

# How To Do Jail Support

*Adapted and updated by the Radical Know Your Rights Collective from a guide created for #ShutDownCityHall-NYC/Abolition Square in 2016, which was adapted from JailSupportNYC's and Mutant Legal's guides from 2014*

This guide is written from love, care, and NYC experience. It is meant to be useful in three scenarios: (1) you have a designated jail support team; and/or (2) NLG legal observers are on site; and/or (3) you are relying on yourself. It's meant to be used for large or small actions.

Jail support works best as a collective mutual aid process. Help each other. Self-organize. Communicate to split tasks and avoid duplicating efforts. Be strategic - you will be engaged in an emotional, sometimes scary, time limited, lower stakes hostage negotiations. Your goal is to get our comrades free as soon as possible, to support and comfort them when they get out, and to protect them throughout their arrest, time in custody.

Handling jail support is easy and important, so EVERYONE can and should be prepared to jump in and do it. In fact, you only need 1 person, plus a buddy or two, when jail support starts. And if you do jail support once, you are already on your way to becoming an expert, and most of the work doesn't require any legal training. IF National Lawyers' Guild (NLG) Legal Observers (LOs), identified with bright green hats and/or and your legal/jail support team are onsite – great. They'll assist. But even if they are at your action, Legal Observers and your jail support crew might not be present for every arrest.

Finally, **jail support is part of the action: the action isn't over until everyone arrested is free.** #Solidarity. In the language of Assata Shakur, these are your duties, as you love and protect each other during jail support:

**find out who is arrested // find out where they are taken // alert your jail support teams (if any) // get to the precinct // get info from the precinct // wait and update folks offsite // (possible) prepare for more jail support at Central Booking // support people who are freed! // take care of yourself!**

## **1. WHO: FIGURE OUT WHO IS ARRESTED (and how many).**

It's vital to get full legal (on governmental ID) names of folks arrested in order to track – and not lose – them in the system. If people's names have not been gathered in advance, getting everyone's name is a collective process: witnesses and National Lawyers' Guild (NLG) Legal Observers (LOs) can ask the arrestees for their names. Sometimes livestreamers gather that info. Arrestees' friends can provide names. So, be aware and ask around for their names. Write the names down. Or record people saying their names. The list of names can be supplemented, if needed, by co-arrestees as they are released. At a minimum, it is helpful to get an accurate count of how many people are arrested.

Full legal names should be given to LOs, anyone coordinating jail support, or called into the NLG (212-679-6018) – if NLG is supporting the action. Full legal name + time + place of arrest is the key information; dates of birth are also helpful, but not crucial.

Be aware that being physically close to people as they are being arrested or are in police custody creates some risk of arrest (for interfering, for being in the street, etc.); be cautious and intentional and protect yourself, as you are helping others.

Also be aware that NYPD uses arrests to distract you and break up actions. If you've got 1-3 people present to help the person arrested – great. Everyone else can and should continue with the action.

## **2. WHERE: FIND OUT WHERE OUR COMRADES ARE BEING TAKEN.**

At the time of the arrests, particularly if there are no LOs or jail support team present (who might know in advance arrestees' destination), try to find out the jail (i.e., precinct or 1 Police Plaza) the arrestees will be transported to. It is necessary to talk to the police for this purpose, and most of the officers will not immediately know the destination, so this can take patience and observation. If your action has a police liaison onsite, that will be their task, but with awareness of their work, feel free to assist them. Getting this info often requires waiting until the transport van or bus is about to leave. If anyone has a bike, they can – if they feel safe doing so – follow the van. Sometimes people who have been arrested can access their phones and text their location to friends, so ask around for location info, too. Sometimes you have to guess and call precinct after precinct to find our comrades. (Reminder to coordinate!)

Addresses and telephone numbers for precincts are easy to find online: just google, for example "7th precinct nypd" or use NYPD's search tool by address: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/bureaus/patrol/find-your-precinct.page>. (TIP: Cops, including Strategic Response Group, use 1 Police Plaza for mass arrests downtown and frequently use the 7th Precinct for a smaller number of protester arrests in Manhattan, such as 5-10.)

## **3. SHARE: ALERT NLG/LEGAL-JAIL SUPPORT TEAM.**

If LOs or a jail support team isn't present, and they are supporting your action, get info about the folks arrested to coordinators or directly to NLG (tel 212-679-6018). (Try to reduce the number of calls to NLG by coordinating who will call.) Do not tweet or publicize arrestees' information before they've explicitly consented to that. You can tweet using #JailSupport and provide basic info, like location and number of arrests and the precinct they were transported to. DON'T SNITCH and release on social media, or anywhere, any information, photo, videos, audio, anything that could be incriminating. Even private texts can be obtained and used by prosecutors in a criminal investigation or case against those arrested and charged.

#### 4. **GO: GET TO THE PRECINCT.**

Try to get to the precinct in time to see arrestees being taken out of wagons and into the building (this doesn't work at 1 Police Plaza, since access to the building is very limited.) One person on-site should be the point person for communicating with off-site jail support workers and the NLG, and for keeping paperwork in order. Don't duplicate effort, if that can be avoided! If you can see wagons unloading, take a headcount & try to get/confirm names. Note any issues like injury; folks in emotional or psychological distress; or people you know are undocumented, might be misgendered, or who have medical conditions that need timely monitoring or medication. Pass this info along to NLG, jail support workers, any lawyer you've connected with, and/or to whomever is taking lead on supporting those arrested.

When the action is winding down, encourage folks you join you at the precinct. Remember: **the action isn't over until everyone arrested is free.**

Get (or ask others to bring) water, snacks for diverse diets (vegan, gluten-free, common food allergies), coffee, and cigarettes. Beyond that, shoelaces, belts, extra clothing, and basic medical supplies (bandaids, ice packs, etc) are also a good idea. These supplies are helpful for you, as you wait, and for our comrades when they are released.

#### 5. **BE STRATEGIC.**

Ideally a minimum of 2-5 people should be at precinct jail support together, with at least one camera to film any interactions with cops. More can be better at 1 Police Plaza – you'll be further from the building. No matter how many people are there, the important thing is to keep a low profile – give the cops as few reasons to hassle you as possible. If cops order you to stand up, disperse, etc., do it. Our actions outside a precinct can affect our comrades' treatment inside; we typically can't get them released quicker, but we can get them held longer. (Cops. Are. Assholes.)

#### 6. **ASK IN PRECINCT.**

You can try to get information from the precinct: (1) confirming who is there (you need to know the names) and (2) finding out how each arrestee will be released, either from the precinct (with a Desk Appearance Ticket (DAT) or summons) or transferred to Central Booking. Your collecting info will often supplement info a lawyer will get by calling the precinct, so share what you learn with LOs, off-site jail support (if you have that support), or a lawyer who is working with you.

Wait on entering the precinct until you and the cops have had enough time to get complete info (names, etc.). Limit the number of people asking for information and how many times you ask for info (because Cops. Are. Assholes. and can decide to shut you out if they feel hassled). Be prepared for the precinct to refuse to give you information. (They must give info to the lawyer for the people they've arrested.)

Be strategic about getting the info you want: act polite and professional, and consider sending someone who their prejudices will consider respectable and sympathetic: "normal" looking to a cop, privileged with race, gender, class, age, etc. Relying on these settler norms sucks, but when our people are in cages, we need to use every trick possible to help them out.

#### 7. **WAIT AND UPDATE** NLG/LEGAL-JAIL SUPPORT TEAM + FRIENDS & FAMILY.

As long as there are protesters in a precinct, there should be jail support outside it. Note any transfers to Central Booking or a hospital. Keep a running tally of who is still in your precinct. If someone is transferred to a hospital (which is done by ambulance) you should immediately call the NLG (212-679-6018) (if they are supporting) and make note of that on your running tally of arrestees.

Especially if arrestees' friends, families, and lawyers are aware of the arrest and can be reached, it can be helpful for 1 to 2 people to handle those communications – and little else. It can be a lot of work to keep everyone who's interested in our comrades in the loop – from friends, family, organizers, press, lawyers, co-arrestees, folks wanting to join jail support. While relying on one person to handle communications keeps things consistent and centralized, it can be overwhelming. Ask to help and for help, especially if there are many arrestees.

#### 8. **THEY'RE FREE:** RELEASES FROM PRECINCT/1PP - SUPPORT AND GATHER INFO.

Hurray! Welcome people released with what they need - ASK! As with everything, individual needs and consent are paramount: someone might need a hug and a phone call and someone might need a quiet smoke alone to process.

To help the arrestees with legal support going forward, have 1-2 (or more) people collect the following information from them before they leave the area: government-ID name, contact info (email and phone), arrest number, charges, appearance date, appearance court address (most of that information will be on the slip (DAT or summons) they were given by the cops). Photograph the slip they get, if at all possible. This information will allow NLG or other attorneys offer them legal representation for their next appearance date. Keep this information strictly confidential: it should go directly from jail support to the NLG or the attorney, and, of course, respect people's wishes if they do not want to provide information.

If anyone was injured, document their injuries as soon as possible, with their consent – it can be important for court cases. That documentation should then go directly to the person who was injured or their lawyer. Encourage folks not to discuss the circumstances of their arrest with anyone except their lawyer and especially not to post anything potentially incriminating online.

**9. THEY'RE HELD OVERNIGHT: NOTE ANY TRANSFERS TO CENTRAL BOOKING.**

We will want to know the legal names of people who are transferred to Central Booking (addresses below), in order to track them there. When a person is brought to Central Booking, they will be arraigned – they appear before a judge and receive charges, if any. This takes usually at least 12-15 hours and, rarely, up to 2 days. Arraignment courts are in session 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. If someone is arrested in the evening, it's common they get out no earlier than 4-5 p.m. the following day.

**10. MORE JAIL SUPPORT AT CENTRAL BOOKING.**

Central Booking is at the Criminal Court building in the borough of the arrest. At Manhattan's 100 Centre St, arraignments are held in courtrooms on the ground floor. (See the bottom of this guide for other boroughs' locations.) We will want to begin jail support again before our comrades are arraigned. It's okay to wait inside the courthouse, and eating, drinking, and electronic device use are commonly okay outside the courtroom, unless court officers prohibit it, but it's best to remain quiet to avoid being kicked out by court cops. If family or friends are present, be sure to support them as much as possible. You must go through a metal detector and bag x-ray to get into the courthouse, so be mindful of what you bring with you.

This is frequently a long process. Encourage people who participated in the action to join you. Set up shift. **The action is still on as long as people who were arrested remain in jail.**

**10 (a). Track Docketing at Central Booking.**

If you have off-site jail support, NLG, or lawyers (if you have their contact info), choose 1 or 2 people to continuously provide them information. That info is (1) if any names are on the “docket sheets” which the clerks post on the wall adjacent to the courtroom (behind seating); (2) if the court clerks (behind a door near the seating area outside the arraignment courtroom) tell you their paperwork is ready. This can be a long process. People get on the docket in shifts. The clerks can tell you when the next set of cases will be posted. If you don't know where to get the information you need, ask.

When our comrades' cases are docketed or posted, they will be arraigned and brought before a judge soon (in 30–90 mins)! Be sure this information gets disseminated right away to any off-site jail support, NLG, lawyers, friends/family, and other supporters. If there is no-one on call, that's fine, too. Your comrades will appreciate seeing anyone they know in the courtroom. For large actions, post this update using the #JailSupport tag for people following online – they're interested; trust us! – though remember not to publicize folks' names without their consent.

After cases are docketed, if some or all people will be represented by public defenders (and not NLG or private attorneys), then try to connect with the Legal Aid attorneys inside the courtroom, to tell them that there are supporters at the courthouse. The Legal

Aid attorneys will sit just beyond the courtroom wall dividing the seating and the judge's area. They are busy, so wait until they have time to talk to you. (Just like at the precinct, this requires some manipulation, because court officers are cops, and again, someone able to seem "professional," "respectable," "normal" to their prejudices will likely have the most success.)

NOTE: Legal Aid public defenders are highly skilled lawyers who do not work for the State and are usually aligned with protesters' goals. They will handle our comrades' arraignments for free, and continue to represent them, if they wish. While we there might be efforts to have NLG-affiliated attorneys available for legal representation (NLG is dedicated to handling protesters' cases), using Legal Aid is often an equally great option, especially if offered to you before an NLG attorney can get to the courthouse.

ANOTHER NOTE: This guide does not include detailed information about arranging for or paying bail. When arrests are planned or anticipated, organizers often plan in advance for the availability of bail funds. It is unusual for bail to be set for civil disobedience or typical arrests at protests. Felony charges, open warrants, combined with an arrest history can all lead to bail being set by the court. Supporters being at court can help lower or avoid bail.

**10 (b). Attending arraignment hearings.**

Send in as many people as possible into the courtroom when our comrades are being arraigned. (1-2 ppl might need to stay with everyone's belongings in the waiting area.) You cannot use electronic devices. You must not talk. Anything considered disruptive by the court officers could make things harder for our comrades facing prosecutors and a judge. Our comrades will appreciate seeing you at their hearings.

**11. THEY'RE FREE: RELEASES FROM CENTRAL BOOKING - SUPPORT AND GATHER INFO.**

See #8, above :) If any of the people released need to get their property from a precinct, offer to accompany them there. If your comrade's case continues past arraignment, ask if they'd like a reminder about their next court date, and write down the day, time, and location.

**12. SELFCARE. Jail supporters deserve support, too.**

Jail support can be stressful & emotionally draining, particularly when there are mass arrests; when we've been out on jail support for a long time; when the weather is bad; when the cops are giving us a hard time; or when we've witnessed violence. It is okay to step away for a while or ask for someone else to take over. If you feel yourself slipping, consider removing yourself before you lose it. After doing jail support, try to do whatever it is you do to return to an even keel, and ask the people around you for support if you need it. Dress appropriately for the weather (courthouses can be cold), wear sunscreen if you'll be outside, and remember to eat and drink.

**Central Booking locations** (courts are in session 7 days a week, 9am-1am):

- Manhattan: 100 Centre Street
- Brooklyn: 120 Schermerhorn
- Bronx: 265 East 161st Street
- Queens: 125-01 Queens Blvd
- Staten Island: 67 Targee Street