

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR INCARCERATED LOVED ONE

A guide to helping fight for the rights and freedom of our loved ones in prison. Created by Initiate Justice.

When we have a loved one in jail or prison, it can be very stressful and deeply painful. We want to help them in any way that we can, and ultimately, we want them to come home and be successful. The mass incarceration system can make us feel powerless and afraid, and we may not know how we can advocate on behalf of our loved ones inside. Below is a simple guide that can help get you started, outlining 5 different steps you can take to be an advocate for your loved one inside:

FILING A CITIZEN'S COMPLAINT

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This is the first step anyone should take when an issue arises with the way your incarcerated loved one or you are being treated by the prison system. A Citizen's Complaint is an official grievance filed against a CDCR employee when you believe they are violating their rules and will remain in that person's file for 5 years. Citizen's Complaints must be filed within 30 days of the incident you are reporting.

Make sure you fill out the form completely, attach any additional pages, and mail it to the warden. They must respond within 30 days of receipt. You can find the form online here: http://www.forpublicsafety.com/cc_form.pdf

CONTACTING THE OMBUDSMAN

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If, after filing your citizen's complaint, you do not believe the prison administration has adequately addressed the issue, you can contact the Office of the Ombudsman. The role of the Ombudsman is to serve as a point of contact between family members on the outside and CDCR itself to resolve procedural issues that affect you and others at that facility. They help identify patterns of misconduct and can advocate for change.

You can reach the Ombudsman by phone, mail, or online, and you can find the contact information for the Ombudsman that represents each facility here: <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/ombuds/>

CONTACTING YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVES

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Another way to advocate specifically for you or your loved one's individual situation is to contact your State Senator and/or State Assemblymember. In addition to passing laws, state representatives provide casework assistance for the people who live in their districts. You can contact their office and ask for the staff person who works on public safety casework. Explain the situation to them and ask how they can help. In most situations, they will ask if you have already tried to resolve the issue yourself, and if so, they can also contact CDCR directly on your behalf.

You can find your State Senator and State Assemblymember here: <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/>

FIGHTING FOR POLICY CHANGE

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When contacting your state representatives, you can also research how to change the law to help your loved one and others in a similar situation. You can present this as a bill idea to your State Senator and/or Assemblymember, or reach out to an organization like Initiate Justice to help you turn your idea into a legislative bill.

If your idea becomes a bill, you can be lead the way and organize other people to join your campaign to get it passed. Initiate Justice has trainings on how to be an effective legislative advocate that you can join as well.

JOINING INITIATE JUSTICE

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Initiate Justice builds the political power of people directly impacted by mass incarceration. We organize people in prison, formerly incarcerated people, and people with incarcerated loved ones to fight for policy change to bring people home from prison and make communities safer. Our members are part of the solution.

Join our email list and learn how you can be involved in our advocacy campaigns and volunteer events. Visit our web site or email us to learn more at info@initiatejustice.org