

AN EQUAL BRAVE FREE COUNTRY WE WORK FOR



2024

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ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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In 2024, we have seen that two of HCLU's flagship issues - press freedom and child protection - have the potential to transform public life. A fact-finding article in February highlighting serious structural flaws in the child protection system led to the disappearance of leading politicians from public life and the emergence of a new party that rivals the government in popularity. Although over the last 15 years in Hungary citizens have often had the impression that nothing has any consequences and that participation does not matter, 2024 has restored the faith of many that it does make sense to participate in public life, to be active and to organise. It is worth taking action, and there are consequences.

Rarely is there a public moment when actions have such a rapid and large-scale impact. At HCLU we believe that the key to lasting social change is slow, persistent and consistent construction. Democracy is made up of small, everyday decisions and actions, many of which can be ignited by a rare yet impactful public event.

In 2024, HCLU continued working to ensure that everyone in Hungary could learn about their rights and exercise them. We are convinced that the lives of Hungarian people who experience the power of their rights in everyday situations — for example, during a medical examination — will change. For them, rights will not be abstract ideas that are

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not worth sacrificing for, but the basis of their personal freedom and happiness, for which they are willing to work for on a daily basis and not let it be taken away from them. This conviction has led us to bring our legal aid and awareness-raising activities even closer to the people. This is why we opened our third regional office in Miskolc, after Pécs and Debrecen. The more than 4,500 people whose legal aid questions we have answered by phone, email, or in person; the 700 people who have participated in our workshops; and the 500,000 people who have read our legal awareness materials on our website – all of them have had the chance to experience that exercising their rights is the key to their well-being.

In 2024, we stood by countless people fighting for freedom and rights, so that we could set an example for others and give them hope. Journalists who continued their work despite secret state surveillance; environmental activists tirelessly opposing harmful industrial projects planned in their communities; child protection professionals speaking out against humiliating and ineffective vetting procedures; striking teachers who took legal action against their dismissals; mothers standing up against obstetric violence – and many others among our clients – all believe that actions have meaning and consequences. 2024 was a year that proved them right.

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DALMA DOJCSÁK
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



DESPITE A LOVING HOME, AUTHORITIES TRIED TO TAKE THE BABY WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION

At HCLU, we stand up for those whose freedom is restricted without proper justification and whose rights are arbitrarily disregarded. Child protection services have declared a young couple unfit to raise their child supposedly due to their mild disability and financial situation, and did not allow them to take their daughter Zoé home from the hospital after she was born. The village's child protection services used Zoé's mother's limping and mild epilepsy and her father's visual impairment as justification. Despite the fact that both parents have an impeccable lifestyle, work and co-operate, the couple's poverty was used as a trump card to have Zoé taken away from them. The couple were looking forward to Zoé's birth and wanted to bring her home to a loving, warm home. However, instead of rejecting this totally absurd and outrageous indication, the guardianship authorities automatically initiated the child removal procedure, putting both baby Zoé and her parents in a cruel situation.

The baby's grandparents went to the guardianship authorities and put it on record that they were ready to move in with the parents if that was the only way to get the baby back. A local NGO also

assured the guardianship authorities that it would help with the caretaking of the baby, but that was still not enough. Baby Zoé had to spend more than a week in hospital without her parents, when, in desperation, the family turned to HCLU through our free legal aid service. We took strong action and made it clear that legal action would be taken if Zoé continued to be separated from her parents. As a result of our action, Zoe was eventually released and could spend her first Christmas with her parents in a peaceful and loving home.

At HCLU, it is part of our mission to stand up for those who are powerless in the face of arbitrary and unreasonable regulations. The case of baby Zoé illustrates the gaps that exist in child protection today and why our work in this area is absolutely essential.



WE HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR IMI'S FREEDOM FOR YEARS - IN 2024, HE FINALLY GOT IT

Those who have been following the work of HCLU for a while might remember our client Imre, who was deprived of his freedom several years ago. After the death of his mother, the court placed him in a guardianship order, saying he was too impressionable and unable to look after himself. This left him with a guardian in charge of his finances, taking control over his own life, and he was even placed in a social care home where he had to live with 130 others. In desperation, Imre wrote letters to her cousin Gyöngyi, who still lived abroad at the time, and she and her husband decided to give up their life abroad and move home to get Imre out of the institution.

Imre first heard about HCLU in the press, and after several unsuccessful attempts of getting out of the situation, in desperation, he asked his cousin to contact us. After contacting him, we started working on behalf of Gyöngyi to help Imre regain his former life back and live as a free man again.

The litigation started in 2019 and Imre had to prove in court for four long years that he was able to navigate the world and make independent decisions about issues that concerned him. Finally, in April 2021, the court ruled that Imre's guardianship was largely unjustified and he was released from the social home, but even then he did not actually regain his freedom: he was placed under the guardianship of his cousin Gyöngyi.

In 2024, however, the ice was finally broken: Imre filed another lawsuit to become a legally free and independent man. We represented Imre in the lawsuit, and in the autumn the court ruled that he was a free man with legal capacity. In 2024, after years of struggling, he was finally able to spend Christmas the way he wanted to.

WE STAND UP FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ATTENDING GÁBOR IVÁNYI'S SCHOOLS!

At HCLU, we have been standing up for those who are arbitrarily persecuted by the authorities from the very beginning. In 2024, in the last days of August, before the start of the school year, the government office removed two institutions from the register: those of the Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood, the Wesley linked to Gábor Iványi supposedly due to their debt.

The closing of the school has left around 500 children, mostly with special educational needs, and their parents in a situation of extreme

hardship: they had to find a new institution last minute before the start of the school year. In the court proceedings, we helped the children and their parents who were deprived of education to seek legal protection from the court, so that the court would rule that the children had the right to a proper education and that depriving them of their school without designating a new institution to replace it was a serious violation of the law. We won the case, and the parents were awarded real redress for the harm they suffered.

TOGETHER WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND IN RESPONSE TO LOCAL NEEDS, WE WORK TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF ROMA PEOPLE

At HCLU, we have been working not only to provide legal assistance to Roma in Hungary for years, but also to strengthen locally based communities that are able to assert their interests in the long term. For them, legal awareness is not just an abstract concept, but is a means for survival. In the framework of the HCLU Roma Rights Awareness Programme [RJP], we have broken away from the traditional “top-down” approach to rights protection and are building upon the active participation of local and affected communities. Our aim is to build and continuously develop a knowledge-sharing system in which Roma communities themselves become equipped to identify the rights violations they face and the means to address their problems.

Mentoring is a key element of the programme. As part of this, we have asked Réka Makula, head of the Roma Women's Association of the 21st Century, and Bea Dánielné Tóth, head of the Roma Women's Association of Bódva Valley, to run legal awareness training in their communities, not only for their sake but also to train the lawyers of HCLU



in local legal protection. The RJP mentors and the most active members of their communities, the five mentors of the two leaders, provide training to their communities on the most important local issues and organise counselling sessions, where they try to resolve individual cases together with the client, often acting as intermediaries with local institutions and service providers.

As part of the Roma Legal Empowerment Program, we organized trainings, case discussions, and community events, and provided assistance in dozens of individual cases through legal counselling. The results are tangible: the number of unjustified fines has decreased, local authorities have become more flexible through mediation efforts, and access to social security benefits has improved. Additionally, with the effective advocacy of community leaders, we supported the smooth school enrollment of children and the enforcement of their rights.

ALTHOUGH THE STATE HAS LET THEM DOWN, THEY ARE STILL CREATING A CARING AND EQUITABLE HOME FOR THEIR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



Anna Rubi's documentary film, *Your Life Without Me*, won awards at both national and international film festivals. The film follows the daily lives of HCLU's extremely brave mother clients who take care of their adult children with disabilities and fear that there will be no one to take over this task when they pass. The state has failed to provide suitable homes, even though it has a legal obligation to ensure that the country is covered by a suitable system of institutions and that parents are not left with this emotionally, physically and financially

demanding task, which they often have to carry out alone for decades.

Magdi, the mother of Feri, a severely, multiply disabled man, has decided to join with other mothers in similar situations to sue the state for not providing what society needs. We are helping them in their legal fight. Although the Curia ruled against the case and held that the state cannot be obliged to fulfil its legal obligations even if it fails

to do so and violates the parents' right to human dignity, we are not giving up: we have submitted an urgent application to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The mothers have also decided to build the home for their children themselves, and have already received substantial financial and other donations for the construction. The acclaim for their film shows the need for the persevering and challenging struggles of ordinary people to be shown on the screen.

WE HAVE EXPANDED OUR FREE KNOWLEDGE BASE!

One more topic where you can find out about your rights and your child's rights for free and in plain language! Our latest factsheet is for parents who have a child of pre-school or primary school age who is suspected of having a special educational need [SEN]. In our factsheet, we cover issues such as the process for getting the SEN status assessed by an expert panel, why

this may be necessary and what are the benefits. We will help parents navigate the SNI process so that they can confidently and assertively advocate for their child's rights to participate in education in the way that best suits their needs.

WE STOOD UP FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND AGAINST THE HARASSMENT OF EDITORIAL OFFICES

In 2024, we will continue to work to ensure that the public is fully informed and that billionaires cannot manipulate the press arbitrarily for their own interests. Today, some of the most influential individuals are taking advantage of a new form of censorship: they are suing for breaches of data protection rules in an attempt to discourage the press from reporting on the extent and nature of their wealth. The point of such often protracted procedures is that the administrative burden and litigation costs discourage journalists from doing real fact-finding work, so that it is easy to hide who has become rich, from what source and over how long. In such cases, journalists can be forced to go to court for years over a thousand-character article.

At HCLU, we stand with the editorial rooms whose work is being obstructed by wealthy individuals simply because they reported on their assets. Press freedom requires that the media be able to report on matters of public interest – and the identity and wealth of the richest people in the country is clearly a public matter.

The 2020 rich list [also] included László Bige, the head of Nitrogénművek, who complained that the newspaper reported on criminal proceedings against him in its article on him, and that the journalists had used 2019 data. In January 2024, Forbes won a final judgment against Bige, but the billionaire did not accept the verdict and the case was again brought before the Curia, which again ruled that Forbes had not violated László Bige's right to the protection of personal data. In an important milestone in the case of press freedom, the court ruled that Forbes' editorial staff acted lawfully when they included the Nitrogénművek CEO in their list of the richest Hungarians.

In 2019, the Barabás brothers, owners of Hell Energy Hungary Ltd., filed a data protection lawsuit against Forbes with a similar aim: to prevent their names and assets from being included in the magazine's list of rich people. The Barabás brothers would even have recalled already printed magazines from newsagents, and their lawsuit ensured that their names would not be listed in the magazine at all for years. We represented Forbes, and in 2024, in their case, the court ruled that the billionaire family members were public figures by virtue of their activities, therefore Forbes had not committed an infringement when it reported their wealth.

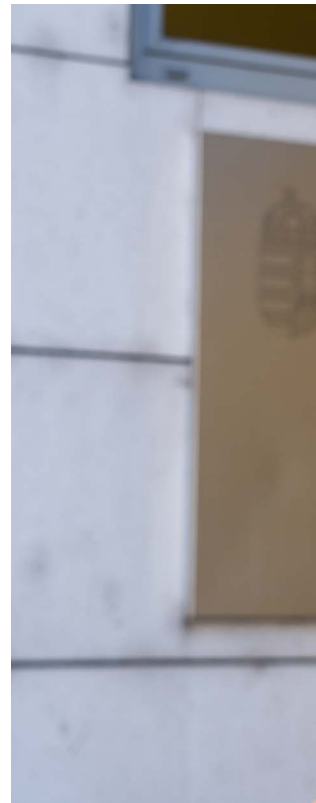
Árpád Habony's cousin, billionaire Gergő Szetlik, also tried to censor the media, citing privacy concerns, after it reported that Szetlik had drunkenly tried to resist the police at a festival, citing his family connections and celebrity lawyers. We, representing Magyar Narancs, which reported on the incident, have argued that the press should be free to inform the public, and that it should not be arbitrarily censored by billionaires entrenched in power in order to preserve their own reputation.

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PROTECTING A FREE PRESS IS IN ALL OF OUR INTERESTS, AND WE AT HCLU WILL CONTINUE TO WORK TO ENSURE THAT NO POWER ENTRENCHMENT OR CONNECTIONS, NO THREAT OF HEAVY COSTS, CAN BE USED TO RESTRICT EDITORIAL OFFICES OR PREVENT THEM FROM DOING THEIR WORK THROUGH STRATEGIC LAWSUITS.

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WE HAVE REPRESENTED THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN RETALIATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF THEIR OPINIONS AND THEIR STAND



MINISTRY WORKER FIRED FOR A MEME ABOUT A HAT, BUT WINS IN COURT

In 2024, we stood up for citizens who were unlawfully silenced by the authorities for political reasons, because they showed them an uncomfortable mirror. Such was the case of a ministry employee who was fired from his job at the Ministry of National Economy after more than 20 years of service for sharing an internet meme. The meme shared by the employee depicted a measure known colloquially as a price cap, featuring Márton Nagy with a cap on his head. He made the satirical post visible only to some of his friends, but the ministry found out about it, claiming that it had found the post through the ministry's organisational system.

The employee was dismissed from his job with immediate effect, even though his work had never been criticised before and his immediate superior had even recommended him for an exceptional

rating. The Ministry employee then turned to HCLU, and we agreed to represent him after his unlawful removal. We first took the case to the Civil Service Arbitration Commission, but it rejected our complaint, saying that the meme was 'capable of seriously damaging the reputation of the government administration and the trust in good administration'. We challenged this decision before the Metropolitan Court of Justice, which ultimately ruled that our client's dismissal was not lawful and that the grounds for dismissal were inadequate. It also awarded our client nearly HUF 5 million in lump sum damages. We believe that freedom of expression is a fundamental right that can only be restricted in justified cases and to a limited extent.

HE PROTECTS THE MONUMENTS, WE PROTECT HIM: WE REPRESENT IN COURT THE FORMER MINISTRY EMPLOYEE WHO HAS DENOUNCED THE VIOLATION OF THE RULES OF MONUMENT PROTECTION

The authorities have used similar serious means to harass Péter Bátonyi, a monument protection expert who has for many years observed the illegal processes in the field of monument protection, repeatedly spoke out against the violations that were being prepared and was fed up with the fact that the future of monuments was dictated by the real estate market or the interests of power representation. He went public on Partizán's programme, where he exposed the violations, and then made denunciations that led to his dismissal from his job and the Ministry of Construction and Transport announcing that

it would file criminal charges against Bátonyi for abuse of office and false accusations. Our client has been treated as a virtual criminal for his stand against abuse and malfeasance and his commitment to his profession. At HCLU, we stand with Peter Bátonyi and against the intimidation and silencing by the powers that be of honest professionals who speak out when they see wrongdoing in their work.



***CORVINUS SCANDAL:
LECTURER DISMISSED WITH
EXTRAORDINARY NOTICE
FOR DRAWING ATTENTION TO
THE FACT THAT A STUDENT
WAS GIVEN PREFERENTIAL
TREATMENT IN AN EXAM***

We continue to represent Zoltán Ádám, the university lecturer who was fired from his job for spurious reasons after he launched ethics proceedings at Corvinus University in 2023 for giving special treatment to a student from a wealthy and influential family and allowing him to sit an exam against university rules. His stand cost him his lecturer's job and he was even prosecuted for being 'uncooperative'. The fired lecturer decided to sue the university and has been represented by HCLU in his fight for justice since 2023.

DEMONSTRATING FOR PEACE: ALLOWED!

Standing in solidarity with the victims and demonstrating for peace: allowed! We filed a constitutional complaint on behalf of the organiser of a solidarity demonstration for peace with Palestinian victims after the police repeatedly banned the event, citing the foreign policy situation and possible violence. Our aim was to have the Constitutional Court annul the decision of the Curia, as it is the state's duty to

ensure peaceful demonstrations, not to impose unjustified restrictions on them. After the Curia, the Constitutional Court upheld the ban, which, in our view, suppresses genuine democratic dialogue and is also contrary to fundamental rights, because it unduly restricts freedom of assembly. We have also challenged the decision before the European Court of Human Rights.

***THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF NYÍREGYHÁZA CANNOT CONCEAL
HOW THEY SPENT THE MONEY UNDER THE GUISE OF HELPING
PEOPLE LIVING IN DEEP POVERTY***

It is a fundamental right of all of us to know how and what those in power spend public money on. In 2020, László Gloncz, a Roma activist from Nyíregyháza, filed a public data request to find out exactly how the municipality of Nyíregyháza spent the money it received from the European Union to desegregate Nyíregyháza. The anti-segregation measures were not implemented, but instead the people living in the segregated settlements were moved from one to another. The municipality kept secret what actually happened to the EU funds, but our client did not give up: in the public data lawsuit that had

already been settled, the court ordered the municipality to release the documents, but the Curia overturned the final judgment due to procedural errors. However, with our help, László Gloncz initiated another data request, had to file another lawsuit, and in 2024, after five years, the court ruled that the municipality of Nyíregyháza cannot hide how EU money was spent to help people living in extreme poverty.

**WE WORKED HARD TO ENSURE THAT
VOTERS WOULD BE WELL-PREPARED FOR
THE 2024 ELECTIONS AND HAVE SOMEONE
TO HELP THEM IF THEY ENCOUNTER ANY
VIOLATIONS OF THEIR RIGHTS**



The run-up to elections and polling day is always critical, when it is crucial that citizens receive swift and effective assistance to enforce their rights and are aware of their rights before election day. At HCLU, we have been working to prepare as many voters as possible to vote or to seek redress in the run-up to local and European elections, starting in 2023. We have held legal awareness workshops in ten rural municipalities and online, going beyond the election process to cover important issues such as the stakes. We also published free legal awareness material on elections as part of the Election Law Programme. And on the day

of the merged elections, we helped voters by telephone hotline and email, answering around 600 questions on issues including re-registration, anti-fraud and voting abroad. We also worked with the National Election Office to help citizens, as well as providing expert advice to the press to ensure that they can accurately inform the public about election events, such as the recount after the election of the Lord Mayor. And at the end of the year, we held a roundtable to discuss the experience of the elections with representatives of the National Election Committee and the National Election Office, and other experts.

WE CANNOT PROTECT OUR RIGHTS WITHOUT PROTECTING OUR PLANET

We believe that as a human rights organization, we must also engage in protecting our environment – if we neglect this, it will affect every aspect of our lives, including our ability to exercise our rights. In 2024, we once again took significant steps to support everyone who wishes to take an active role in environmental causes.

Throughout 2024, we assisted active environmental citizens in accessing information on green issues and supported their environmental advocacy through legal tools – mainly by providing free legal aid regarding harmful environmental developments.

In September 2024, as part of the Fluctuations Festival, we facilitated a community assembly aimed at fostering dialogue about the future of the Danube. In strategic partnership with the Alliance for Great Lakes and Wetlands, we created the Balaton Green Minimum, which we presented in Balatonalmádi on May 10. The goal of this initiative is to highlight the environmental legal rights and obligations of local governments.

We now also help our clients use the Aarhus Committee as a new legal remedy – this body oversees the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, which ensures that people have access to information on environmental matters, can participate in environmental decision-making, and can seek legal redress when these rights are not upheld.

We believe that advancing environmental protection requires more people to know about, dare to, and want to take part in green causes. On our new thematic site (tasz.hu/zold), anyone can learn how to contribute to protecting the environment using the tools of activism and law.



SHE WAS NOT PROPERLY INFORMED THAT THEY WERE GOING TO PERFORM A CAESAREAN SECTION UNDER ANAESTHESIA ON HER, BUT SHE DID A LOT TO ENSURE THAT THIS WOULD NOT HAPPEN TO OTHER MOTHERS

At HCLU, we believe that everyone has the right to be properly informed at the hospital, and that these violations cannot be swept off the table. This is what happened to our client, Móni, who had a caesarean section under anaesthesia in the delivery room without her consent and without being properly informed, depriving her of the right to be awake at the birth of her daughter. Although she knew that she would have to consider the option of a caesarean section, she did not think that she would find out about it lying on the operating table. So, even though the anaesthesia was medically justified, our client has not had a chance to prepare to give birth to her daughter this way.

Móni was unconcerned about what had happened to her during her birth - she had made a complaint to the hospital, but her case was swept under the carpet and they tried to settle it cynically

by saying: she should be happy that her baby is healthy.

Our client, however, did not let it pass and did not accept the condescending attitude of the hospital. She wants her daughter to grow up not having to worry about being ignored in the maternity ward. We stood up for her, so that in 2024 we managed to get the court to rule that a mother has the right to be fully informed even if she cannot decide whether an intervention is medically necessary or not.

Through her determination and courage, Móni has taken an important step towards ensuring that mothers do not have to go through a traumatic birth experience in the delivery room. We believe that it is in the best interests of mothers and their babies to provide them with the most relaxed and safe birthing environment possible.

BY CHANCE, HE FOUND OUT THAT HE HAD BEEN CLASSIFIED AS A NATIONAL SECURITY RISK – AND TOGETHER WITH HIM, WE STOOD UP TO ENSURE THAT THIS CANNOT HAPPEN TO ANYONE ELSE

Perhaps the most important thing now is to stand up against the arbitrary harassment of civilians and active citizens based on the interests of power, and to represent those who would be disempowered because of their opinions. This is what happened to our client, István Koczka, who was classified as a national security threat by the secret service led by Antal Rogán without his knowledge.

István, a respected mathematics teacher with no criminal record, learned of the classification by chance when he signed up to volunteer for Pope Francis' visit to Hungary. His application was eventually rejected by the police, who said the maths teacher's involvement could pose a "threat to criminal justice, public security or national security". He was not officially informed why he had been given the label, despite subsequent requests. István has participated in the teachers' protests and signed petitions in a perfectly legitimate manner, but it would be a

serious offence if he had been targeted by the secret service due to this activity. However, it is certainly a violation of the law that he was not informed and that the failure to inform him was not justified.

With the help of HCLU István has filed a lawsuit against the National Information Centre to find out who and why, and on the basis, declared him a public or national security threat. In 2024, the Metropolitan Court of Budapest ruled that the secret service led by Antal Rogán had violated our client's right of access by not answering his questions without giving reasons. The case goes beyond the case of István Koczka, as it reveals abuses by a body that is supposed to serve the interests of citizens. It is in the interests of all of us that the secret services do not carry out political orders, but that they operate effectively and that citizens can legitimately trust them. We will continue to work to ensure that they do their job instead of arbitrarily harassing people.



WE EVALUATED THE FIRST ACTION PLAN OF THE METROPOLITAN DRUG STRATEGY - EFFECTIVE PREVENTION AND ASSISTANCE INSTEAD OF STIGMATISATION!

While the country has not had a National Drugs Strategy in place for four years in 2024, Budapest has created its own, which we helped to develop. The first Action Plan of the Metropolitan Drug Strategy, adopted in December 2023, covered the period from 1 March 2024 to 28 February 2025, and the first mid-term evaluation meeting was due to take place in September 2024, in which we participated.

During the meeting, the working groups reported on their progress in their respective areas. The Prevention Working Group organised a meeting on drug prevention in schools, where school social workers from 16 districts shared their experiences and coordinated their activities. The Demand Reduction Working Group developed a training theme for the Municipal Police Directorate of

Budapest (Municipal Police Directorate), which will help facilitate cooperation between law enforcement officers and addiction specialists in order to reduce stigmatisation of drug users. As a result of the work of the Harm Reduction Task Force, four low-threshold organisations have received a total of 19.2 million HUF in funding from the Municipality of Budapest - their activities include hepatitis and HIV screening, homeless care and street outreach work.

At HCLU, we work to ensure that there are real prevention and assistance options in Hungary, rather than taboos and stigma, and we hope that through our work we can contribute to the development of a systemic safety net for all those in need, despite the government's efforts.

WE PROTECT THOSE WHO GET ARBITRARILY MONITORED BY THE SECRET SERVICES FOR POLITICAL REASONS

The secret services exist to protect the security of the nation, and it is in all our interests that they are able to carry out their statutory duties. However, it is equally important that citizens can trust that the services are not being used as a political weapon and that they are free to participate in public life without the fear of consequences. In Hungary, however, it is becoming increasingly common to find that the secret services are being misused by the authorities and that they are also being used to monitor citizens who can

cause inconvenience for them. They also have the means to do so, because the legal regulation of the secret services is too loose and the system lacks safeguards to counteract abuses. This is what happened to our clients in the case known in the public as the Pegasus case, where Pegasus spy software was used to attack the phones of citizens who were inconvenient to the government for the purpose of monitoring them. At HCLU, we stand up for those whose activities would lead the authorities to use nefarious means to monitor

them, abusing the tools they have been given.

In 2024, there was an important development in the Pegasus case: after two years of litigation, we won a first-instance lawsuit against the Constitution Protection Office (AH) in the case of Adrien Beauduin, a Belgian student activist who was one of several individuals targeted and surveilled through the Pegasus spyware on his phone. At the time, the Metropolitan Court ruled that the AH was obliged to declare

whether it handled data on Beauduin. The ruling was groundbreaking because it states that intelligence services cannot automatically refuse to provide information on whether someone is being monitored. In addition to Adrien Beauduin, we are also providing legal representation to journalists Brigitta Csikász, Dávid Dercsényi, Szabolcs Panyi and Dániel Németh, and lawyer Ilona Patócs. We will continue to work to ensure that the secret services work for their citizens, not against them.

WE PROVIDE LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO THE DISMISSED TEACHERS

In 2024, we continued to represent the six teachers against the Outer Pest School District who were dismissed from the Karinthy Frigyes High School in 2022 after they all participated in civil disobedience. Although the court of first instance dismissed the six teachers' case, the fight does not end there: we continue to

represent them in order to assert their right to exercise their fundamental right through civil disobedience. Education is a matter for all of us, and we are confident that by standing together we will be able to build an education system that is fair for all.



EQUAL, BRAVE, FREE - NOW IN MISKOLC TOO!

In 2024 we opened the third regional office of HCLU in Miskolc! This means that, in addition to Pécs and Debrecen, we now have established a permanent presence in a third rural city in addition to our Budapest base. In Miskolc, we have already had a foothold, as we have been running a Roma rights awareness programme in the region for a longer time, through which we aim to raise the awareness of local Roma communities, “from the bottom up”, with the involvement of local people. The opening of the office in Miskolc is an important milestone in the life of HCLU, as we have been working since 2018 to bring legal protection closer to citizens beyond the capital. Our explicit goal is also to look beyond our own bubble and learn more

about the problems citizens are facing outside the capital city.

The Miskolc office opening was celebrated in June 2024, where Domi Milanovich, a journalist from WMN, Mária Lubinszki, a psychologist, and Stefánia Kapronczay, the strategic director of HCLU, discussed the topic of burnout. Afterwards, courtesy of Lőrinc Barabás, we celebrated our expansion with a rousing jazz concert, and with each milestone we celebrate the reaching of more and more people and empower citizens so that they can stand up for themselves in any situation.



WE ARE EVERYWHERE!



At HCLU, part of our mission is to reach as many people as possible in as many places as possible – and in 2024, we continued to do this through workshops covering a wide range of topics. Throughout the year, we held 71 workshops across the country, where we had the chance to meet 695 participants in person and help them learn about their rights and how to exercise them.

As the combined municipal and European Parliament elections on June 9, 2024 approached, we organized 15 election law workshops both in rural areas and online. These workshops aimed to raise awareness about the importance of voting and the tools citizens can use to enforce their rights in relation to the electoral process. During the sessions, we answered questions such as what can voters do if they spot false information during a campaign and what is exactly at stake in the elections.

In 2024, we also organized film screenings in several locations across the country, where we showed the films *“We Wash Our Hands”* and *“Just Like Any Other Person.”* After each screening, we held discussions with the filmmakers and experts on the topic.

The documentary *“We Wash Our Hands”* was inspired by a series of investigative articles exploring the devastating impact of hospital-acquired infections in Hungary. The authors of the series, Kamilla Marton and Zsuzsanna Wirth, were awarded the Transparency-Soma Prize for the best investigative reporting. The film explores the conditions prevailing in hospitals, detailing the experiences of hospital workers and the victims of infections.

“An Ordinary Person Just Like Anyone Else” is a short film by the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU), offering insight into the life of Gábor Győri, one of our clients living with a disability, and his struggle for independence. The film highlights how little we know about the everyday lives and challenges faced by people with disabilities. After the screenings, the film’s main character, Gábor, also held discussions with the audience.

In 2024, we organized several regional workshops for parents, students, and teachers on the topic of advocacy and rights enforcement in schools. These workshops explored issues related to the educational movement together with teachers and experts who have been actively involved in building the movement. They provided firsthand information on how to assert



our rights in education and take action against injustices in the system.

In the autumn, we participated in the Freedom of My Identity festival, which concluded with the fourth Pécs Pride march. We also set up booths at the Campus Festival in Debrecen and the Kocsonya Festival in Miskolc, where we engaged with the public through rights-awareness quizzes, conversation cards, and washable HCLU tattoos for children. Our goal at these events was to raise



awareness of our work among local residents and to ensure they know they can confidently turn to us if their rights are violated.

Together with the Örkény István Theatre, we participated in organizing the ProTest – Road to Revolution theatrical board game in four cities. The story is set in a dictatorial country where a nonviolent movement challenges an unjust government policy: mandatory military conscription. The audience becomes part of the movement and, with guidance from a HCLU moderator, works toward achieving their goals. The expert helps resolve dilemmas and provides legal and strategic insights throughout the process.

In December, we opposed the so-called “public hearings without the public” in Debrecen regarding the licensing of the Chinese Eve Power battery factory. These hearings excluded direct participation by those affected, who were only allowed to submit comments via letter or email. We believe this practice violates the right to public participation, so in cooperation with two other organizations, we filed a public interest complaint demanding hearings that allow the affected community to attend in person.



At HCLU, we work across the country to spread awareness about the importance of environmental protection and the ways people can engage in it. In February 2024, we held a green legal empowerment workshop for members of the Új Koma Háló network—organized by the Small Communities Program—and for human ecology students at ELTE University. In March, we ran a similar workshop for law students from ELSA Debrecen, and in July, at the Bánkitó Festival. These workshops focused on the opportunities in green activism, collecting legal tools and developing a joint action plan tailored to the experience and needs of those already active in the field.



WE CONTINUE TO STAND WITH LILI PANKOTAI!

Lili Pankotai became widely known after performing a slam poem she wrote on October 23, 2022, in front of tens of thousands of people at a protest organized in support of education. Her speech drew criticism from the media and from her former school, the Cistercian High School of Nagy Lajos in Pécs. She was humiliated and subjected to psychological pressure, which led her to leave the school and continue her studies in Budapest.

In 2023, Lili decided— with our support— to file a lawsuit against her former school to draw attention to the unacceptable campaign waged against her. Through her case, she hopes to raise awareness among fellow students, educators, and the broader educational system. Thanks to our Pécs office, we were able to take on her case,

with the goal of making education in Hungary more equitable and free— where students do not face retaliation for expressing their opinions.

In 2024, the court ruled in the first instance that Lili's former school did not violate her personal rights by participating in the smear campaign against her, stating that her slam poem did not constitute a political opinion in its entirety. We disagree. We believe that there are many valid ways to express opinions, and no student should be harassed or excluded for exercising this right. We continue to stand with Lili and remain committed to ensuring that students can be active participants in shaping and improving education.

INTERVIEWS TO THE PRESS:
OVER

250

TIMES

ON TIKTOK
WE PUBLISHED

34

VIDEOS, THE MOST POPULAR
OF WHICH HAS

60 000

VIEWS

NUMBER OF LEGAL
AID QUERIES:

4622

2024

WE MONITORED
AROUND

10

**PROTESTS AND
ACTIVATED A HOTLINE AT
EVERY SECOND ONE**

IN PREPARATION FOR
THE 2024 EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT AND LOCAL
ELECTIONS, WE ORGANIZED
15 ELECTION WORKSHOPS
ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND
ONLINE

WE HELD **WORKSHOPS**
IN RURAL AREAS **FOR**
PARENTS, STUDENTS, AND
TEACHERS ON ADVOCACY
AND RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT
IN SCHOOLS

WE HELD **2 WORKSHOPS TO**
SUPPORT LOCAL MEDIA IN
RURAL REGIONS OF EASTERN
AND WESTERN HUNGARY

COMMUNICATION
TRAININGS TO SUPPORT
RURAL CIVIL SOCIETY
GROUPS

NUMBER OF
WORKSHOPS:

71

[all around Hungary]
for

695

participants

GREEN WORKSHOPS:

ÚJ KOMA HÁLÓ
[February 2024]

ELTE HUMAN ECOLOGY
STUDENTS
[February 2024]

ELSA LAW STUDENTS IN
DEBRECEN
[March 2024]

BÁNKITÓ FESTIVAL
[July 2024]



THE HCLU TURNS 30!

In 2024, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union celebrated its 30th anniversary! We are proud to have spent the past three decades defending the rights of the Hungarian people – offering help, going to court, speaking up, and standing with those the powerful would rather silence. Over the last thirty years, we’ve achieved breakthroughs in many important areas, and we’ve stood by people who, today, wouldn’t even speak to us. But our values have never changed: we’ve always worked for a more equal, braver, and freer Hungary – and we hope to keep doing so for many more decades to come.

Thirty is a milestone worth celebrating, so we marked the occasion properly – together with all of you at Turbina! The good vibes were guaranteed by three amazing bands: Várkonyi Csibészek, Jazzbois, and Hakumba. On top of that, we held a raffle with dozens of great prizes and offered our exclusive SZABAD. merch for sale at the venue. And when the formalities were over, we danced the night away – as long as our feet could carry us.



“ SZABAD AWARD

IN HUNGARY, ANYONE WHO STANDS UP FOR
THEIR OPINIONS, DEFENDS THEIR RIGHTS
OR THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF THEIR
COMMUNITY, IS TAKING EVER GREATER RISKS.
YET, THERE ARE THOSE WHO TAKE UP THE
FIGHT ”



In 2024, we presented the SZABAD Awards for the sixth time to honor those whose commitment and actions tirelessly contribute to building a freer Hungary.

“THE SZABAD AWARD REMINDS US EVERY YEAR THAT COURAGE IS NOT ONLY FOUND IN GRAND AND SPECTACULAR ACTS, BUT ALSO IN THE SMALL DECISIONS WE MAKE IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES,” said Máté Szabó, TASZ’s Legal Director, at the SZABAD Award ceremony on September 17th at the 6szín Theater.

The members of the professional jury in 2024 were: **DORKA HORVÁTH** (founder of BOOKR

Kids), **ANNA KERTÉSZ** (Head of Communications and Individual Giving at TASZ), Marge (singer-songwriter), **GÁBOR MIKLÓSI** (journalist), **LUCA NYÁRY** (author and journalist at WMN), and **ÁRON MOLNÁR** (actor and former SZABAD Award recipient).

The professional jury’s award for 2024 went to Erika Schmidt, an experiential learning trainer who played a key role in bringing the Bicske child abuse scandal to light.

“Even one swallow can make a summer. If at least one tries, others might join in, and eventually, they’ll carry the torch,” said **ERIKA SCHMIDT** in

her acceptance speech. She spent years fighting to ensure the truth wouldn't remain hidden about the abuses committed by the director of the Bicske children's home, known as "Uncle János," and his accomplice **ENDRE K.**, who was later granted a presidential pardon.

The **AUDIENCE AWARD** was given to **DÁNIEL KARSAI**, a constitutional lawyer battling ALS, who dedicated the final period of his life to seeking social change in the area of end-of-life decision rights, using his personal tragedy and struggle as a catalyst for public debate.

Due to his condition, Dániel was unable to attend the ceremony; his brother, **PÉTER KARSAI**, accepted the award on his behalf and said:

"Whether Dani will live to see the introduction of the right to make end-of-life decisions, we don't yet know. But one thing is certain: the public conversation he initiated cannot be put back in the bottle. If there is one example Dani has set for us, it's this: don't be afraid to start discussions on sensitive topics – even in today's Hungary, there is still room for civil, meaningful dialogue."

LEGAL AID

The HCLU's free legal aid has been one of the organization's most important activities since its inception, and currently, thousands seek our assistance every year. The coordinator of the legal aid service is Attila Szabó. In 2024, we dedicated around 500 hours to phone-based legal assistance, receiving a total of 3,586 calls. Many people also reached out to us via email: we responded to 2,481 email inquiries throughout the year. Our goal is to expand our legal assistance in more areas, so that in the future, citizens can turn to us for advice and, if necessary, representation in an increasing number of legal matters.



*WE ALSO RESOLVED THESE ISSUES
THROUGH OUR LEGAL AID SERVICE:*

A LAW WOULD HAVE RESTRICTED BRIGITTA IN REALIZING HER DREAMS

Brigitta McNeill, a resident of Kaposvár, is determined by the fact that she raises two children with autism spectrum disorder at home. Caring for her children is a 24-hour task, making it impossible for her to work full-time alongside it. The Hungarian state provides support for this situation, the home care allowance for children, called GYOD. Compared to other social benefits, this support is quite generous, but –

understandably – it excludes the possibility of working full-time. However, beyond caregiving, Brigitta wanted to do more for her children and for other children facing similar challenges. In 2023, she applied and was accepted into the Doctoral School of Psychology at the University of Pécs, in the Applied Psychology doctoral program, to conduct autism-specific research. Her application was not without precedent, as in

2019, as a university student, she won an honorary prize in a prestigious academic competition on this topic. Moreover, she graduated with honors from the university and has also published studies in her field.

However, the doctoral program is only available in full-time study mode, and the rules regarding GYOD, just like those for full-time employment, excluded the possibility of continuing full-time studies. In a benevolent interpretation, the legislator may have intended to ensure that the supported parent would focus entirely on their children. For Brigitta, this rule meant that she had to choose: either receive the home care allowance for her children and give up her dreams, or pursue her dreams, but lose her income. At this point, Brigitta turned to us. Our stance was that the regulation was unreasonable and discriminatory. Brigitta also said what we thought: participation in the doctoral program is not the same as full-time employment. She would still have time to care for her children. So, while the rule may make sense in the case of employment or full-time university studies, it is certainly unreasonable and unnecessarily restrictive in the case of a doctoral program, which offers much more flexible scheduling.

Armed with our arguments, Brigitta wrote a letter to the relevant ministry in May 2024. In it, she outlined her situation and pointed out

that she was being hindered by an unreasonable rule from continuing her studies and conducting autism-specific research. She emphasized that, as a doctoral student, neither would she fail to fulfill her caregiving role, nor would her children suffer, if she could go on to study. Based on past experiences, we could easily think that the state is capable of brushing aside such reasonable and well-founded requests from citizens or civil organizations. However, this did not happen in Brigitta's case. The government submitted a legislative amendment package, which included changes to various rules regarding higher education. Among these, they incorporated Brigitta's proposal. The solution was quite simple. It was simply this: In Section 39/B (1) c) of Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Services, the term "higher education" was replaced with "higher education, except for doctoral programs." It was this small change that allowed Brigitta to pursue her dreams. The amendment came into effect on December 21, 2024. Through her perseverance and argumentation, Brigitta succeeded in getting an unreasonable regulation changed in about a year, enabling her to submit her application for the doctoral program in the next academic year without losing her livelihood. We believe that this, among other things, is the responsibility of the state, and specifically the government: to listen to the citizens' arguments and observations, and to act.

SHE CANNOT KEEP HER SALARY A SECRET

The Central European Academy, affiliated with the University of Miskolc, hid the former Minister of Justice's salary for months. It was only after the Magyar Narancs editorial office filed a data release lawsuit with our help that they disclosed

it. Judit Varga receives 2 million forints per month for providing scientific research orientation and expert work. This is double the average 1 million forint fee of her fellow legal scholars. In 2024, Varga earned 24.9 million forints.

OUR COLLEAGUES IN 2024:

MÁRTON DÁNIEL ASBÓTH
NÓRA ILONA AUJESZKY
ANNA MÁRIA BALÁZS
MÁRTA ESZTER BALÁZS
KAROLA BECKER
FLÓRA KATINKA BENKŐ
ZSÓFIA BLASKÓ
ZOLTÁN BOGNÁR
DOMINIKA BÓI
ILONA ZSÓFIA BOROS
VIKTÓRIA DAGMAR BRUMECZ
KATALIN BUDAI
FLÓRA CSATÁRI
ESZTER CSILLAG
LUCIA CSABAI
ANDREA CSÖRGITS
BEÁTA DÁNIELNÉ TÓTH
DALMA DOJCSÁK
DÁNIEL DÖBRENTEY
EMESE DOROSZLAI
ANETT DUBLECZ
ANNA DZUNICZ
BORBÁLA FERNEZELYI
ANNA FORRÁS
SZABOLCS HEGYI
ESZTER JOVÁNOVICS
DÓRA KAPOTS

STEFÁNIA KAPRONCZAY
JÚLIA KAPUTA
TAMÁS KARDOS
ANNA KERTÉSZ
ZSUZSANNA KUNOS
RÉKA DÓRA LEBEDI
LILLA LŐRINCZI
ANNA MÁRFFY
JÁNOS MÉCS
AMARILLA ZSÓFIA NAGYNÉ GERE
EMESE PÁSZTOR
MÁRIA MAGDALÉNA PERCZEL
BALÁZS PIVARNYIK
ÁDÁM REMPORT
ANNA ROSNER
ATTILA SZABÓ
MÁTÉ SZABÓ
MELITTA SZARKA
ÁDÁM TAKÁCS
ANNA VALENTINYI
RÉKA VÁRKONYI
RÉKA VELÉNYI
ZOLTÁN VESZPRÉMY
EDINA VINNAI
BEATRIX VISSY
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KATA ZSILLE

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