government employees to expose wrongdoing without facing retaliation or criminalization.

In a year when the government redrew the boundaries of acceptable expression, TRI stood on the front lines defending the First Amendment.

2. TRI Battled Executive Overreach and the Rise of Rule-by-Decree

At a time when executive power was expanding faster than the constitutional safeguards designed to restrain it, TRI worked to reassert the rule of law. Executive orders and “emergency powers” drove some of the most aggressive constitutional violations of 2025.

Our work included:

- Challenging the President’s federalization of the National Guard to police civilian protests and immigration operations.
- Challenging the misuse of public-safety emergencies as a pretext for unilateral executive action and expanded agency power.
- Challenging wide-ranging attempts to establish what amounts to a permanent standing army under executive control, bypassing Congress and the constitutional separation of powers. These efforts—including troop deployments in states that did not request assistance—represent one of the gravest threats to civilian governance in recent memory.
- Opposing federal attempts to erode birthright citizenship, expand denaturalization powers, and create second-class citizenship categories vulnerable to political targeting.
- Issuing constitutional analyses on the dangers of the Unitary Executive Theory and expanding unilateral executive authority.

3. TRI Fought the Expansion of Mass Surveillance

2025 saw sweeping adoption of AI-powered enforcement tools, predictive policing, biometric wearables, and real-time data tracking.

TRI responded by:

- Exposing the growth of Palantir-powered surveillance, digital dragnets, and behavioral scoring systems.
- Exposing the expansion of government–corporate surveillance fusion centers that pool private data, digital behavior, financial activity, and geolocation information to create real-time threat scores on citizens.
- Warning about a proposed national wearable-health mandate and its implications for bodily integrity.
- Challenging financial deplatforming and digital blacklists that deny individuals access to banking, fundraising, or payment systems based on political or religious viewpoints.
- Warning against the government’s expanding use of DNA collection, biometric identifiers, and mandatory health-tracking systems that erode bodily privacy and autonomy.
- Opposing geofence and cell-site surveillance without warrants, especially targeting churches, activist groups, and protest gatherings.
- Exposing government use of psychological operations, behavioral nudging, and emotional manipulation to cultivate compliance and suppress dissent.
- Combating Thought-Crime Policing: TRI challenged the administration’s attempts to normalize surveillance programs that profile citizens based on political ideology, online

behavior, or “pre-crime” indicators. These systems, fueled by AI and data mining, risk criminalizing dissent and punishing individuals for beliefs rather than actions.

Our goal: stop the government from turning every citizen into a suspect.

4. TRI Challenged Militarized Policing and the “Prison State”

Across 2025, militarized police responses, no-knock raids, and expanded incarceration funding surged dramatically.

TRI pushed back by:

- Defending protesters, journalists, and bystanders swept up in militarized responses to demonstrations and immigration crackdowns.
- Challenging the criminalization of poverty through excessive fines, fees, probation traps, and pretrial detention policies that punish individuals for their economic status.
- Challenging Fourth Amendment violations resulting from militarized SWAT tactics and warrantless searches.
- Opposing the administration’s \$170 billion incarceration expansion, including development of “Alligator Alcatraz,” a megaprison complex designed to warehouse detainees based on algorithmic risk scores.
- Sounding the alarm over the rise of paramilitary-style immigration raids that deploy armored vehicles, tactical gear, and no-knock entry tactics against civilian neighborhoods.
- Defending citizens harmed by police overreach—including wrongful raids, excessive force, and retaliatory arrests for filming officers.
- Highlighting the emergence of policing by algorithm in commentaries and policy papers.

5. TRI Protected Religious Liberty

This year, TRI continued and expanded its longstanding defense of individuals and institutions seeking to live out their faith without government interference.

Our advocacy focused on:

- Ensuring that houses of worship could minister freely without being surveilled, profiled, or targeted during public safety crackdowns.
- Defending Christians and other religious individuals facing viewpoint-based discrimination.
- Filing briefs in Supreme Court cases involving compelled speech, expressive freedom, and conscience rights.

6. TRI Empowered Parents and Students

Even amid executive overreach, 2025 brought an increase in government intervention into family life, education, and child-welfare decisions.

TRI responded by:

- Defending parental rights in cases involving medical decision-making, education, and state overrides of family autonomy.
- Opposing expansive Department of Education rules that could marginalize religious student groups.
- Publishing rights guides to help families navigate school censorship, surveillance, and disciplinary due process.

7. TRI Exposed Government Abuse, Secrecy & Lack of Accountability

Across the year, we addressed critical areas of constitutional breakdown:

- Asset forfeiture abuses
- Warrantless IRS bank surveillance
- Botched SWAT raids
- Watchlists that classify ordinary citizens as “extremists”
- Use of mental-health pretexts to detain dissidents
- Deployment of robots and drones as enforcement tools
- Government coverups and attempts to sidestep transparency and accountability

Each represents a step toward a government that operates above the law — and each one demands resistance. TRI responded by:

- Denouncing judicial and administrative efforts to expand secrecy doctrines and shield government agencies from oversight, including refusals to review cases involving official misconduct, surveillance overreach, and unlawful force.
- Calling out attempts by government officials to obscure, classify, or retroactively justify civil liberties violations, particularly in cases involving migrant detention, predictive threat scoring, and federalized policing operations.
- Advocating for servicemembers and military families denied access to justice due to outdated doctrines that shield the government from liability for non-combat negligence.

ANALYSIS, ADVOCACY, OUTREACH & PUBLIC EDUCATION

Alongside litigation and direct advocacy, TRI continued to produce in-depth research and investigative reporting that illuminated emerging threats to constitutional liberty.

This year TRI produced major reports on:

- Mental Health Round-Ups & Thought-Crime Policing
- AI Surveillance & Predictive Profiling
- Technocensorship: When Corporations Serve as Government Censors
- Child Trafficking in America (Annual TRI Report)
- The Dangers of Geofence Surveillance on Churches
- Weaponized Policing and Midnight SWAT Raids

Each report reached tens of thousands online and was cited by journalists, civic groups, and policymakers.

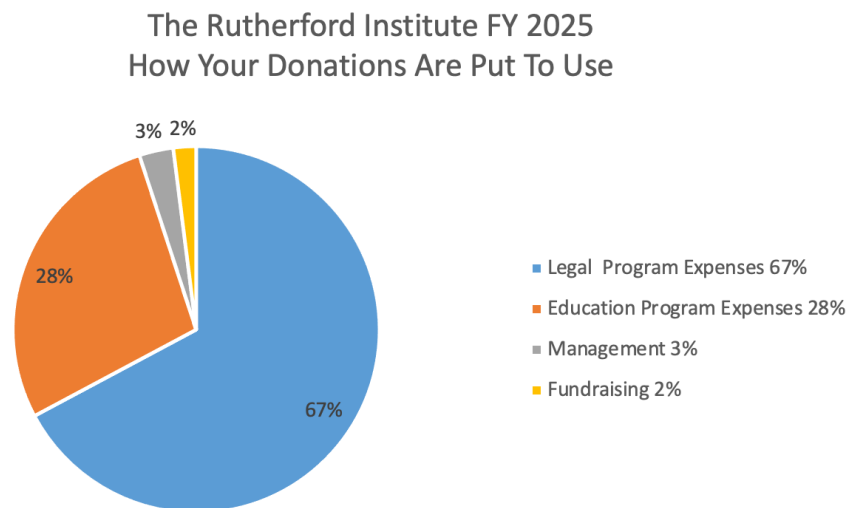
Through weekly analyses, TRI exposed the rapid transformation of American government—from constitutional republic to surveillance-driven police state. Our readership continues to expand through syndication in newspapers nationwide, radio interviews, and partnerships with civil liberties and academic organizations.

Freedom Watch, our weekly digest, now reaches tens of thousands and provides rapid updates on court rulings, abuses of power, and threats to constitutional rights.

TRI attorneys delivered presentations and media interviews on executive power, policing reform, constitutional checks and balances, and First Amendment protections. We expanded digital resources, including shareable rights guides, legal toolkits, and explainer graphics to help the public understand their constitutional protections.

TRI continued to collaborate with coalition partners on key First and Fourth Amendment issues. TRI's analyses were also widely cited by journalists, researchers, pastors, educators, and civil liberties organizations across the political spectrum.

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT: THE IMPACT OF YOUR SUPPORT



Every victory we achieve begins with someone who believes freedom is worth defending.

In the past year, the generosity of our supporters enabled TRI to:

- Represent individuals who could not otherwise afford constitutional legal defense
- Challenge unlawful government power in courts
- Publish crucial commentary on constitutional abuses
- Provide free resources to schools, churches, civic groups, and community leaders
- Fight for the rights of the marginalized, the unpopular, and the politically targeted
- Keep alive the founding principles meant to protect “We the People”

TRI's financial footing strengthened significantly in 2025, providing the essential cushion needed to take on large-scale constitutional litigation.

Primary Expense Categories:

- Legal services & casework
- Public education & outreach
- Research & publications
- Administration & development

Given that TRI receives no government funding, the generosity of our donors ensures that TRI remains able to continue serving as a constitutional watchdog and respond swiftly as new constitutional threats arise.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

The challenges before us are significant:

- Expanding AI-driven policing, surveillance, and biometric monitoring
- Increased militarization and expansion of federalized domestic military power
- Criminalization of dissent and crackdowns on political criticism of government abuses
- Growing attempts to sidestep judicial oversight
- Government efforts to redefine citizenship and the protections thereof
- A national climate increasingly hostile to constitutional limits
- Growing attempts to use artificial intelligence not merely to enforce laws but to define risk, suspicion, and future criminality
- Executive power unchecked by Congress or the courts

In 2026, TRI will focus on:

- Expanded strategic litigation against executive overreach
- National campaigns to protect free speech and dissent
- Oversight of AI-based enforcement and digital privacy violations
- Deep investigations into AI surveillance and predictive enforcement
- Stronger public education tools to empower citizens
- Coalition work to defend students, activists, religious groups, and vulnerable communities

THANK YOU

The Constitution cannot defend itself. It requires people—vigilant, principled, resilient—willing to stand up when power becomes dangerous. The generosity of those who believe in constitutional government, individual dignity, and the rule of law fuels everything we accomplish. Together, we will make America free again.

ABOUT THE RUTHERFORD INSTITUTE

Our job is to make the government play by the rules of the Constitution.

Here at The Rutherford Institute, we believe that the best defense against tyranny is an educated citizenry—one that knows their rights and is prepared to stand up for them. That's why we work daily to sound the alarm over threats to freedom and help Americans push back against the government's heavy-handed tyranny on almost every front.

Your tax-deductible donations make it possible for us to:

- **Sound the alarm** over government abuses
- **Push back** against government power grabs
- **Defend Americans** whose constitutional rights have been violated
- **Hold the government accountable** to the rule of law and the U.S. Constitution
- **Educate the public** about how to rein in runaway government, reclaim freedoms, and restore justice in America

The Rutherford Institute—**nonpartisan, apolitical and committed to the principles enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights**—is working tirelessly to reshape the government from the bottom up into one that respects freedom, recognizes human dignity, resists corruption, and abides by the rule of law.

OUR HISTORY

Founded in 1982 by constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead, The Rutherford Institute is one of the nation's leading advocates of civil liberties and human rights. For more than four decades, TRI has litigated in the courts and educated the public about a wide spectrum of issues affecting individual freedom in the United States and around the world.

The Institute's mission is twofold:

1. To provide legal services—at no charge—to individuals whose constitutional and human rights have been threatened or violated; and
2. To educate the public about critical issues affecting their constitutional freedoms.



SCAN TO DONATE

The Rutherford Institute is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, and gifts are fully tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

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