

# Practical Skills for Gender Justice Advocacy

Open to Learn  
More About:

*Developing  
Skills to  
Advocate &  
Build Coalitions*

*Writing to Elected  
Officials*

*Reading &  
Interpreting  
Laws*

*Fighting for  
Gender Justice*

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Gender Justice  
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# ARC Gender Justice

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# About Our Collective

## **Gabriel Arkles**, Co-Founder (NY)

Gabriel Arkles is an experienced lawyer and writer who works toward trans liberation, prison abolition, and disability justice. He has experience with direct services, collective building, and community organizing support (Sylvia Rivera Law Project), teaching and researching (NYU and Northeastern law schools), and impact litigation and public education (ACLU LGBTQ & HIV Project, Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund). Gabriel's writing has appeared in publications such as the NYU Law Review, Northeastern Law Journal, Southwestern Law Review, Scholar and Feminist Online, and TruthOut.

Outside of ARC Gender Justice, Gabriel is currently Senior Counsel at the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund. He also serves on the steering committee for Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD) and the board of HEARD (a cross-disability, abolitionist organization). Gabriel is a white, trans, queer, Muslim, neurodivergent, U.S. citizen man and a survivor of gender-based violence. He lives with his partner and cats on Lenape land in Brooklyn. In his free time, he loves reading sci fi and fantasy, studying Islamic feminist theology, and cooking.

## **Pooja Gehi**, Co-Founder (FL)

Pooja Gehi is a lawyer, activist and strategist who has worked for immigrant, prisoner and racial justice, trans and queer liberation, transformative justice, and cross-movement coalition building for decades. As the former Executive Director of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), she centered and lifted up jailhouse lawyer members in the organization and ensured they had a seat on the national board. She also successfully brought a resolution in support of prison abolition, making the NLG the first and only explicitly abolitionist bar association in the US. Prior to that, she was the Director of Immigrant Justice at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP), where she provided direct legal services to hundreds of low-income transgender and gender nonconforming clients, and achieved major victories like access to transition-related healthcare for New York State Medicaid recipients through litigation and coalition work. Pooja's scholarly work focuses on social movements, the devolution of criminal and immigration systems, and the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality.

Pooja serves on the Board of GRIOT Circle - a community based organization that provides services and a political home to BIPOC elders in New York City. She is a queer, south asian, cis woman with disabilities. Pooja is also a survivor of gender based violence. She has the best emotional support dog, named Henry, and has recently become an avid gardener.



# About Our Collective

## **Ary Graham, Inside Member (PA)**

Aryella Miclee Graham aka Ary does not like labels because she feels that they divide us more than they unite us, she likes to say that she is just her. She is a proud parent to a beautiful child, a paralegal, and an LGBT+ and gender justice activist, she strongly believes in and incorporates Malcolm X's form of activism BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY. She enjoys studying and practising law, targeting inequality, discrimination, oppression and the likes through lawsuits and activism activities, listening to music cooking, tattooing, being adventurous, being outdoors, trying new things, being stimulated intellectually and emotionally, and geeking out to animation movies and shows and humorous stuff. Her goals and dreams include owning some businesses, flipping houses, finding her soulmate, getting married and living on a self sufficient environment friendly farm complete with baby goats, chickens, cows, horses, crops, a pond or creek, staff to maintain the property, and a wide range of off road vehicles to wet her appetite for mudding, rock climbing and trails. She encourages anyone to reach out to her for any reason because as she says you can never have too many loyal, honest, and helpful friends. As she always says "STAY UP".

## **Niara Burton, Inside Member (PA)**

Niara Burton is a pretty woman of color and trans Muslimah who is assiduous at justice. As a jailhouse lawyer and paralegal, she has litigated and prevailed on the merits in over nine cases for others, and is working on her second case for herself. She joined ARC Gender Justice because marginalized communities are deprived of advocacy and a voice. As a victim of gender abuse herself, she wants to use her skills to help others access justice and feel whole! She dreams for a future where there is no more abuse, and people can live and let live. She sees equality as a human right.

## **Adrian Lowe, Outside Member (PA)**

Adrian Lowe has organized for the past 3 decades in movements for LGBTQ civil rights, economic justice, prison abolition and health justice. In 2007 he co-founded Hearts on a Wire, an inside/outside prison advocacy organization working to address the needs of transgender people in Pennsylvania's prisons. He remains a committed member of the Hearts on a Wire collective. Adrian is also a senior staff attorney with the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania where he specializes in public benefits and HIV-related civil rights issues.

## **Maddy Tamarez, Inside Member (NY)**

Madelyn Tamarez is a Latinx woman and a mother of two beautiful girls. She is a being who had her glimpse of enlightenment and considers herself a lifelong learner. She is down to earth, selfless, with a satirical sense of humor. She has been told she has an old soul--many people confide in her, and she can usually relate. She is proud of coming to a point in her life where she can own her story. She decided to get involved in ARC Gender Justice because why wouldn't she want to help her people? She hopes one day everyone will get that second chance they justly deserve. She loves hot sauce, dogs, and funny cards, and her sign is Scorpio.

## **Nadirah Ali, Inside Member (PA)**

Nadirah Ali is a 53-year-old, beautiful inside and out, caring, and understanding black female of the Islamic faith. She hopes to help others to have courage to believe in themselves and to stand up for themselves and to stand up for what they believe in. She would like to help reform this injustice system. She has lived through a lot--some good, some bad, but she always tries to look at the glass as half full and not half empty. One of her biggest dreams is to go home.

# About Our Collective

## **Rayne Vylette** **Inside member (FL)**

Rayne Vylette is a mixed race, Indigenous trans woman. She is an active supporter of other trans women in prison and a member of several advocacy organizations, including the Prisoner correspondence project, Black and Pink, and the transgender, gender nonconforming, intersex justice project (TGIJP). She is also in a creative writing group, the gavel club, an advanced public speaking class and a comedy class. She has authored several articles, including "FI Trans Prison Policy," available on ARC's blog page.

## **Kaylyn Alvarado, Inside Member (PA)**

Kaylyn is a 38 year old mixed race (Irish and Puerto Rican), straight trans woman. She has hazel eyes, brown hair, and speaks English. One of Kaylyn's future goals is to change how the trans woman and the male prison population are viewed as different populations and make all prisoners viewed as unisex so DOCS can't use the male and female rhetoric against trans people in order to keep us segregated on things we can have and not have every time we strive for something making us road blocked by this divisiveness. Her goal is to work with ARC is to help and try to bring changes in prisons. She enjoys reading, learning, working, and being outdoors. Kaylyn has a positive attitude and outlook on life and dislikes negative people with negative attitudes. She joined ARC gender justice because she has passion for wanting to help people who are doing advocacy work and the story on how this organization formed impacted her deeply. She wants to help bring change and equality for the transgender community. Kaylyn believes that although she is only one person joining she is one of many joining to help fight the injustice that the transgender community in prison has to endure.

## **Miley Selena Fletcher,** **Inside Member (PA)**

Miley Selena Fletcher has 30 years in as of 2022, and her earliest release date comes in 2024. She has done a lot of legal cases for the last 27 to 28 years, including criminal, tort, habeas, post-conviction relief act, § 1983, and § 1986 cases and cert petitions for the US Supreme Court. She is also an artist. She is a calm person who thinks before she does and researches before she speaks. She's not the kind of woman who gets a big head—she listens and learns. She believes that as a team we have no time to belittle anyone; we need to put our heads together to bring forth success. She believes in enforcing the legal system to give transgender rights to our transgender communities, juveniles and adults, and wants to help communities in need either incarcerated or on the outside.

# WHO WE ARE

## *Fighters for Justice Across Prison Walls*

The Alyssa Rodriguez Center for Gender Justice (ARC Gender Justice) strengthens movements for gender justice across prison walls, fights gender-based violence, and eliminates barriers to political participation for incarcerated survivors and other grassroots advocates.

We recognize that incarcerated and marginalized advocates have done the most critical, ground-breaking gender justice work for decades with the least resources and support. We bring in more resources and support, so people can have even greater impact.

We are made up of inside members and free-world members.

Our work has three main parts:

- 1** Facilitating opportunities for gender justice advocates to learn from one another, build shared analysis, strategize, and collaborate to end gender-based violence.
- 2** Creating and distributing advocacy materials and other resources to support the gender justice work of jailhouse lawyer survivors and other advocates.
- 3** Organizing to shift power through fighting for changes to court, administrative, and legislative procedure to make it easier for grassroots leaders, including incarcerated survivors, to participate politically.

# WHY

## *We Created This Resource*

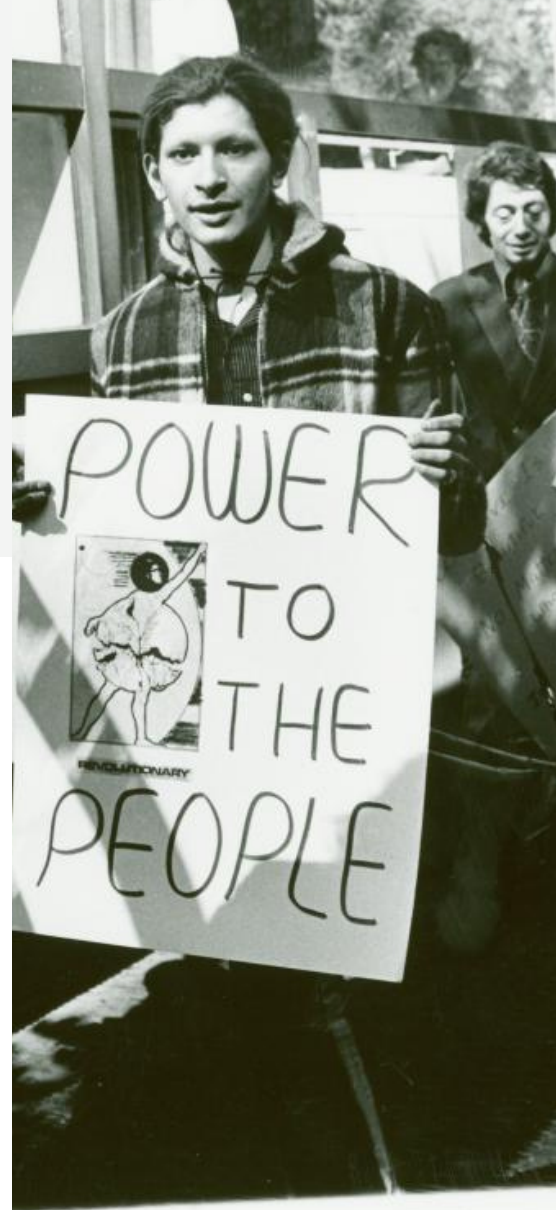
ARC has inside and outside members. In 2022 and 2023, members pitched projects they wanted to work on together. Members voted to develop this resource so TGI people inside have support in their efforts to reach out to policy makers and elected representatives and to engage in legislative advocacy.

Simply put, incarcerated trans people want to be able to advocate for their needs with their own voices. This resource provides general information about the legislative process that is hopefully useful to incarcerated people anywhere.

ARC created another resource, titled “Legislative Advocacy Guide for TGI Folks Inside Prisons.” If you would like a copy, please write to us.

ARC also has state-specific information for the states that ARC has members in: New York, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Florida. If you want other states, we may be able to help. Please write us.

This resource is just a starting point. We’re here to support you and your efforts to engage in building power and changing policy.



*This is a photo of Sylvia Rivera, a Latinx trans woman who was incarcerated many times and who organized for trans rights. In one essay, she wrote, “We have to do it because we can no longer stay invisible. We have to be visible. We should not be ashamed of who we are. We have to show the world that we are numerous. There are many of us out there.”*



# HOW TO *Change Things*

There are so many different ways to change things. This guide mainly discusses legislative advocacy, which includes how to pass or amend laws. Legislative advocacy is difficult and requires knowledge, expertise, resources, time, and skills. Even when legislative advocacy is successful, “a law is only as powerful as the legal advocacy, relentless organizing, and community-based inquiry that comes before and comes after.”

Knowing how the legislature works and how policy advocacy works are important skills, but they are only part of the story. Our experiences in developing and winning campaigns and in advocating for incarcerated people has shown us over and over again how important lots of different strategies, skills, and tactics are to this work.



*This is a photo of Marsha P. Johnson, an early activist for trans people and trans and queer youth specifically.*

Most legislative advocacy driven by incarcerated individuals is the result of relentless advocacy of large coalitions of people. In New York, incarcerated people and outside organizations organized for ten years to pass the New York State Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act, which allows judges to re-sentence survivors of domestic violence currently in prison and to grant shorter terms or program alternatives to survivors upon their initial sentencing. In California, multiple statewide coalitions organized to support incarcerated trans people and multiple legal organizations successfully sued the state prison system for nearly a decade, resulting in progressive laws that require state prisons to recognize people’s gender, search preference, and housing preference. These efforts, too, have their roots in organizing stretching back decades.

# HOW TO *Change Things*

We do not share this to scare you. We share this to acknowledge that organizing to change things takes time, labor, and care. We interviewed long-time activist and organizer Judith Clark, who was incarcerated for 37 years in Bedford Hills CF in New York, for this guide. She described how she and other organizers didn't start with a policy proposal; they started by "taking on issues that we wanted policymakers and policy enforcers to think about." Sometimes, she said, this involved specific legislative work with specific individuals. But more often than not, Clark and others inside would come together in both "formal" groups, like committees approved by the Superintendent, and "informal" groups, those that were not recognized by the prison, to discuss what they were experiencing. These groups reflected the issues at the time.

The women at Bedford created a "Long Termer" committee that addressed the needs of those who were incarcerated for a long time. Others created cultural/identity-based groups, like the Puerto Rican committee at Bedford that advocated on behalf of Puerto Rican women and all Spanish-speaking people at the prison. They also created committees to address the impact of policy changes, like a committee they formed in the 90's to bring back college after the state revoked funding, or creating ACE in the 80's, which provided peer education and support to address the emergent AIDS epidemic.

In these settings, she and others would share their stories and then learn from others, developing one's awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider social context.

Clark emphasized that the purpose of this work was always to gain a deeper, better understanding of what was really going on. Her work resonates with what Chris Dixon, another organizer for liberation, has said: "Transformative social movements are always much more dynamic and intelligent than individual organizers, no matter how reflective, tireless, and courageous such individuals may be. This is one of many amazing things about collective struggles for justice."

We see this guide as one step towards collective liberation. Yes, we all need to know how policy is passed and how legislative advocacy happens! But we also need so much more to achieve trans liberation & gender justice.

# Coalitions 101

## A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO HOW WE BUILD COLLECTIVE POWER TO CHANGE THINGS.

A coalition is a group of people and organizations working on a specific problem.

Coalition building is the process by which people and organizations come together to form a coalition to coordinate efforts. Coalitions help our movements avoid duplication, mixed messaging and ineffectiveness. Coalitions are helpful because they can accomplish things that are beyond the capacity of any individual person or organization.

The broad purpose and breadth of coalitions give them more credibility than individual organizations. In addition, coalitions encourage all of us to work together for the greater good. Coalitions provide a forum for sharing information, staff and resources to work for change.

Coalitions have many benefits but also can have some issues, too. We discuss both below.



# *Benefits of* **COALITIONS**

**OVERALL, COALITIONS CAN CONCENTRATE THE COMMUNITY'S FOCUS ON A PARTICULAR PROBLEM, CREATE ALLIANCES AMONG THOSE WHO MIGHT NOT NORMALLY WORK TOGETHER, AND KEEP THE COMMUNITY'S APPROACH TO ISSUES CONSISTENT. SOME MORE SPECIFIC REASONS FOR FORMING A COALITION MIGHT INCLUDE:**

- To empower elements of the community - or the community as a whole - to take control of its future.
  - Changing conditions and fighting for trans liberation requires that incarcerated trans people are centered in creating solutions.
- To actually obtain or provide services.
  - It may take a coalition - either initially or over the long term - to design, obtain funding for, and/or run a needed intervention in the community.
- To bring about more effective and efficient delivery of programs and eliminate any unnecessary duplication of effort.
  - Gathering all the players involved in a particular issue can result in a more cohesive and comprehensive intervention. Rather than duplicating their efforts, organizations can split up or coordinate responsibilities in ways that afford more participants access to programs and allow for a greater variety of services.
- To pool resources.
  - A number of organizations and individuals together may have the resources to accomplish a task that none of them could have done singly. In general, people and organizations join coalitions to do just that - accomplish together what they cannot alone.
- To increase communication among groups and break down stereotypes.
  - Bringing together groups and individuals from many sectors of the community can create alliances where there was little contact before. Working together toward common goals can help people break down barriers and preconceptions, and learn to trust one another.



# Benefits of COALITIONS

## SOME MORE SPECIFIC REASONS FOR FORMING A COALITION MIGHT INCLUDE:

- To revitalize the sagging energies of members of groups who are trying to do too much alone.
  - A coalition can help to bolster efforts around an issue. For people who've worked too long in a vacuum, the addition of other hands to the task can be a tremendous source of new energy and hope.
- To plan and launch community-wide initiatives on a variety of issues.
  - In addition to addressing immediately pressing issues or promoting or providing services, coalitions can serve to unify efforts around long-term campaigns in such areas as smoking cessation, community economic development, or environmental preservation.
- To develop and use political clout to gain services or other benefits for the community.
  - A unified community coalition can advocate for the area more effectively than a number of disparate groups and individuals working alone. In addition, a wide -ranging coalition can bring to bear political pressure from all sectors of the community, and wield a large amount of political power.
- To create long-term, permanent social change.
  - Real change usually takes place over a period of time through people gaining trust, sharing ideas, and getting beyond their preconceptions to the real issues underlying community needs. A coalition, with its structure of cooperation among diverse groups and individuals and its problem-solving focus, can ease and sometimes accelerate the process of change in a community.



# Issues with COALITIONS

**THERE ARE OFTEN BARRIERS TO STARTING A COALITION, AND IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE AWARE OF AND ANTICIPATE THEM, BECAUSE THEY MAY DICTATE THE PROCESS THE COALITION WILL HAVE TO FOLLOW IN ORDER TO BEGIN SUCCESSFULLY. AMONG THE MOST LIKELY:**

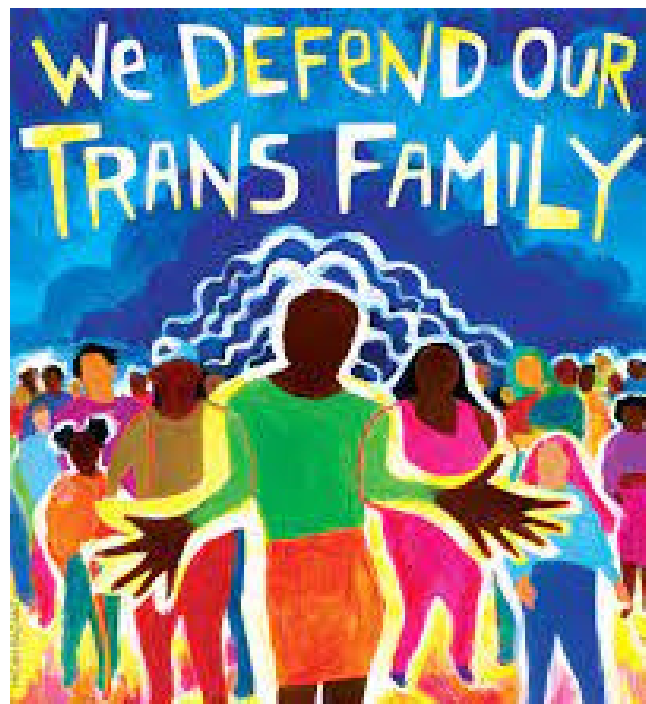
- Turf issues.
  - Organizations are often very sensitive about sharing their work, their target populations, and especially their funding. Part of the work of starting a coalition may be to convince a number of organizations that working together will in fact both benefit all of them and better address their common issues.
- Bad history.
  - Organizations, individuals, or the community as a whole may have had experiences in the past that have convinced them that working with certain others - or working together at all - is simply not possible. A new coalition may have to contend with this history before it can actually start the work it needs to do.
- Domination by "professionals" or some other elite.
  - All too often, agency people with advanced degrees, local politicians, business leaders, and others, in their rush to solve problems or to "help the disadvantaged," neglect to involve the people most affected by the issue at hand and other community members. Creating a participatory atmosphere and reining in those who believe they have all the answers is almost always part of starting a coalition.
  - Part of a solution here may often be providing support for those who aren't used to the "professional" way of holding meetings and reaching conclusions, while at the same time training professionals and others to include those whose opinions are likely to be far more accurate and important to the solving of the problem than their own. This might mean bringing in an outside facilitator, or simply paying careful attention to guiding the process from within the group.



# Issues with COALITIONS

## HERE ARE SOME ADDITIONAL BARRIERS:

- Poor links to the community.
  - A first step may have to be the development of hitherto nonexistent relationships among agencies and the community at large.
- Minimal organizational capacity.
  - It might be necessary to find a coordinator, or for one or more individuals or organizations to find a way to share the burden of organization for the new group if it is to develop beyond - or as far as - a first meeting.
- Funding.
  - The difficulty of finding funding is an obvious obstacle. Less obvious are the dangers of available funding that pushes the coalition in the wrong direction or requires it to act too quickly to address the issue effectively. New coalitions have to be alert to funding possibilities from all quarters, and also have to be vigilant about the kind of funding they apply for and accept.
- Failure to provide and create leadership within the coalition.
  - Coalitions demand a very special kind of collaborative leadership. If that leadership isn't available and can't be developed from within the coalition, its existence is probably at risk. It may be necessary to bring in an outside facilitator and/or training in collaborative leadership to salvage the situation.
- The perceived - or actual - costs of working together outweigh the benefits for many coalition members.
  - The task here may be to find ways to increase benefits and decrease costs for the individuals and organizations for whom this is the case if the coalition is to survive.



# Advocacy 101

**ADVOCACY MEANS SPEAKING FOR OR AGAINST A CAUSE. IT CAN ALSO MEAN SUPPORTING, DEFENDING, OR PLEADING FOR OTHERS.**

The term “advocacy” encompasses a broad range of activities that can influence public policy. From research and public education to lobbying and voter education, advocacy is about using effective tools to create social change. Recognizing the importance of these tools, advocacy is an effective strategy for bringing about systemic, long-lasting change that can affect large segments of the population for long periods of time. Advocacy can include these types of actions and more:

## **ISSUE ADVOCACY**

Issue advocacy can look like media campaigns to “change the narrative.” Think of “Black Lives Matter,” which is a slogan for a wide variety of campaigns and organizations that advocate against police violence and for racial justice. Some issues that BLM and associated groups advocate for include reducing the size and scope of prisons, policing, and surveillance.

## **LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY**

Legislative advocacy includes actions that are trying to get a legislative body to take a specific action. This can include introducing a bill, passing a bill out of committee, killing a bill in committee, approving or killing a bill, changing the bill’s language, or other actions.

## **POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ADVOCACY**

Campaign activity can look like supporting or opposing a specific candidate or trying to get a candidate to take a certain position on an issue.

## **DIRECT REFORM / DIRECT ACTION**

This type of advocacy can include direct actions, like protest, demonstrations, and boycotts. It can also look like direct reform projects, including litigation, repeal/ballot initiatives, and other measures.

## **IMPLEMENTATION CHANGE**

Implementation advocacy includes actions that try to change how a law is implemented. This could involve pushing for certain administrative regulations or for additional oversight.



# Advocacy & COALITIONS

## STEPS TO COALITION BUILDING

**1** Pick an Issue 

**2** Find Your People 

**3** Agree on Politics, Goals, and Positions 

**4** Develop Shared Norms 

**5** Rotate Leadership 

**6** Communicate 

# Advocacy & COALITIONS

## 1

### Pick an Issue

When building or joining a coalition, the first step should be to identify the issue that unifies the coalition and motivates every member to take action. When building or joining a coalition, it is important to have a clear understanding of the main issue area the coalition is advocating for before joining. Coalitions tend to be more effective when they focus on a specific issue so that all organizations involved have a clear idea of what the policy goal is and what they are advocating for.

Issues can be big or small. For instance, some coalitions form because people want better education in prisons or want better commissary. Other coalitions form to support people who are getting released or who are fighting for clemency.



## 2

### Find your people

Whenever possible, it's crucial that coalitions have leaders directly affected by the issue. If you're fighting for sex work decriminalization, but no sex workers lead the coalition, something's wrong. Your coalition will probably also need people with different types of expertise. They might be directly affected or not.

Does it seem like the right people are a part of the coalition? What can you add? Who else can you invite?

If some group is not involved, why is that? Is there anything to make your coalition more welcoming?



# Advocacy & COALITIONS

## 3

### Agree on Politics, Goals, & Positions

When building or joining a coalition, the first step should be to identify the issue that unifies the coalition and motivates every member to take action. When building or joining a coalition, it is important to have a clear understanding of the main issue area the coalition is advocating for before joining. Coalitions tend to be more effective when they focus on a specific issue so that all organizations involved have a clear idea of what the policy goal is and what they are advocating for.

Issues can be big or small. For instance, some coalitions form because people want better education in prisons or want better commissary. Other coalitions form to support people who are getting released or who are fighting for clemency.



## 4

### Develop Shared Norms

You should also discuss guidelines for advocacy with other organizations in the coalition. These guidelines should include information about how decisions will be made on behalf of the coalition and how organizations involved in the coalition will be informed about decisions. Especially when working in coalitions of inside and outside members, everyone should agree on communication norms and how people, especially outside members, agree to share information and decisionmaking roles.

When setting up advocacy guidelines, make sure your coalition develops an operating structure that is inclusive to all types of organizations and approval processes. Some organizations may have fewer resources and may not be able to devote as much time to the coalition's advocacy efforts as other organizations. Or, some organizations may have lengthy approval processes they must go through before signing on to letters or making public statements about an issue. It is important to take into consideration the structure of the organizations in your coalition when developing advocacy guidelines.

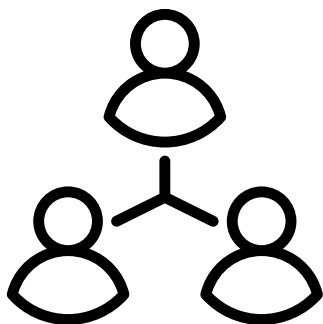


# Advocacy & COALITIONS

## 5

### Rotate Leadership

Each organization in a coalition will have a different level of engagement. Some organizations will take on leadership roles within the coalition while other organizations will be less engaged. Taking on a leadership role in a coalition may mean that you are in charge of the coalition's email listserv or that you are responsible for drafting coalition letters to policymakers. You will have a different role in every coalition you join. Everyone in coalitions should rotate administrative tasks, like meeting facilitation and taking notes. If you've never done something like this, ask for a buddy! We're all learning.

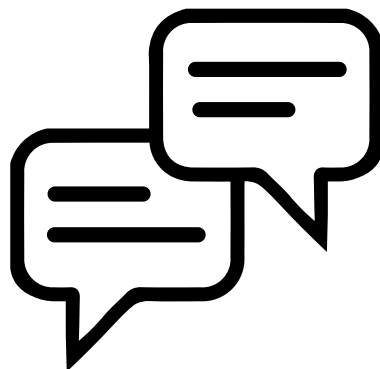


## 6

### Communicate!!

Agree on how members will communicate (e.g., JPay, calls, snail mail) for regular and speedy decisions and issues. Depending on the size, structure, and scope of your coalition, you may need different communication methods to share information, updates, feedback, and decisions. For example, outside members might use email, phone, text, social media, online forums, newsletters, or webinars to communicate with your coalition members. Inside members might use phone calls, snail mail, JPay/GTL, video calls, or the trusty old school method of kites and conversations. Whatever tools and methods you use, make sure they are accessible, reliable, and user-friendly for your coalition members.

Inside ARC member Rayne Vylette says, “In the absence of formal support offerings, meet informally, such as in the rec yard.”





# Advocacy & COALITIONS

## EXAMPLES FROM MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS:

Sylvia Rivera Law Project, a free legal services organization created by and for trans people, has the following core values (related to step 3 above):

- We can't just work to reform the system. The system itself is the problem.
- Oppressed people need to be empowered with the skills and vision to fight for their own liberation. For SRLP, this includes taking reasonable steps to provide necessary training and resources.
- All oppressed people need to work together in solidarity to end all forms of oppression. For this reason, SRLP values coalition work with organizations whose stated missions reflect our organizational values.
- We believe that the struggle for gender self-determination will in the end be fought by our whole communities, and it will win liberation for all of our people.
- It is critical that transgender, intersex, and gender variant people and people of color, especially low-income people, youth, and people with disabilities, take leadership in our work. Furthermore, SRLP as an organization must actively work to realize this goal.
- SRLP strives to maintain gender parity at all levels of the organization.
- SRLP believes that the working environment of an organization shapes the work, and for this reason we strive to create an environment that is non-hierarchical in structure and operates by consensus.

# Advocacy & COALITIONS

## EXAMPLES FROM MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS:

Many social justice movement organizations have a practice of setting “ground rules” for meetings. An example of some of these ground rules or norms are listed below. See Step 4 above.

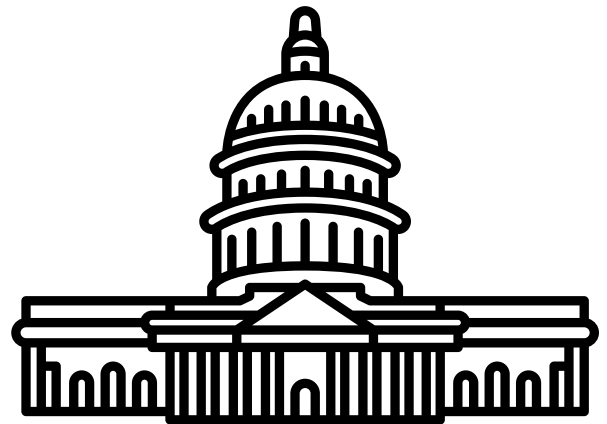
- Use “I” Statements – Speak your truth, and avoid using “we” or “they.”
- Get curious about other people - Seek understanding of truths that differ from yours, with awareness of power dynamics.
- Be aware of your engagement - If you normally talk a lot, “move up” your listening and listen more. If you normally don’t talk a lot, “move up” your participation in ways that feel comfortable to you.
- Say what you need - If you cannot hear someone, say “Speak louder, I can’t hear” or raise your arm or get someone’s attention.
- Ask about intentions - When someone says something that you find offensive or bad, ask them if that’s what they intended.
- One person, one mic - Only one person speaks at a time. Don’t interrupt.
- Stick to the schedule - if there’s an agenda, try to stick to those topics and issues. Add new topics to future meetings.
- Be clear on decisions and voting - if the group is making a formal decision, make sure that everyone understands what the proposal is and how to vote.
- Be accountable about your impacts - If something you said or did hurt someone else, take accountability. It’s okay!

# Writing to ELECTEDS

## A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO HOW TO WRITE TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

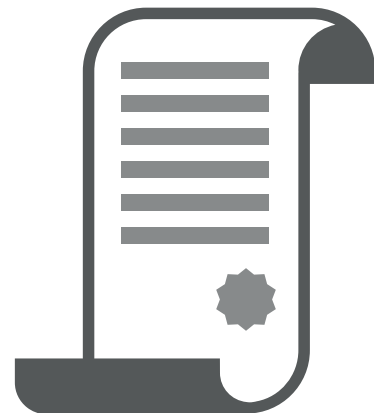
One of the hallmarks of democracy is individuals' ability to share their views, request information or help, and seek to persuade those elected to represent them. One of the most popular ways to communicate with elected officials is through a letter or email.

Personal letters and emails help your message stand out from the crowd of cookie-cutter letters and emails that your elected representatives receive every day. If you want your message to receive more attention, consider writing or printing a letter to send by mail.



## WHY WRITE YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL?

The purpose of writing to your elected representative depends on the outcomes you want to achieve. You may write your elected representative to express your opinion, ask them to act on a specific issue, or obtain public documents.



# Writing to ELECTEDS

## WHEN TO WRITE YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL

If you have time, a letter will probably get the most attention, but a personal email or call can also be effective. A letter is an appropriate way to request information, express your opinion, or convey a call to action. Below are some circumstances in which you should write to your representative:

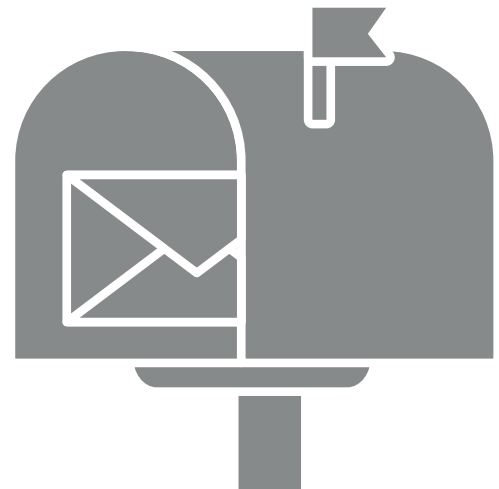
- When you need information or services
- When you want to call attention to an issue or need
- When you want to thank them for addressing an issue or need
- When you want to share your disappointment or frustration with their actions



## HOW TO WRITE TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL

Before you write a message, letter, or email, determine who should receive it. This might be a local council member, a state senator or representative, or a federal senator or representative. Once you know who you're writing to, you can address them properly.

Then, clarify what you're writing about and come up with three points to support your perspective. If you can, think of a personal story that you can share to humanize your message. Explain how the issue affects your life.



# Writing to ELECTEDS

## WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR WRITING?

Here are some rules you should follow when you write a letter to your elected official:

- Keep it under one page or five hundred words if you're writing an email.
- Address only one topic in your letter.
- Include your contact information, including your ID number and mailing address.
- If using email, send it to only one representative at a time.
- State your subject clearly in the subject line or the first sentence of the letter.
- Include facts.
- Avoid personal attacks.

## WHAT TONE SHOULD I USE?

Letters to elected officials should maintain a respectful and more formal writing tone. Recipients may save letters for official reference or, on some occasions, may even read them in front of Congress.

It's important to remember that your elected representatives, whether local or federal, are real human beings. Expressing your respect and appreciation for their time by using a courteous tone will help your message receive the attention it deserves.





# Writing to ELECTEDS

## WHAT IS THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF A LETTER?

Here is an outline you can follow when writing to your elected representative:

- Salutation
- Summary
- Context
- Personal story
- Respectful closing

## WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD BE IN THE LETTER?

If you're writing a printed or handwritten letter, include the date you're writing the letter in the upper right-hand corner. Your first paragraph, the summary paragraph, should outline who you are, why you are writing, and what you'd like them to do. You can include your credentials—your job title or any honors you've been awarded—if they are relevant to the issue you're writing about.

In your second paragraph, give the representative some context. Why is the issue you're writing about important? This way, they know exactly what you'd like them to do about the issue. You might ask them to vote for a particular bill, take action on a pothole in your community, or include funding for your issue in a budget.

Then, provide three of your best supporting points. Those could be data, relevant events, or other key evidence points. You may break up your evidence into a bulleted list after your second paragraph or include them in the paragraph.

In the last paragraph of your letter, help them connect with you. Including a personal story can make your letter more convincing. If you have any personal connection, or you know someone who does, tell a story about it. You might add a transition sentence at the beginning of your fourth paragraph, too.

At the end of your letter, include a polite closing. You may write “sincerely,” “thank you,” or something along those lines. You can sign your name, but be sure to print it beneath your signature as well. You may add your title, if you have one, to your name.

# Example Letter

## #1

The Honorable Representative [Last name]  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative [Last name],

My name is [X], and I reside in your district. I'm writing to urge you to increase funding for the [X agency/program/initiative].

As you may know, the [X agency] is responsible for [X]. With [X event] in our state, I hope you see how important it is to continue funding [X].

Fact 1 about the importance of the program

Fact 2 about the impact in the official's district

Fact 3 about how it impacts those beyond their district

The money invested in [X] contributes to communities across the country, including our state, creating jobs and stimulating the local economy. I personally know many people in my community who will benefit from [X].

I hope you will consider approving an increase in funding for [X]. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact me should you wish to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Contact information]

# Example Letter

## #2

Dear Senator [Last name],

As the director of a nonprofit housing alliance, I am writing to urge you to vote yes on [Bill number].

As you may know, [Bill number] is a bipartisan, budget-neutral proposal to build more affordable housing in the [Region]. Approving this bill authorizes critical funding for your constituents' essential basic housing.

[Bill number] is beneficial for your constituents for the following reasons:

- This bill creates local jobs and stimulates the economy by funding new housing projects.
- This bill will provide housing for more than two thousand families seeking affordable housing, many of whom are not currently housed.
- This bill will increase property tax revenue for the state government.
- Through [personal connection or work or life experience], I know how important it is to provide constituents with affordable and accessible housing. There are thousands of families in our state seeking homes that they can afford to rent. I am urging you to vote yes on [Bill number].

Thank you for taking the time to read this email. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Contact information]

# Example Letter #3

Councilmember [Last name]  
[Work address]

Dear Councilor/Councilmember [Last name],

My name is [Your name], a resident of [Your city]. I'm writing to urge you to increase funding for the highway department in the 2023 budget.

As you may know, potholes and frost heaves have plagued the streets of [Your city]. They've gotten much worse this year and must be repaired before they get worse. Potholes can cause suspension, alignment, axle, oil pan, and tire damage in motor vehicles.

Frost heaves and potholes combined cause over \$200,000 worth of damage each winter in the northeastern United States.

There are more than thirty reported potholes and 150 recurrent frost heaves in [Your city]. It will cost just \$1,350 to repair the reported potholes in [Your city].

I've personally spent more than \$1,500 on car repairs over the past twelve months because of our roads. I urge you to provide funding to fix the potholes. I also would like to request that the city council considers repaving [Road names] to mitigate frost heaves.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your name]  
[Contact information]

# Visitation Rules FOR LEGISLATORS

**MANY STATES HAVE LAWS THAT ALLOW LEGISLATORS TO VISIT PRISONS AND JAILS. HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES.**

## **FLORIDA**

XLVII Fl. Crim. Pro. Corr. 944 § 23

944.23: Persons authorized to visit state prisons.

The following persons shall be authorized to visit at their pleasure all state correctional institutions: The Governor, all Cabinet members, members of the Legislature, judges of state courts, state attorneys, public defenders, and authorized representatives of the commission. No other person not otherwise authorized by law shall be permitted to enter a state correctional institution except under such regulations as the department may prescribe. Permission shall not be unreasonably withheld from those who give sufficient evidence to the department that they are bona fide reporters or writers.

## **PENNSYLVANIA**

61 Pa. Prisons & Parole §§ 3512-13

§ 3512. Definitions.

The following words and phrases when used in this subchapter shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

"Official visitor." The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, President pro tempore and members of the Senate, Speaker and members of the House of Representatives, justices and judges of the courts of record, General Counsel, Attorney General and his deputies and authorized members of the Pennsylvania Prison Society who have been designated as official visitors, whose names shall be given to a chief administrator, in writing, together with the terms of their appointment under its corporate seal.

§ 3513. Visitation.(a) Time.

An official visitor may enter and visit any correctional institution on any and every day, including Sundays, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Visits at any other time shall be made only with the special permission of the chief administrator.



# *Visitation Rules* **FOR LEGISLATORS**

**MANY STATES HAVE LAWS THAT ALLOW LEGISLATORS TO VISIT PRISONS AND JAILS. HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES.**

## **NEW YORK**

N.Y. Corr. § 500-j.

The following persons may visit at pleasure all local correctional facilities: The governor and lieutenant-governor, secretary of state, comptroller and attorney-general, members of the legislature, judges of the court of appeals, justices of the supreme court and county judges, district attorneys and every clergyman or minister, as such terms are defined in section two of the religious corporations law, having charge of a congregation in the county in which such facility is located. No other person not otherwise authorized by law shall be permitted to enter the rooms of a local correctional facility in which convicts are confined, unless under such regulations as the sheriff of the county, or in counties within the city of New York, the commissioner of correction of such city, or in the county of Westchester, the commissioner of correction of such county shall prescribe.

## **GEORGIA**

No laws permit legislators to visit prisons and jails in Georgia.

# *How to Read* **A LAW**

**READING LAWS IS HARD. WE HAVE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO READ THE LAW LIKE A JUDGE OR ELECTED OFFICIAL WILL READ THE LAW.**

## Reading Bills

Legislation generally creates obligations, prohibitions, or permissions for future actions—that is, it says that people must, may not, or may do certain things.

The first tip in reading bills is to read slowly and carefully, because every word matters. If you miss a word, you may end up thinking the law would do something it wouldn't. Pay close attention to all words, but especially words like those on this list:

- And
- Or
- May
- Must
- Will
- Shall
- Not
- Except
- Provided
- Notwithstanding

You might find it helpful to highlight these sorts of words. Sometimes, it also helps to create a diagram or flow chart, to help you understand how the different parts of a provision fit together.

Next, always follow the cross references. Lots of laws refer to other laws, and you can't fully understand what they mean or what they do without looking at those other laws.

# How to Read A LAW

**READING LAWS IS HARD. WE HAVE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO READ THE LAW LIKE A JUDGE OR ELECTED OFFICIAL WILL READ THE LAW.**

## Examples

Let's try a couple of examples. First, let's look at section 1 of the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The words might already be familiar.

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Now, answer who gets which protection, looking back at the text carefully.

1. No state may abridge privileges or immunities of whom?

A. U.S. citizens only      B. Persons

2. No state may deprive whom of life, liberty or property without due process of law?

A. U.S. citizens only      B. Persons

3. No state may deny equal protection of law to whom?

A. U.S. citizens only      B. Persons

If you read the language of the constitutional provision carefully, you answered A, U.S. citizens only, for the privileges and immunities clause, but B, persons, for the due process clause and equal protection clause. A quick or careless reading could lead to serious consequences, such as thinking an immigrant could not bring a case if her equal protection rights were violated.

# How to Read A LAW

**READING LAWS IS HARD. WE HAVE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO READ THE LAW LIKE A JUDGE OR ELECTED OFFICIAL WILL READ THE LAW.**

## Examples

Now, let's look at the statute that explains how to execute a will (make a will official) in Massachusetts.

Section 2-502. Execution of Wills.

(a) Except as provided in subsection (b) and in sections 2-506 and 2-513, a will shall be:

(1) in writing;

(2) signed by the testator or in the testator's name by some other individual in the testator's conscious presence and by the testator's direction; and

(3) signed by at least 2 individuals, each of whom witnessed either the signing of the will as described in paragraph (2) or the testator's acknowledgment of that signature or acknowledgment of the will.

(b) Intent that the document constitute the testator's will can be established by extrinsic evidence.

After you've read the statute carefully, try answering the following questions.

4. If a will is in writing, signed by the testator, and signed by two witnesses, does it also need extrinsic evidence to establish the intent of the testator?

A. Yes B. No

5. If a will is in writing and signed by the testator, but signed by only one witness, is there any chance that it would still be valid?

A. Yes B. No

6. At a minimum, what else do you have to read to understand all the ways a will can be executed in Massachusetts?

# How to Read A LAW

**READING LAWS IS HARD. WE HAVE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO READ THE LAW LIKE A JUDGE OR ELECTED OFFICIAL WILL READ THE LAW.**

## Examples

Massachusetts Example Continued:

If you read the statute carefully, you should have answered no to the first question and yes to the second question. The key word is the first word: *except*. The statute says that a will has to meet all the requirements under (a)(1), (a)(2), and (a)(3), unless it meets the requirements in (b), 2-506, or 2-507.

It's important to notice whether provisions in statutes are “conjunctive” or “disjunctive.” If they are conjunctive, all must be true for the effect to take place. If they are disjunctive, any can be true for the effect to take place. “Except” signals that subsection (b) and subsection (a) are disjunctive, not conjunctive.

The key word “and” in (a)(2), on the other hand, signals that the requirements (a)(1), (a)(2), and (a)(3) are conjunctive—they all must be met for a will to be valid under that subsection.

The answer to the last question is 2-506 and 2-507. You should always follow the cross-references—otherwise you will never know the full answer.

A flow chart of the above provision might look like this:

1. Is the will in writing? –If No, skip to 4. If Yes, go to 2.
2. Did testator sign the will (or have someone else sign it in front of her)? –If No, skip to 4. If Yes, go to 3.
3. Is the will signed by two witnesses? –If No, go to 4. If Yes, will validly executed!
4. Does extrinsic evidence establish that document is testator's will? –If No, go to 5. If Yes, will validly executed!
5. Is 2-506 satisfied? –If No, go to 6. If Yes, will validly executed!
6. Is 2-513 satisfied? –If No, will NOT validly executed! If Yes, will validly executed!



# How to Read A LAW

**READING LAWS IS HARD. WE HAVE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO READ THE LAW LIKE A JUDGE OR ELECTED OFFICIAL WILL READ THE LAW.**

## Interpreting Language

Making sure that you catch all the words in the statute is just the beginning. The next step is figuring out just what those words mean.

Take, for example, a New York City ordinance prohibiting public dance halls from operating without a license. The ordinance defines “public dance hall” as follows:

Any room, place or space in the city in which dancing is carried on and to which the public may gain admission, either with or without the payment of a fee.

Which of the following fall under that definition? For each situation, jot down a few arguments for why it is a public dance hall, and a few arguments for why it isn't.

- A grocery store in the city plays pop music. Sometimes, young children dance to the music while their parents shop. No one in the store tells the children or the parents that dancing is not allowed.

For:

Against:

- A group of tai chi practitioners regularly practice in a public park in the city.

For:

Against:

- A bar in the city has no dance floor, but does have a juke box. People often nod their heads, sway, and tap their feet along with the music. Sometimes they start more active couples dancing, but then the bartender usually tells them to knock it off.

For:

Against:

# How to Read A LAW

**READING LAWS IS HARD. WE HAVE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO READ THE LAW LIKE A JUDGE OR ELECTED OFFICIAL WILL READ THE LAW.**

## Interpreting Language

New York City Example, continued.

- One night, a group of people in a city bar break out in cheering and “victory dances” when their team wins. The bartender joins in.

For:

Against:

- A few graduate students have a party in their apartment in the city. They invite people through a public event on facebook. At the party, they serve beer, play music, and dance.

For:

Against:

- A few young people get on a subway car in the city, announce “It’s showtime,” play music, and give a dance performance.

For:

Against:

After working through these scenarios, return to the original language. Circle every word that is open to multiple interpretations. You may find that you have circled most of the words.

Law professors, attorneys, judges, legal workers, jailhouse lawyers, and law students have debated the best way to interpret law for centuries, and doubtless will for a long time to come. That said, some interpretations are more reasonable and persuasive than others, and judges have developed tools to guide interpretation.

# Glossary & DEFINITIONS

<b>EXECUTIVE BRANCH</b>	the branch of government charged with the execution and enforcement of laws and policies and the administration of public affairs; also called the executive.
<b>LEGISLATIVE BRANCH</b>	the branch of government having the power to make laws; also called the legislature.
<b>JUDICIAL BRANCH</b>	the branch of government charged with the interpretation of laws and the administration of justice; also called the judiciary.
<b>REPRESENTATIVE OR ASSEMBLY MEMBER</b>	an elected representative, usually to the House of Representatives or the Assembly (depending on the state); these representatives usually run every two years and represent smaller districts.
<b>UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES</b>	the House is made up of 435 elected members, divided among the 50 states in proportion to their total population. In addition, there are 6 non-voting members, representing the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and four other territories of the United States: American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.
<b>SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE</b>	the presiding officer of the chamber is the Speaker of the House, elected by the Representatives. He or she is third in the line of succession to the Presidency.

# Glossary & DEFINITIONS

## **SENATOR**

an elected representative, usually to the Senate (may have another name, depending on the state), which has fewer members than the other body; Senators usually have staggered terms and represent much larger areas.

## **UNITED STATES SENATE**

the Senate is composed of 100 Senators, 2 for each state. Until the ratification of the 17th Amendment in 1913, Senators were chosen by state legislatures, not by popular vote. Since then, they have been elected to six-year terms by the people of each state. Senators' terms are staggered so that about one-third of the Senate is up for reelection every two years.

## **ADVOCACY**

the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal; the act or process of advocating something.

## **LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY**

the act or process of supporting or opposing a specific bill

## **PROPOSAL**

a plan or suggestion, especially a formal or written one, put forward for consideration or discussion by others.

## **STRATEGY**

a plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim.

## **POLICY**

a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual

# Glossary & DEFINITIONS

## **PUBLIC POLICY**

What government (any public official who influences or determines public policy, including school officials, city council members, county supervisors, etc.) does or does not do about a problem that comes before them for consideration and possible action.

## **ABOLITION**

“Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal.” - Critical Resistance

## **REFORM**

Make changes in something (typically a social, political, or economic institution or practice) with the intention (usually) to improve it. Many organizers for gender justice are skeptical of “reforms” when offered by prisons or police.

## **CAMPAIGN**

(noun) An organized course of action to achieve a goal.  
(verb) Work in an organized and active way toward a particular goal, typically a political or social one.

## **LIBERATION**

The act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression; release

## **TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE**

A political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm and abuse. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence.



# Glossary & DEFINITIONS

**JAIL** A place of confinement for persons held in lawful custody that is under the jurisdiction of a local government (such as a county) for the confinement of persons awaiting trial or those convicted of minor crimes.

**PRISON** An institution (under state or federal jurisdiction) for confinement of persons convicted of serious crimes.

**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS** The department of local government that is responsible for managing the treatment of people who are convicted of a “crime.”

**GRIEVANCE** Grievances are one way incarcerated people raise issues, especially a complaint about custody treatment, medical treatment, jail or prison policies and procedures, or other related matter; a grievance may include complaints against the substance of policies as well as their application.

**APPEAL** When someone does not agree with the prison’s response to a grievance, they can file an appeal and ask for higher-level staff to review the grievance

**EXHAUSTION REQUIREMENTS** The Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA) requires prisoners to fully exhaust any administrative remedies available to them before filing a lawsuit concerning any aspect of prison life. PLRA passed in 1996 in an effort to curb litigation from prisoners.

# Glossary & DEFINITIONS

## **PRISON RAPE ELIMINATION ACT**

A federal law passed in 2003. The purpose of the act is to “provide for the analysis of the incidence and effects of prison rape in federal, state, and local institutions and to provide information, resources, recommendations and funding to protect individuals from prison rape.

## **TRANSGENDER**

Transgender people (very broadly conceived) are those of us whose gender identity and/or expression that does not or is perceived to not match stereotypical gender norms associated with our assigned gender at birth. In other words, people think that we should be more masculine, more feminine, not have facial hair, have facial hair, not have wombs, have wombs, identify differently, etc.

## **GENDER VARIANT**

A term often used by the medical community to describe individuals who dress, behave, or express themselves in a way that does not conform to dominant gender norms. People outside the medical community tend to avoid this term because it suggests that these identities are abnormal, preferring terms such as gender expansive

## **INTERSEX**

The current term used to refer to people who are biologically between the medically expected definitions of male and female. This can be through variations in hormones, chromosomes, internal or external genitalia, or any combination of any or all primary and/or secondary sex characteristics. While many intersex people are noticed as intersex at birth, many are not. As intersex is about biological sex, it is distinct from gender identity and sexual orientation. An intersex person can be of any gender identity and can also be of any sexual orientation and any romantic orientation.



# ARC Gender Justice

**This resource is available in Spanish, Kreyol, and American Sign Language.**

**Bilten sa a disponib an kreyòl!**

**¡Este boletín está disponible en español!**

We send these free of charge. Anyone can use these resources!

Please write to us about your advocacy. We want to hear about what you're doing, what's working, and how we can help.

## Contact Us

**Alyssa Rodriguez Center for Gender Justice  
P.O. Box 180198  
Brooklyn, NY 11218**

**[www.arcgenderjustice.org](http://www.arcgenderjustice.org)**

