



Justice First ACTION GUIDE

April 2018

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Harnessing Grassroots Power in WA

This past March, the ACLU Washington & People Power Activists helped secure a major voting rights victory with the passage of the Washington Voting Rights Act. We know this would not have been possible without the organizing of many passionate volunteers across the state. Thank you for all that you've done! As we gear up to take on criminal justice reform, we will need to keep this grassroots momentum up. Join us in showing up for real justice!

Criminal Justice Reform in WA

We lock up too many people, for too long, often with little thought of the lasting impacts that incarceration has on our communities. Here in Washington, we have the opportunity to create a criminal justice system that is more equitable and effective.

Large majorities of Americans across the country now recognize that being the world leader in the number of people behind bars is a major failure. A democracy that prides itself on freedom and equality should not have large and disproportionate numbers of people of color, people with mental health issues, poor people, and young people in cages. Fortunately, lawmakers are taking notice, especially at the state and local levels.

This year, we're kicking off a long-term strategy to end mass incarceration in America, with Washington leading the way. In the 2018 electoral cycle and 2019 legislative session, we want to build momentum with wins on three issues lawmakers need to hear from their constituents on:

1. **Repealing the death penalty**, which is very costly, is not applied fairly, and fails either to provide swift and certain justice or to deter crime;
2. **Decriminalizing driving with a suspended license in the third degree**, which disproportionately impacts people of color, young people, and poor people;
3. And advocating for a **pragmatic approach to teen sexting**, for which harsh criminal penalties can derail a young person's life for engaging in common adolescent behaviors.

How You Can Light the Fire

In order to build a robust grassroots movement calling for criminal justice reform in WA, we will need volunteers just like you to light the spark in every part of the state!

Our goals

1. ACLU supporters, members, and activists go to the ballot box with criminal justice at the forefront of their mind.
2. Candidates and elected officials understand our priority issues and see that their constituents care about them, too.
3. ACLU Washington activists build personal relationships with their state legislative candidates and elected officials, and commit to work together past election day and into next year's legislative session.

Our strategy and tactics

Our campaign has three main areas for action: research, grassroots organizing, and engaging with elected officials and candidates. Before we discuss getting a team together and hosting a kick-off event, take a moment to familiarize yourself with the actions we envision for each of these areas.

- 1. Researching our state Senate and House candidates on ACLU priority issues.** What's amazing about the level of People Power engagement across Washington is that with your help, we can create and share in-depth assessments of almost every candidate running for the state House of Representatives or Senate. We've created a research worksheet to guide your work, and we appreciate you keeping our criminal justice reform priorities top of mind while you fill them in. This research will help your own local work building personal relationships with the elected officials who represent you in government, and what you share with us will get shared back with the wider ACLU Washington community as part of our get out the vote efforts. We will also share this research with allied organizations and coalition partners to

inform and strengthen our combined strategies for the 2019 legislative session.

2. Get commitments to vote from ACLU supporters, and get out the vote!

- **Commit to Vote Cards**

Next, we'll want activists to turn their focus outward and begin mobilizing voters around ending mass incarceration through grassroots outreach. Gathering commit to vote cards establishes connection, provides activists an opportunity to educate and engage voters, and builds a list of folks we know we should follow up with in our fall get out the vote efforts.

- **Voter Contact**

We're looking forward to working with you to increase the number of voters who mail in their ballots, through phone banks, text banks, etc.!

3. Engaging with elected officials and candidates on ACLU priority issues.

- **Candidate Forums**

Activists can attend candidate forums and ask the candidates direct questions about how they plan to help end mass incarceration.

- **Campaign Events**

Similarly, activists can attend campaign events, taking every opportunity to bring up mass incarceration and options for candidates to end it once they're in office.

- **In-person Meetings**

Meeting with representatives in person to chat about their stances on criminal justice reform and the policies they'll support builds relationship and accountability.

Getting started: hosting an organizing meeting

Now that you know more about the exciting ways you can help advance criminal justice reform, let's take a step back and talk about how to get started. The first step is to hold a kickoff meeting in your community. This gives you a chance to identify who is passionate about the issue and how you can work together!

Step One- Get started by posting your event to the map:

1. Decide when and where you can host your event. Good places to host include a coffee shop, a library meeting space, and your home. Feel free to get creative!
2. Visit our website at peoplepower.org/JusticeFirstWA
3. Scroll down to the "Take Action" section and click "Host an Event"
4. Submit details for your kickoff meeting.
5. Now it's time to invite others to join! Share the event with your networks. We will also help get the word out to our volunteers.

Step Two- Put together your meeting agenda. Here's a sample agenda you can use!

Sample Agenda (60 mins):

1. Let everyone get settled (5 mins)
2. Welcome & introductions (5 mins)
 - Send around a sign in sheet to collect everyone's full name, phone number, and email address.
3. Overview (5 mins)
 - Why we need to reform our criminal justice system in WA (Hint: you can use the first few pages of the action guide or check out the website for compelling facts.)
4. Planning for research project: Where do your reps stand? (10 min)
 - Does anyone already have a sense of any local reps' position on issues related to criminal justice ?
 - Review the issue backgrounders provided by the ACLU of Washington
 - Review the research worksheet provided by the ACLU of Washington and delegate to your team.
5. Planning for Commit to Vote card collection (10 min)
 - Review the plan for Commit to Vote card collection (below)
 - Decide on your plan of action -- will you have an event to collect CTV cards? Will you set a goal of how many cards to collect from your network?

- Decide who will be point on requesting CTV cards from ACLU WA, posting your next action to the People Power map, and what your next steps are.
- 6. Establish communication norms (5 min)
 - How often do you all want to meet? We suggest 1-2x/ month
 - What days generally work for people?
 - How would you like to communicate between meetings? Email, private Facebook group, etc.
 - Make sure everyone filled out the sign in sheet.
- 7. Review next steps and responsibilities (5 min)
 - Make sure everyone is prepared to accomplish whatever research they agreed to spearhead.
 - Decide on your next meeting time and who can host.
 - Take a picture with your team to share with the ACLU of Washington and People Power!
- 8. Closing and thank you (3 min)

Step Three - Host your meeting using this Action Guide as a resource.

Spring & Summer priorities

Research project

Now that you have identified other ACLU supporters in your area who are ready to take action on criminal justice and get out the vote for Washington in 2018, you can all get started conducting research on your state legislative candidates. Once you have the lay of the land, you'll be able to launch a strategic grassroots campaign, and ACLU Washington will be able to share what you've learned with the wider ACLU community and to our coalition partners.

In your research project we want you to answer all questions [outlined in this worksheet](#). In Washington, the filing deadline for candidates is May 18, so check back after this date to make sure you're researching everyone who is running in your district.

We know that research can be a daunting task at times, especially for those who haven't done it before, so [here are some best practices that can aid you in this task](#).

Below are some of the **suggested tasks** people can take on during the research process:

- ❑ Look for previous newspaper articles and Letters to the Editor (LTEs) (online)
- ❑ Check out the candidates' internet presence
- ❑ Connect with local activist groups working on criminal and racial justice
- ❑ Research donations made to the candidate's previous campaigns, noting those people and orgs that consistently make large donations. ([This info can be found here](#))
- ❑ Divide each few sections of the template research doc
- ❑ Have someone be point for making sure your team completes the research project

When are you done with your research **email all of your completed answers to justicefirst@aclu-wa.org.**

If you can take on more research projects, please reach out to us and we'll give you a few more districts!

Gathering commit to vote (CTV) cards

Asking your personal community

Your friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors are likely to support criminal justice reform -- because fairness and justice are Washington values.

Who you can ask to sign CTV cards

- Colleagues at work
- Friends you see over the weekend
- Casual acquaintances at the gym, daycare drop off, book club, or any other activities
- Bartenders, corner store clerks, or baristas at your favorite spot

Tip: If you're feeling shy or stuck on who to ask, first, remind yourselves how important ending mass incarceration will be to your community. Second, make a list of 20 people you will challenge yourself to ask. They may say no, and that's ok! However, many will say yes!

How

- Be prepared with materials
 - Keep a stack of CTV cards in your purse or backpack
 - Keep a few pens on you as well
- Ask directly
 - To make a strong ask: explain the problem, give context, share your personal story, explain the solution, and why this action will get towards the solution. Finally, make the ask directly and unapologetically!
 - Sample script: *Do you know that in Washington, black defendants are three times more likely to be sentenced to death than white defendants who committed the same crime? And that many of our laws disproportionately affect people of color, young people, and poor people? Washington's criminal justice policies don't touch all families and communities equally, and this has severe consequences for hundreds of thousands of American families. Can you sign this postcard to commit to vote for criminal justice reform in the upcoming elections?*

Asking the wider community with street canvassing

Street canvassing is a great way to collect multiple CTV cards and show your elected officials the massive support their constituents have for ACLU issues! This is a long tried and tested technique for effective grassroots organizing and driving change. You can collect CTV cards in your own time, in passing to strangers, at events with families and friends, but you can also hold a street canvassing event and multiply your outreach in a fraction of the time!

Note: this may be an event that you plan as a group during an organizing meeting.

Holding a street canvassing event:

Post your event to the [map](#):

- When choosing an event location, consider the volume of people at a particular location.
- Examples of great places to petition:
 - **Big Events**, such as rallies, concerts, or conventions. These events might require express permission, a permit, and/or payment, but usually that is not the case.

- **Heavily Populated Areas**, such as farmer’s markets, downtown areas, or college campuses. These locations are often on or near public property, so you’re not required to obtain a permit. You are allowed to gather signatures on public property without a permit or permission. This includes sidewalks, parks, and libraries.
- **Speaking Events**, such as civic or faith-based must be planned ahead of time. You must receive permission from the event organizer to present and collect postcards. An effective tactic is passing out postcards while talking to the crowd.

❑ **Invite friends, networks and family to join:**

- ❑ Send a link by text and email from the map and ask people to RSVP!
- ❑ Post to your social media and ask people to RSVP and share
- ❑ Call your friends directly and ask if they can be there

❑ **Prep your materials:**

- ❑ Multiple clipboards
- ❑ CTV cards
- ❑ Printed script for volunteers
- ❑ Pens
- ❑ (optional) Awesome signs

Important Things to Remember While Petitioning

- **Start with a brief training.** Remind everyone why you are street canvassing today, have everyone reflect on mass incarceration and other ACLU issues they care about. Review the main talking points (see first part of this guide!) and the tips below.
- **Smile, wave and make eye contact!**
- **Ask everyone who approaches/walks nearby to sign:** “Can you sign a postcard to commit to vote for criminal justice reform?”
- **Make sure to get their contact info:** “And make sure to put down your phone and email so we can keep you updated on this important campaign”

Sample Script

Q1: Can you sign a postcard to commit to vote for criminal justice reform in the upcoming elections?

If YES - hand them the postcard and pen to sign, and say thanks!

If MAYBE - pick a talking point to share why this is important, then Q2
If NO - say thanks

Q2: Did you know that Washington has spent over a billion dollars to enforce laws against driving with a suspended license?

If YES – Then sign our postcard to commit to vote in the upcoming elections and change our criminal justice system! (hand them the postcard and make sure it is properly filled out). When finished, proceed to Q3

If NO – proceed to Q3

Q3: Can we count on you to help get the word out about this effort? We'd love to have you join our team!

If YES - Great! I'll take down your contact information, and you can also check out our website at peoplepower.org/JusticeFirstWA to learn more.

If NO – Say “thank you” and ask them to check out the campaign website

Looking forward: fall & winter priorities

In late summer and fall, activists will be attending candidate forums and community events across the state where they'll be getting candidates on the record on criminal justice reform. We'll need your help! We will be providing resources on how you can engage directly with your candidates at campaign events and in person meetings. We also will be communicating with the list of voters that you've help build in what we call "GOTV," or get out the vote. One part of GOTV will be mailing back the commit to vote postcards to everyone who filled them out to remind them of their commitment. We will also be calling, texting, and maybe even knocking on doors of our ACLU supporters across the state to remind them to vote, and we'll need your help to make those calls, host phonebanks, and train others on how to make sure all ACLU supporters, members, and activists in Washington are voting in November with their ACLU values.

Later this summer we'll have another update webinar when we pivot to the next phase of the campaign, and we will keep in touch throughout this year!

Resources and contact information

Website and action hub: peoplepower.org/JusticeFirstWA

Action Guide - check it out here!

Request CTV cards - email us at justicefirst@aclu-wa.org with how many CTV cards your group needs and your upcoming actions.

Email back your research and request additional districts to research at justicefirst@aclu-wa.org.

Additional questions? Email us at justicefirst@aclu-wa.org.