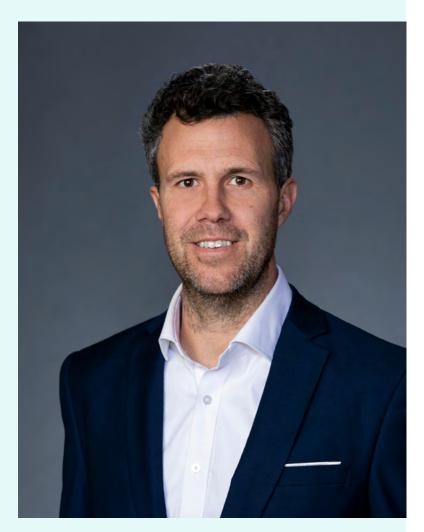




2025 Annual Report



JUSTIN MARCEAU

Director, Animal Activist Legal Defense Project

Director's Note

The Animal Activist Legal Defense Project is not slowing down. We have been involved in more than fifty legal matters in just over two years, and have racked up impressive victories. This year, we helped shutter one of the last two breeders of beagle dogs for vivisection, through a campaign with Dane4Dogs, Alliance for Animals, and The Simple Heart, which began when activists with Direct Action Everywhere openly rescued three dogs from the facility; pressed to establish an important legal precedent on animal rescue, and litigated Zoe Rosenberg's high-profile, six-week open rescue case; fought frivolous lawsuits that threatened to limit protests; and defended demonstrators, whistleblowers, alleged animal liberators and caregivers alike.

Our work is expanding. Having built a strong foundation over our first few years, we are excited to continue to represent new activists, and to provide support to an evergrowing list of individuals and organizations. Our goal is to provide big-firm legal resources and quality to activist legal work, and we have one of the most capable legal and media teams out there. We work to drive up the cost of prosecuting animal activists and provide them the assurances that come with having a top-rated legal team on their side. Awareness of our work is spreading among animal rights activists, as we have litigated—and won—some of the most highprofile cases in the movement.

In each of our cases, we have brought our legal expertise, our understanding of activists' priorities, and a comprehensive approach that leverages cases about activists into public stories about animals. This year, the abysmal conditions and abhorrent treatment of dogs at beagle breeder Ridglan Farms dominated local headlines, and garnered national press calling for an end to all testing on dogscontributing to the imminent closure of the facility; the New York Times used Zoe Rosenberg's case to cover the debate between animal rights and animal welfare and her open rescue trial attracted considerable media attention, including coverage in the Associated Press, LA Times, and *The Guardian*; and much, much more. Activist repression and representation draws headlines in ways that, sadly, animal oppression rarely does. AALDP works to harness that attention and expand the story well beyond the plight of activists, to discuss the rights of animals to be free.

The movement and the public were not the only ones to take notice of our work this year. AALDP has the great honor of having been added to the Animal Agriculture Alliance's web of "Major Animal Activist Groups." AAA is an animal agriculture industry group that monitors the animal rights movement, warning the industry of activism that threatens to cut into its profits. In previous years, AAA has expressed its highest concern about strategies used by many of our clients, namely open rescue and protests that do not mince words calling for an end to eating animals. Now, the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project itself has made the cut. When those we oppose take notice, we know we're doing something right.

For too long, activists willing to take risks for animals could not count on quality representation by lawyers who understood their goals. In just a few short years, AALDP has changed that, and the results are beginning to show. We see renewed energy in grassroots animal rights and hear directly from activists who credit our work with instilling confidence in their activism.

We couldn't do this work without our generous funders. AALDP is eager to expand our work to fully meet the needs of all animal advocates facing repression and politicized prosecution. Thank you for helping us get there.

To donate

visit AALDP.com and click on GIVE NOW

Or, mail your gift to:

University of Denver

PO BOX 209454 Dallas, TX 75320-9454

Please be sure to note on your check that you direct your gift to the AALDP.

AALDP

2025 Case Highlights

Our cases made waves this year, galvanizing established activists and new supporters alike.

Ridglan Farms to Close

Having secured the <u>stunning dismissal</u>, last year, of criminal charges against activists who openly rescued beagles from the notorious beagle breeder Ridglan Farms, in 2025 AALDP helped bring about the closure of the facility.

This victory came after AALDP successfully secured (on behalf of local advocates Dane4Dogs, and along with Alliance for Animals and Wayne Hsiung of The Simple Heart) the appointment of a special prosecutor to pursue criminal cruelty charges against Ridglan. It's hard to overstate the impact of the special prosecutor case. We earned national press coverage, including a story in Science, which directly prompted some of Ridglan's customers to cease doing business with the breeder, and an op-ed in the Washington Post by none other than the late, great Dr. Jane Goodall and Dr. Marc Bekoff, calling for

If it weren't for AALDP, I don't know what we would have done. We were freaking out."

Rebekah Robinson, President, Dane4Dogs, on the lawsuit filed against the organization by Ridglan Farms an end to all experiments on dogs. Locally, the battle against Ridglan Farms was a near-weekly topic in print and TV news.

Increased—and often dramatic—regulatory action and legislative efforts followed the appointment of a special prosecutor. Wisconsin's Veterinary Examining Board voted unanimously to <u>suspend the license of Ridglan's head veterinarian</u>; the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) <u>referred 311 additional violations</u> to the District Attorney; and the local Board of Supervisors called on DATCP to revoke Ridglan's license.

Ultimately, Ridglan decided it'd had enough. Faced with the prospect of being criminally prosecuted for felony animal cruelty, Ridglan accepted a stipulation requiring that it shutter its breeding facility and relinquish its license in 2026. This closure comes on the heels of the dramatic, 2022 closure of Ridglan's then-competitor Envigo, and leaves only one other large U.S. breeder of beagles for experimentation.

Months before announcing it would close, Ridglan filed a dangerous lawsuit against Dane4Dogs targeting the organization's public education and boycott campaigns. Ridglan's lawsuit decried "social media[,] protests, [and] participating in the judicial and administrative complaint processes" and letters to Ridglan customers asking



AALDP Litigation Fellow Steffen Seitz (R) confers with clients and other counsel during the Ridglan Farms special prosecutor hearing. Credit: Let Us Be Heroes

that they cease doing business with the company. This is the sort of lawsuit that requires legal representation in order to avoid chilling core First Amendment protected expression. AALDP stepped in to defend this case and make sure that the free speech issues are clearly presented to the court. We have moved to dismiss the case.

AALDP made a unique contribution to the coalition of advocates that secured the closure of Ridglan Farms. Together, we moved from defense to offense, hit Ridglan from several angles, and maximized the impact of activist campaigns. Grassroots activism is necessary and the central part of a campaign to end animal abuse, but it is not alone sufficient to generate changes in law and policy. Our high quality legal representation and advocacy are keeping the voices of activists in the news, keeping activists out of jail, and preventing animal exploiting industries from using law firms and legal threats to silence the activists.

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We have not been using Ridglan Farms since the article in Science came out... and we have no plans to re-establish any relationship with them unless they are cleared of the allegations."

Robert Canter, research scientist and division chief for surgical oncology at University of California-Davis

AALDP

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Open Rescue Trial

Another major 2025 case was the criminal trial of Zoe Rosenberg. Zoe was prosecuted for openly rescuing chickens from a slaughterhouse in Sonoma County, CA. Sonoma County, located in California wine country, is the heart of humane washing, foodie culture. Its meat, dairy, and egg purveyors pride themselves on being "organic" and "free range," and bucolic images of animals frolicking during the golden hour saturate their advertising.

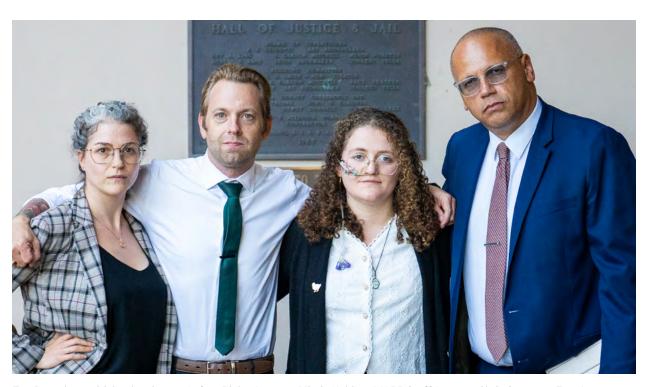
Zoe's rescues, coupled with years of investigations and animal cruelty reports to law enforcement by <u>Direct Action</u>

<u>Everywhere</u> (DxE), blasted holes in this slick marketing. Though authorities showed no political will to enforce California's ostensibly robust animal welfare laws, they aggressively prosecuted Zoe, forcing her to wear a GPS-tracked ankle bracelet for nearly two years and spending gobs of taxpayer money prosecuting her for taking

chickens worth less than \$25. Throughout the case, we successfully fought numerous requests by prosecutors for a gag order, including one seeking to prevent a billboard asking a simple question: "Should she go to prison for rescuing a chicken?"

Zoe faced six felonies, four misdemeanors, and over 20 years in prison. AALDP achieved a dramatic reduction in those charges, and, in September, she went to trial facing one felony and three misdemeanors. The trial lasted over six weeks. Sadly, Zoe was convicted on all charges.

The case garnered overwhelming attention. Zoe's videos about the trial garnered nearly 150 million views in under a year. In the months leading up to trial, the case was covered in feature stories in the New York
Times and The Guardian, in a Los Angeles
Times op-ed, and in tons of other press.



Zoe Rosenberg with her legal team. Left to Right: Attorney Mirais Holden, AALDP Staff Attorney Chris Carraway, Zoe, Attorney Kevin Little. Credit: Direct Action Everywhere

During the trial, media attention was constant, widespread, and predominantly positive. Each story focused on the fundamental debate: was this a rescue, or a crime? The coverage is a testament to the ability of open rescue prosecutions to spark exactly the kind of moral debate that the animal rights movement needs—forcing to the surface all of the tensions inherent, but suppressed, in loving animals, but eating them too. Zoe's case is a prime example of leveraging activist defense to draw attention to the substantive matter of animal rights.

At the same time, we are of course disappointed in the jury's verdict. We will continue to stand by Zoe, appeal the conviction, and keep fighting until these actions are recognized by all as the rescues they are.



AALDP Communications Director Lauren Gazzola speaks at the press conference on the first day of Zoe Rosenberg's trial. Credit: Direct Action Everywhere

During his closing argument in a Sonoma County trial that could reverberate throughout America's animal rights movement, Deputy District Attorney Matt Hobson seized several opportunities to stress something that should have seemed obvious: The defendant — not animal agriculture — is on trial here. His need to reiterate that point Tuesday spoke to the unique nature of this case."

San Francisco Chronicle, October 28, 2025

Should You Go to Jail for Rescuing a Dog From Drowning in Your Neighbor's Pool?

That is the question posed by law professors from Harvard and the University of San Francisco in an <u>LA Times op-ed</u> discussing Zoe's case and a similar case, in which Direct Action Everywhere co-founder Wayne Hsiung was also convicted in Sonoma County. AALDP represents Wayne and Zoe on appeal.

Zoe and Wayne both raised a necessity defense, arguing that trespassing to rescue animals from agricultural facilities, while nominally unlawful, prevented a greater harm and was therefore lawful. Both courts blocked the defendants from raising necessity at trial, holding that *no* animal could ever be the subject of a necessity defense under any circumstances.

These courts are wrong.

Despite convictions at trial, the opportunity to appeal the courts' necessity rulings is golden. Examples like the drowning dog, along with laws that protect animal rescuers from liability—such as so-called "hot car laws," which protect bystanders who break into cars where animals are at risk of overheating—make clear that protecting animals is, in fact, the kind of social value that is a valid basis for a necessity defense. We are eager to establish this legal precedent.

On Wayne's appeal, we are thrilled to have brought together a unique coalition of advocates who recognize the importance of the underlying issues. Our appeal is supported by several amicus parties, including both animal advocates and civil liberties groups, such as the Center for Constitutional Rights, Climate Defense Project, the Animal Law & Policy Program at Harvard, Nonhuman Rights Project, Animal Justice, and the Justice for Animals Program at the University of San Francisco School of Law. This is the largest coalition of support

among legal advocates for an open rescue to date. We hope to gather a similar coalition to support Zoe's appeal.

These appeals are also another example of using activist defense to discuss substantive animal rights issues with the public. A necessity defense may initially sound like an obscure legal doctrine, with little application to the lives of ordinary people. In fact, as the law professors show in their op-ed, necessity moves us from the abstraction of court proceedings to concretely weighing the underlying moral issues. What is more important—not trespassing? Or saving the life of a suffering animal?

Lost battles are inevitable in any long-term social struggle. Through activist defense work, we can often use those initial losses in ways that contribute to winning the war.



From Liberation to Care, AALDP is Everywhere

At the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project, we pride ourselves on defending all animal advocates, from the most radical liberators to the quiet couple who own an unassuming bird sanctuary. The vigor with which people are prosecuted for helping animals demands a strong defense wherever it pops up.

In rural Pennsylvania, we represent two women accused of releasing hundreds of mink from area fur farms. They face 19 charges, including multiple felonies, among them ecoterrorism and, perversely, aggravated animal cruelty. This summer, we secured the dismissal of a racketeering charge, and we continue to move towards trial.



Pennsylvania mink release defendants with their attorneys. Left to Right: AALDP Staff Attorney Chris Carraway, Defendant Cara Mitrano, Attorney Natalie Burston, Defendant Celeste Legere, and Attorney Jim Best.



Theresa Lyson, Michigan Duck Rescue and Sanctuary.

Meanwhile, in Michigan, we successfully resolved a case against the owners of Michigan Duck

Rescue and Sanctuary, who were charged for taking in ducks and geese in need of medical care, allegedly without the proper permits to do so.

Meanwhile, the permitting agency refused to take any action to issue the permit. Ultimately, as part of a broader dismissal agreement, we were able to show the permitting agency and the prosecutor that the sanctuary does not possess any animals for which they lack the proper permits, and all charges were dismissed.

Defending Demonstrators and Protecting the Right to Protest

AALDP has had enormous success this year defending protesters. We were part of a coalition of movement attorneys in the Stop Cop City case, which ultimately resulted in the judge throwing out Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) charges. Seeking to recast a political campaign as an unlawful conspiracy, and eerily resonant of the mid-2000s prosecution of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty organizers (which itself began as a RICO investigation), the Cop City case was hands down the biggest threat to protest activity in the last decade. Based in part on AALDP's legal work, all RICO charges were dismissed against all 61 protesters.

Westword

OPINION | READER RESPONSE

Rebuttal: Ducks Deserve an Honest Debate About Foie Gras

"As a lawyer who focuses on animal law and protesters' rights, I am troubled by Ms. Bonannos op-ed."

By Justin Marceau | January 12, 2025

The scene outside Misuna on New Year's Eve. Duck Alliance

Other 2025 protester defense cases included:

- Portland, OR Along with lawyers from the Civil Liberties Defense Center, secured an acquittal, from both judge (felonies) and jury (misdemeanors), for an anti-fur protester over-charged for participation in a protest and office disruption.
- Denver, CO Entered the foie gras fray, on behalf of a protester falsely accused, assaulted, and arrested during a New Year's Eve protest, as part of a successful, citywide campaign to remove foie gras from restaurant menus. In addition to resolving the protester's charges, we once again used the public attention on the case to talk about animals, placing an op-ed discussing the violence of foie gras in one of the most widely-read local publications. Ultimately, we resolved the protester's case and the restaurant at which he was arrested eliminated foie gras from its menu.
- Spokane, WA Represented anti-foie gras protesters restrained from protesting at a restaurant and the home of its owner. Just weeks after AALDP completely lifted the effective ban on demonstrations at the restaurant and significantly narrowed the restrictions on home demos, the restaurant announced it would remove foie gras from its menu.



The Duck Alliance protests against foie gras at a Denver restaurant on New Year's Eve. Video credit: Duck Alliance

- Salt Lake City, Utah Represent an anti-foie gras protester, charged in three separate cases with run-of-the-mill, protester harassment charges (disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, violating a noise ordinance) simply for standing outside a restaurant and speaking out about foie gras. Our Motion to Dismiss the case is pending.
- Also in Utah Represent activists with The Humane League, arrested for trespass and disorderly conduct, for a peaceful protest against Crumbl Cookies, over the company's continued use of eggs from hens confined to battery cages.

SLAPP Suits

We are also assisting with two SLAPP suits, or Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation, filed against Direct Action Everywhere, over home demos against prominent executives of Perdue. SLAPPs are frivolous lawsuits that sue defendants over First Amendment-protected speech and petitioning activity. The goal of a SLAPP is not necessarily to win the lawsuit. They are most often filed by an individual or corporation with superior financial resources, and the goal is to burden the defendants such that they spend considerable time, energy, and money defending against it—thereby detracting from their organizing and advocacy. SLAPPs are one of the most potent weapons used against activists, and they underscore the vital need for activist attorneys to defend against them-to keep activists out of court, and in the streets.

Defending Whistleblowers and Protecting Free Speech

Along with a lawyer from the legendary People's Law Office in Chicago, we represent the Campaigns Director of SHowing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK), who was charged with two felonies and one misdemeanor for having reported unlawful animal cruelty at an unsanctioned rodeo in Ogle County, IL. The complaints arose out of extensive documentation of extreme violence inflicted on animals at so-called "steer tailing" events. Rather than taking action to enforce animal cruelty laws, law enforcement blocked the defendant from certain communications with the county and filed charges against her. These actions are blatantly unconstitutional, and we will defend against these First Amendment violations.

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Miami Seaquarium to close!

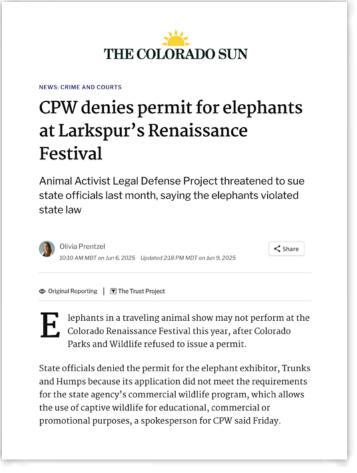
For two years, AALDP has represented a former marine animal trainer, after he <u>blew the whistle</u> on <u>Miami Seaquarium's treatment of the famous</u> orca <u>Lolita</u>. The Seaquarium had a long record of inadequate animal care and preventable animal deaths—not least of all during the time it has spent its energy and resources suing our client, rather than cleaning up its act.

This fall, after more than 50 years of imprisoning highly sophisticated marine animals, Miami Seaquarium closed. As this goes to print, we are working to dismiss the lawsuit against our client. The historic closure is due in no small part to our client's whistleblowing, and AALDP is proud to have played a role in shuttering this hell hole.

An end to elephant acts at Colorado Renaissance Festival!

This summer, AALDP lent our expertise to local advocates campaigning to end elephant displays at a Renaissance Festival. We sent a letter threatening litigation if Colorado Parks and Wildlife issued a permit to the traveling roadside circus Trunks and Humps to display elephants at the festival. Colorado law prohibits the use of elephants and certain other animals in traveling animal acts, through a law that was enacted specifically to stop the display of elephants at the Renaissance Festival. And we won! After the substantial negative press coverage we drummed up, we'll be surprised if Trunks & Humps attempts to break the law again—but if they do, we will be there!





Press Highlights



News

University of Denver Sturm College of Law's Animal Activist Legal Defense Project Helps Get Special Prosecutor Appointed in Suspected Animal Cruelty Case

By Jess Brovsky-Eaker - February 5, 2025



The University of Denver Sturm College of Law's Animal Activist Legal Defense Project team. / Photo provided by the



THE DENVER POST

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NEWS > **COLORADO NEWS** • News

Threatened lawsuit aims to stop elephants from performing at Renaissance Festival

Animal Activist Legal Defense Project says Colorado Parks and Wildlife permits violate state law



By **KATIE LANGFORD** | klangford@denverpost.com | The Denver Post PUBLISHED: May 22, 2025 at 6:00 AM MDT | UPDATED: May 22, 2025 at 2:58 PM MDT





NATION

Company at center of probe into dolphin deaths at Gulf World Marine Park files for bankruptcy

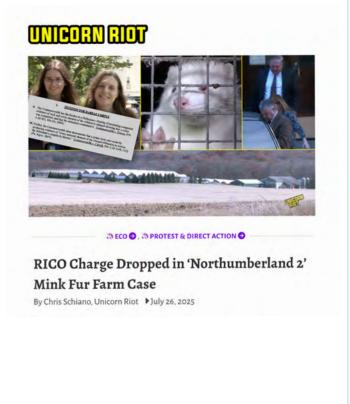
The Dolphin Company, which operates 31 theme parks and marine exhibits in eight countries, filed for bankruptcy amid a Florida probe into animal deaths at the Gulf World Marine Park.

Mary Walrath-Holdridge and Dylan Gentile USA TODAY









Los Angeles Times

Voices

Kristen Stilt and Matthew Liebman

Why rescuing animals should never be a crime

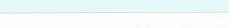


Rescued chickens gather in the aviary at an animal sanctuary in Acton, Calif. (Mario Tama / Getty Images)

By Kristen Stilt and Matthew Liebman Guest contributors

Sept. 17, 2025 3 AM PT

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US news

She took chickens from a slaughterhouse. Was it a rescue or a crime?

Zoe Rosenberg, a California student, is on trial over a tactic that animal rights activists consider a moral imperative. Critics say it's a threat to the food supply



Zoe Rosenberg grew up with back-yard chickens, which she said made her realize 'they have unique personalities ... and that their lives are really, really valuable'. Photograph: Courtesy of Zoe Rosenberg

Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow

Fri 24 Oct 2025 10.00 EDT



One of the largest research-related dog breeding facilities in the country will close its breeding operations after an investigation into accusations of animal cruelty, a litigation fellow with the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project told the Wisconsin State Journal



California woman on trial for taking chickens from Perdue Farms' plant says she was rescuing them



1 of 5 | Animal rights activist Zoe Rosenberg, who is on trial for taking four chickens from one of Perdue Farms' major poultry; Sonoma County Superior Court in Santa Rosa, Calif. on Tuesday, Oct. 28, 2025. (AP Photo/Terry Chea)

BY OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ

OLGA R. RUDRIGUEZ

Updated 8:31 PM EST, October 28, 2025

2025 Advocacy and Outreach

Public talks

- Know Your Rights training presented to The Humane League
- Animal Law Conference "Free Speech and Animal Activism"
- Animal and Vegan Advocacy Conference
- Cambridge Centre for Animal Rights
- Birmingham University, UK (keynote)



33rd annual Animal Law Conference

AALDP Staff Attorney Chris Carraway (Left) with (Left to Right) moderator Caitlin Hawks and panelists Madeline Krasno and John Watson at the 33rd annual Animal Law Conference. Credit: Clif Ellis

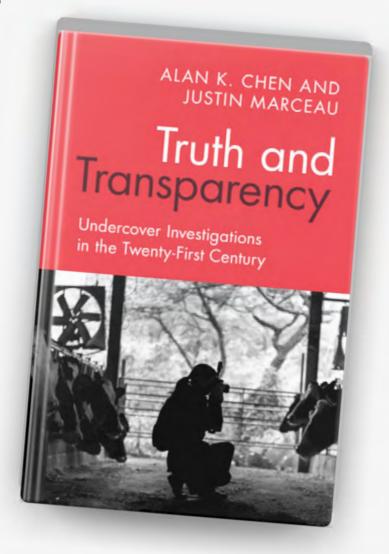
2025 Animal and Vegan Advocacy Conference

AALDP Communications Director Lauren Gazzola tables at the 2025 Animal and Vegan Advocacy Conference.



Truth and Transparency

The law school also held a full day event, featuring the work of investigators and journalists, a talk by the dean of the law school in support of transparency efforts, and talks by AALDP Director, Professor Justin Marceau, and fellow Sturm College of Law Professor Alan K. Chen. The event was centered on *Truth and Transparency: Undercover Investigations in the Twenty-First Century*, Marceau and Chen's recent book, the first comprehensive legal, historical, and sociological examination of undercover investigations in the United States.



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University of Denver Sturm College of Law students Dante Lombardi and Zach Netteland, with AALDP Staff Attorney Chris Carraway, walking into court for Zoe Rosenberg's open rescue trial. Credit: Direct Action Everywhere

Students

2025 was another excellent year for student participation in the Animal Activist Legal Defense Project. Students provided important research and drafted motions for several of our cases, did mock oral arguments for the appeal of Wayne Hsiung's conviction (including our argument that preventing harm to animals can be the basis of a necessity defense), and attended both the trial at which we won a not guilty verdict for an anti-fur protester in Portland, OR, and Zoe's Rosenberg's trial. They also heard guest lectures from journalist Will Potter and Alec Karakatstanis, Executive Director of Civil Rights Corps.



















University of Denver, Sturm College of Law

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