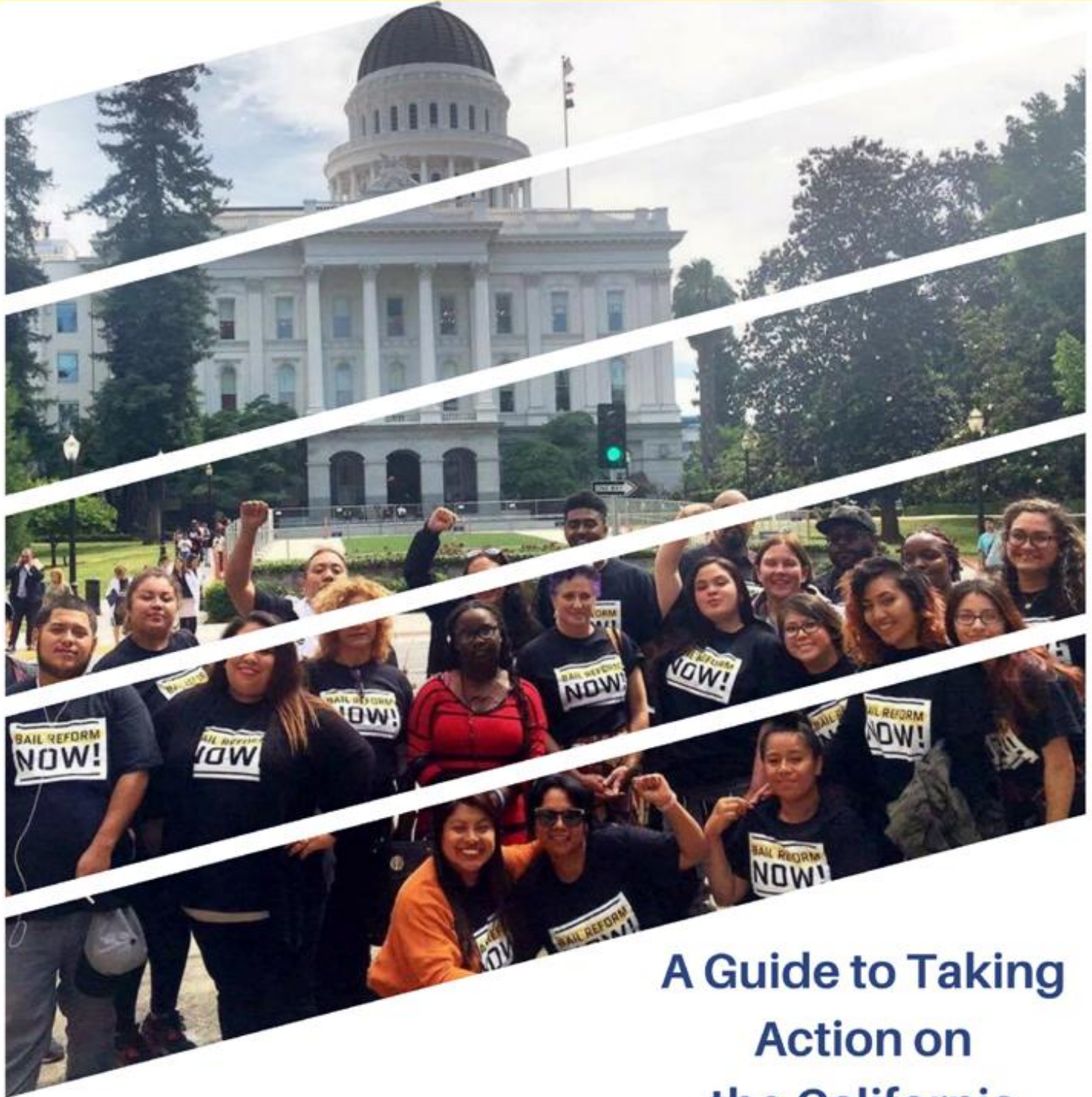


Bail Reform Activist Toolkit



A Guide to Taking
Action on
the California
Money Bail Reform
Act

Introduction

Released July, 2017

Thank you for taking action on bail reform!

On any given day, over 60 percent of people in jail in California are awaiting trial or sentencing, and many remain detained simply because they cannot afford to post money bail. The results can be devastating. Individuals who spend even a few days in pretrial detention - let alone weeks or even months - can end up losing their jobs, their homes, and their children. The current bail system disproportionately impacts low-income people and people of color and allows the for-profit bail industry to profit off of people's freedom.

The goal of the money bail reform campaign is to safely and significantly reduce the number of people who are held in jail before their trial. SB10 (authored by Robert Hertzberg) and AB42 (authored by Rob Bonta), known as the California Money Bail Reform Act, were first introduced in December 2016. The Act will require, among other things, that pretrial services conduct individualized assessments and that no one is incarcerated solely on inability to pay.

The bill is co-sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union of California, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, the California Public Defenders Association, Californians for Safety and Justice, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Essie Justice Group, SEIU California, Silicon Valley De-bug, and the Western Center on Law and Poverty.

Purpose of the Toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide individuals, activists, impacted people, organizations, and anyone who is interested in bail reform with tools to take action on the Campaign to Reform Money Bail. While actions you can take are not limited to those in this toolkit, it is intended to provide examples of actions you can take and provide the resources to implement them. The campaign would not be successful without the leadership and support of community members and organizations.

How to Use this Toolkit

The actions within this toolkit are organized by the amount of time or level of commitment required. Some activities are geared towards educating others about the need for bail reform while other activities focus on engaging with legislators and holding decision-makers accountable. These actions are flexible enough that they can be combined or conducted individually depending on skills, interests, and resources.

The first step to being an advocate is to educate yourself about the issues that are important to you. Bail reform resources, included in the beginning of the toolkit, provide background information about our current criminal justice system.

Some of these actions may require you to engage in conversations about the criminal justice system as a system of oppression that targets communities that are often marginalized. If you are a member of a community that has been affected or you personally have been affected by the money bail system, you already possess lived experience that will inform your work.

However, as you learn about racial and economic disparities within the criminal justice system, it may be important to check in with yourself and understand your own privilege – especially if you have not been impacted by the money bail system. An important step for advocates before beginning a conversation that involves discussing race and ethnicity is to understand and acknowledge their own feelings and biases. To learn more about this, check out the resources listed in the appendix.

The current money bail system has wreaked devastating, long-lasting damage on Californians, particularly low-income people and people of color. Social justice work is most effective when we can help others understand how this issue affects all Californians, since at any given day, at least 46,000 Californians are incarcerated even though they have not been sentenced to jail. Many of them are there simply because they cannot afford to pay bail. **It is important to remember that people with lived experience are experts and should be respected as such.**

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Bail Reform Resources

Below is a list of resources on bail reform and the pretrial system from which you may want to draw.

[Bail Reform California - Campaign Website](#)

[Bail Fail: Why the U.S. Should End the Practice of Using Money Bail](#)

Justice Policy Institute

[Moving Beyond Money: A Primer on Bail Reform](#)

Harvard Law School Criminal Justice Policy Program

[Pretrial Justice: How Much Does It Cost?](#)

Pretrial Justice Institute

[“Not in it for Justice”: How California’s Pretrial Detention and Bail System Unfairly Punishes Poor People](#)

Human Rights Watch

[Detaining the Poor: How Money Bail Perpetuates an Endless Cycle of Poverty and Jail Time](#)

Prison Policy Initiative

[Race and Bail in America](#)

Pretrial Justice Institute

[Coming Out of Concrete Closets: A Report on Black and Pink’s National LGBTQ Prisoner Survey](#)

Black & Pink

[For Better or for Profit: How the Bail Bonding Industry Stands in the Way of Fair and Effective Pretrial Justice](#)

Justice Policy Institute

[Selling off Our Freedom: How Insurance Corporations Have Taken over Our Bail System](#)

Color of Change and the American Civil Liberties Union

A Guide to Social Media

Social media is a great tool to help spread the word about money bail reform. You can organize Tweet chats, coordinate large-scale social media blasts, or communicate directly with your representatives on social media. Tweet using the hashtag #BailReform and #SB10.

Sample Tweets About Bail Reform

Every yr, California jails thousands of people before their day in court, all because they can't pay bail & buy their freedom #BailReform

California's money bail system prioritizes wealth over community safety & well-being, creating a 2-tiered system of justice #BailReform

Behind many 'mom & pop' bail bonds agencies is a huge insurance corporation out to profit from suffering <https://www.aclu.org/blog/speak-freely/behind-many-mom-and-pop-bail-bonds-shops-huge-insurance-corporation-out-profit> #BailReform

Money bail tears communities apart & fuels already egregious racial disparities in the justice system. Our communities need #BailReform now!

The bail industry preys on low-income ppl of color: takes \$9 million/yr from black & Latino fams in SF <https://ww2.kqed.org/news/2017/06/28/report-bail-hits-people-of-color-hard-strips-15-million-a-year-from-s-f-residents/> #BailReform

Money bail keeps ppl in jail before their day in court because they can't afford to buy their freedom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7B4jzZvuH8> #BailReform

Money bail boosts bail insurance corporations' profits at expense of millions of low-income people of color #BailReform

Tweet your Representative

You can organize your community to Tweet your representatives. First, [locate your representative here](#).

Sample Tweet:

Freedom shouldn't be for sale. CA needs [#BailReform](#). Please vote yes on [#SB10](#), @_____.

Representative Twitter Handles

Below is a list of California representatives and their Twitter handles. Note: If your

representative does not have a Twitter handle, use a hashtag with their first and last name (#FirstNameLastName)

California Senate

Representative	Twitter Handle
Allen, Benjamin	@BenAllenCA
Anderson, Joel	@JoelAndersonCA
Atkins, Toni G.	@ToniAtkins
Bates, Patricia C.	@SenatorPatBates
Beall, Jim	@JimBealljr
Berryhill, Tom	@TomBerryhill
Bradford, Steven	@SteveBradford
Cannella, Anthony	@AnthonyCannella
de León, Kevin	@KdeLeon
Dodd, Bill	@BillDoddCA
Fuller, Jean	@JeanFuller
Gaines, Ted	@TedGaines
Galgiani, Cathleen	@SenatorGalgiani
Glazer, Steven M.	@Steve_Glazer
Hernandez, Ed	@DrEdHernandez
Hertzberg, Robert M.	@hertzleLA
Hill, Jerry	#JerryHill
Hueso, Ben	#BenHueso
Jackson, Hannah-Beth	@SenHannahBeth
Lara, Ricardo	@SenRicardoLara
Leyva, Connie M.	@SenatorLeyva
McGuire, Mike	@iilike_mike
Mendoza, Tony	@MrTonyMendoza
Mitchell, Holly J.	@HollyJMitchell
Monning, Bill	@BillMonning
Moorlach, John M. W.	@JohnMWMoorlach
Morrell, Mike	@MikeMorrellGOP
Newman, Josh	@JoshNewmanCA
Nguyen, Janet	@JanetNguyenCA
Nielsen, Jim	@CASenatorJim
Pan, Richard	@DrPanMD
Portantino, Anthony J.	@Portantino
Roth, Richard D.	@GeneralRoth
Skinner, Nancy	@NancySkinnerCA
Stern, Henry I.	@HenrySternCA
Stone, Jeff	@SenJeffStone
Vidak, Andy	@SenAndyVidak
Wieckowski, Bob	@BobWieckowskiCA
Wiener, Scott D.	@Scott_Wiener
Wilk, Scott	@ScottWilkCA

California Assembly

Representative	Twitter Handle
Acosta, Dante	@AsmDanteAcosta
Aguilar-Curry, Cecilia M.	@AsmAguilarCurry
Allen, Travis	@JoinTravisAllen
Arambula, Joaquin	@drarambulaAD31
Baker, Catharine B.	@CBakerAD16
Berman, Marc	@Marc_Berman
Bigelow, Frank	@FrankBigelowCA
Bloom, Richard	@RichardBloom
Bocanegra, Raul	@AsmBocanegra
Bonta, Rob	@RobBonta
Brough, William P.	@Bill_Brough.
Burke, Autumn R.	@AutumnBurke
Caballero, Anna M.	@AMCab2
Calderon, Ian C.	@IanAD57
Cervantes, Sabrina	@AsmCervantes
Chau, Ed	@EdChau49
Chávez, Rocky J.	@AsmRocky
Chen, Phillip	@PhillipChenCA
Chiu, David	@DavidChiu
Choi, Steven S.	@irvinespeaker
Chu, Kansen	@KansenChu
Cooley, Ken	@KenCooley
Cooper, Jim	@AsmJimCooper
Cunningham, Jordan	@Cunning_Jordan
Dababneh, Matthew	@MattDababneh
Dahle, Brian	@BrianDahleCA
Daly, Tom	#TomDaly
Eggman, Susan Talamantes	@SusanEggman
Flora, Heath	@HFlora4Assembly
Fong, Vince	@vfong
Frazier, Jim	@AsmFrazier
Friedman, Laura	@laurafriedman43
Gallagher, James	@J_GallagherAD3
Garcia, Cristina	@AsmGarcia
Garcia, Eduardo	@AsmEGarciaAD56
Gipson, Mike A.	@MGipson2014
Gloria, Todd	@AsmToddGloria
Gomez, Jimmy	@JimmyGomezCA
Gonzalez-Fletcher, Lorena	@LorenaSGonzalez
Gray, Adam C.	@AdamGrayCA

Representative	Twitter Handle
Grayson, Timothy S.	@AsmGrayson
Harper, Matthew	@AsmHarper
Holden, Chris R.	@ChrisHoldenNews
Irwin, Jacqui	@JacquIrwin
Jones-Sawyer, Sr., Reginald B.	#ReginaldJonesSawyer
Katra, Ash	@Ash_Katra
Kiley, Kevin	@KevinKileyCA
Lackey, Tom	@TomLackey
Levine, Marc	@MarcLevine
Limón, Monique	@AsmMoniqueLimon
Low, Evan	@Evan_Low
Maienschein, Brian	@BMaienschein
Mathis, Devon J.	@AD26Mathis
Mayes, Chad	@ChadMayesCA
McCarty, Kevin	@KMcCartyAD7
Medina, Jose	@AsmJoseMedina
Melendez, Melissa A.	@asmMelendez
Mullin, Kevin	@KevinMullin
Muratsuchi, Al	@AMuratsuchi
Nazarian, Adrin	@Asm_Nazarian
Oberholte, Jay	@JayOberholte
O'Donnell, Patrick	@ODonnellUpdate
Patterson, Jim	@JimPatterson559
Quirk, Bill	@AsmBillQuirk
Quirk-Silva, Sharon	@QuirkSilva65th
Rendon, Anthony	@Rendon63rdAD
Reyes, Eloise Gómez	#EloiseGomezReyes
Ridley-Thomas, Sebastian	@SebastianMRT
Rodriguez, Freddie	@AsmRodriguez52
Rubio, Blanca E.	@Blanca_E_Rubio
Salas, Jr., Rudy	@RudySalasJr
Santiago, Miguel	@SantiagoAD53
Steinorth, Marc	@MarcSteinorth
Stone, Mark	@AsmMarkStone
Thurmond, Tony	@TonyThurmond
Ting, Philip Y.	@PhilTing
Voepel, Randy	@RandyVoepel
Waldron, Marie	@ConservtveWoman
Weber, Shirley N.	@AsmShirleyWeber
Wood, Jim	@JimWoodAD2

Not sure who represents you? Find out here: findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov

Note: If your representative does not have a Twitter handle, use a hashtag with their first & last name (#FirstNameLastName)

Images and Graphics

You can also post these graphics on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and any other social media channels along with a personal message and the hashtags #BailReform and #SB10.

Why Californians Need #BailReform

“Denying equal access to justice solely based on income is unconstitutional.”

**- Kamala Harris,
U.S. Senator**

Why Californians Need #BailReform

“Detaining someone in jail pre-trial should only happen when there is substantial chance they'll negatively affect public safety”

Why Californians Need #BailReform

“The United States and the Philippines are the only two countries in the world that allow for-profit bail companies.”

Why Californians Need #BailReform

“If someone can afford their bail even though they are a threat to public safety, they’re free to go. Our bail system should prioritize public safety, not wealth.”

Why Californians Need #BailReform

“Contrary to popular belief, cash bail doesn't impact the likelihood that a person will show up to court. In states where money bail is not allowed, people show up for court at the same rate with a simple phone call.”

Email Your Elected Officials

Below is a sample email that you can send to urge your representative to support bail reform.

Identify Your Elected Office

If you don't know who your elected official is, simply go to <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/> and enter the address where you are registered to vote. From there, you will be able to see your Senator and Assemblymember.

Subject: Support the California Money Bail Reform Act (SB10)

Body: Dear Senator/Assemblymember **[INSERT NAME]**,

My name is **[INSERT NAME]** and I am **[INSERT TITLE – example: volunteer / member-leader / community organizer / policy director, etc.]** with **[INSERT ORGANIZATION]**. I am writing to ask that you support SB 10 (Hertzberg) which will reform California's money bail system and put our communities before the profit interests of the private bail bonds industry.

We need bail reform in California to ensure that people are not held in jail after an arrest simply because they cannot afford to post bail. The effect of the Act will be to ensure that people return to court as required and that the public is protected, while ending the current bail system's cruel discrimination against low-income Californians and people of color.

California's current bail system is punishing whole families and communities. Most Californians cannot afford to post bail and so must either stay in jail or pay substantial nonrefundable fees to a bail bond company. These fees are not refunded - even if the court finds that a person is innocent or was wrongfully arrested.

This lucrative industry portrays itself as a group of small, "mom and pop" bail bonds agencies. In reality, multinational insurance corporations dominate the industry. In fact, Tokio Marine, the world's largest for-profit bail bonds insurance corporation, hired a Sacramento-based lobbyist for the first time this year just to defeat the Act.

The current system, coupled with over-policing of communities of color, results in more arrests and exacts a disproportionate price from these communities. Whole families suffer, as they take on long-term debt to purchase the safety and freedom of a loved one, and women are hit the hardest. According to an Ella Baker Center survey, 83 percent of family members who take on court-related costs on behalf of loved ones are women.

Successful models for reform can be found in California and other states. Like with these systems, under the California Money Bail Reform Act of 2017, judges will have additional tools to help them determine, based on the circumstances of the individual case rather than a person's wealth, who can return home and under what conditions while their case is being resolved. More informed decision-making protects public safety while reducing the number of

people kept in jail after arrest, at a cost to the liberty of low-income Californians and to taxpayers.

For more on the bill and to see our growing list of supporters, [download the fact sheet](#) and visit our [campaign website](#).

Thank you for your support,

[INSERT NAME & CONTACT INFORMATION]

Call Your Representatives

Below is a sample call script and contact information for California legislators. You can support bail reform by organizing your community to call their representative and urge them to support bail reform.

You might even want to organize a phone bank, where you bring several people together at the same time and place to make calls, using the sample call script below.

Sample call script

My name is _____, and I live in _____, California. I am calling to say that I support Senate Bill 10 - the California Money Bail Reform Act. Thousands of people are currently locked up California's jails simply because they can't afford to pay bail, while wealthy people can buy their freedom. This is not fair. Freedom should not depend on your bank account balance or your ability to contract with a bail company that profits from financial desperation. Please ask the Assemblymember to vote "Yes" on SB 10.

Locate Your Representative's Contact Information

Once you find your local representatives on [Find Your California Representative](#), click the links to your representatives' websites to find the phone number for their local offices as well as their Sacramento offices.

Get Your Organization to Support Bail Reform

A major way you can help is to **talk to your community or organization about making bail reform a priority**. Whether you are involved with a faith community, direct service agency, grassroots group, volunteer organization, labor union, or another group, you can engage your community around bail reform.

The money bail system impacts many intersectional communities*, including communities of color, low-income people, LGBTQ communities, single parents, women, the children of detained people, and people without homes. It is likely that members of your community are impacted by the money bail system.

Research the ways that the money bail system (and mass incarceration as a whole) impact your community. This can help galvanize your organization to make bail reform a priority. You can refer to the “resources” section of this toolkit for fact sheets on the intersection of bail reform with other issues and communities.

Some questions you might ask yourself when discussing bail reform with your organization:

- How are members of my organization or community impacted by the money bail system?
- What are the values of my organization that align with bail reform?
- What type of capacity does my organization have and what type of action makes sense for us?

At the end of this toolkit there are printable materials, including fact sheets on specific topics, that you can share with your organization.

*See the Appendix A for resources that offer an in-depth explanation of “intersectionality.”

Send a Letter of Support

If you are a member of an organization or group, you can send a letter of support to Senator Hertzberg expressing your support of SB10. Individuals may also send in a personal letter.

Please print on organizational letterhead.

[DATE]

State Senator Robert Hertzberg
State Capitol, Room 4038
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: SUPPORT for California Money Bail Reform Act of 2017 – SB 10 (Hertzberg)

Dear Senator Hertzberg:

On behalf of **[NAME OF ORGANIZATION]**, I write in support of SB 10 (Hertzberg) – the California Money Bail Reform Act of 2017 – which will ensure that people are not held in dangerous, overcrowded jails after an arrest *simply because they cannot afford to post bail*. The effect of the Act will be to ensure that people return to court as required and that the public is protected, while ending the current bail system’s cruel discrimination against low-income people and people of color.

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, about 63% of people in jail in California on any given day (or 46,000 people) are either awaiting trial or sentencing – at a high financial and social cost to taxpayers.

California’s current bail system is punishing whole families and communities. Most Californians cannot afford to post bail and so must either stay in jail or pay substantial nonrefundable fees to a bail bond company. These fees are not refunded under any circumstances – even if the court finds that a person is innocent or was wrongfully arrested. Over-policing of communities of color results in more arrests, exacting a disproportionate price from these communities. Whole families suffer, as they take on long-term debt to purchase the safety and freedom of a loved one, and women are hit the hardest. According to an Ella Baker Center survey, 83% of family members who take on court-related costs on behalf of loved ones are women.

Successful models for reform can be found in California and other states. Like with these systems, under the California Money Bail Reform Act, judges will have access to more information than they do now about people coming before them so they can determine, based on the circumstances of the individual case rather than a person’s wealth, who can return home and under what conditions while their case is being resolved. More informed decision-making protects public safety while reducing the number of people kept in jail after arrest, at a cost to the liberty of low-income Californians and to taxpayers.

It is time for California to implement these proven and cost-effective systems across the state. For these reasons, we thank you for your leadership in introducing the California Money Bail Reform Act of 2017 and support your efforts to advance this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

[NAME, TITLE]

[ORGANIZATION]

cc: Senator Robert Hertzberg c/o diane.griffiths@sen.ca.gov
Emily Harris, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, emily@ellabakercenter.org

Reach Out to Other Organizations

The following template outreach email can get you started on reaching out to organizations to encourage them to submit their own letters of support. The pieces highlighted in yellow are areas for you to personalize. Make sure to remove all yellow highlighting / instructions before sending your email.

Subject: Help Win Bail Reform in California

Body: Dear Friends & Allies,

My name is [INSERT NAME] and I am [INSERT TITLE – example: volunteer / member-leader / community organizer / policy director, etc.] with [INSERT ORGANIZATION]. I am writing to ask that you support the California Money Bail Reform Act – SB 10 (Hertzberg) – which will reform California’s money bail system and put our communities before the profit interests of the private bail bonds industry.

SB 10 will reform California’s money bail system which criminalizes poverty and severely compromises the integrity of our criminal justice system at the expense of public safety.

Download, customize and email your [support letter](#) today!

Why is Bail Reform Critically Needed in California?

California’s money bail system is not working. Instead of promoting public safety and justice, it rewards people who can afford to pay for their freedom, while punishing people who can’t. Money bail forces families to make the difficult decision between paying their loved one’s bail bond fees and covering basic needs – like food, shelter, and child support. Financially forcing people to sit in jail before trial increases the likelihood that people will plead guilty to a crime – even if they’re innocent – and receive longer sentences if convicted, putting their job, income, and their family’s housing at risk.

Additionally, [INSERT 1-3 SENTENCES FROM [OUR VARIOUS FACTSHEETS](#) – BASED ON WHAT INFO WILL MOTIVATE YOUR TARGET – example: cost, mental health, poverty, etc.] For more on the bill and to see our growing list of supporters, [download the fact sheet](#) and visit our [campaign website](#).

Thank you for your consideration,

[INSERT NAME]

Table at Local Events

If you know of any events or resource fairs where there will be an opportunity to table, you can print materials to distribute and inform folks about bail reform.

Recommended materials for tabling:

1. [Template Sign Up Sheet](#)
2. [SB10 Fact Sheet](#)
3. [Bail Reform Flyer](#)
4. [“Selling Off Our Freedom” California Snapshot](#)

Depending on the event, you may also want to print some or all of the fact sheets on bail's intersection with other issues - located in [this folder](#).

Sample Tabling Script

Hello! Do you have a second to learn about how people are jailed for being poor in California?

Did you know that around 60 percent of people in jail right now are awaiting their day in court? Many people are stuck in jail simply because they cannot afford to post money bail and buy their freedom.

The California Money Bail Reform Act (SB10) will change the system from a money-based system to a one where no one is held in jail simply based on wealth.

If you are interested in learning more or getting involved, please sign-up here, and help yourself to some of our printed materials.

Sample Follow-Up Email

Subject line: Take action on money bail reform!

Dear **[INSERT NAME]**,

Thank you for your interest in getting involved in the bail reform effort! It was great to meet you at **[INSERT EVENT NAME]**.

There are several different ways you can support bail reform in California, from using social media to hosting film screenings to calling your representatives. All of the ways you can take action around bail reform are highlighted in the *Bail Reform Activist Toolkit*, which I have attached **[MAKE SURE TO ATTACH TOOLKIT]**. There you will find many ways that you can get involved in the bail reform effort, as well as dozens of resources and in-depth information about the bail system.

[If the person had specific questions] Regarding the question you asked about [INSERT TOPIC], here is an excellent article that explains the issue in more depth: [INCLUDE RELEVANT ARTICLE].

For more on the bill and to see our growing list of supporters, [download the fact sheet](#) and visit our [campaign website](#).

Thank you for your support,

[INSERT NAME]

Encountering Difficult Questions

If you encounter difficult questions that you have a hard time answering, it is okay to simply say “I can get back to you with more information on that. Please sign in on the sign-up sheet, and I will be happy to get back to you.”

Make sure in any follow-up email, you address their question either with resources from this Toolkit, or - for particularly difficult questions - you can contact us! (Contact information is located at the end of the Toolkit).

In general, it is not a good idea to get into a heated discussion when you are tabling. If you find yourself in a situation where you no longer feel it is a productive conversation, respectfully end the conversation and invite the person to seek out further information by visiting the website www.bailreformca.org. You can also offer to follow up with additional reading materials that they may use to obtain more information about the issue.

Submit a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor provide an opportunity to share your view with readers about an issue. Below we have included some guidelines to get you started. For additional tips and sample letters, check out this great [resource](#) from CURB.

Part 1: Background

Write a summary of the legislation, policy, or issue that your letter will focus on. Sometimes it helps to read other letters that your media outlet has selected so that you can see the types of letters that they choose. Below are some questions to get you started:

1. Why is this issue important?
2. What is its scope, its impact, its costs, its negative or positive outcomes?
3. What is the status of it becoming law or in being implemented?
4. How have you or your communities been impacted?

Part 2: Identify the Appropriate outlet

Scan your local media outlets to identify to whom you will submit your letter to the editor. You may want to consider their geographic boundaries as well as obtain information about their circulation (i.e. how many people read their paper etc.). In addition, you may want to research any writers or outlets that have covered criminal justice issues. Remember that larger media outlets receive hundreds of letters. You may have a better chance at getting published in a smaller publication.

Part 3: Draft your letter

Before you draft your letter make sure to read any instructions or guidelines that your chosen media outlet may have. Most papers provide clear guidelines about word count (typically 150 words), where to submit, and any additional information to include.

Once you begin drafting your letter it is important for you to identify your angle. You can use your position and/or personal experience to discuss the need for bail reform. You can provide information to readers on how to get involved in bail reform. You can also use your letter to praise an article that covers the issue the way you want it to and reinforce why this issue is important.

Part 4: Review Your Letter

The bail reform campaign can offer support reviewing your letter to the editor. For support on how to best tailor your letter to your location and your audience, please contact Destiny Lopez (dlopez@aclusandiego.org) with the following information:

- Your name
- Your contact information
- Name of the publication

- Word limit
- Draft of your letter

Part 5: Submit your letter

There might be multiple ways to submit your letter, read the instructions to see the paper's preferred method of submission. Once you have sent it, you may receive a response from the paper notifying you whether they will be publishing your letter. If you do not hear a response, it is recommended that you wait a month or two before you re-submit.

California Bail Reform: Letters to the Editor Toolkit

What is a letter to the editor (LTE)?

A letter to the editor (LTE) is a way for you to express your opinion on an issue of interest to you and the broader public. Usually, people submit an LTE in response to a specific article or opinion piece a paper runs. That doesn't have to be the case, but your LTE is more likely to be selected if you are responding to something the paper has run. In that situation, it is best to submit within 2-3 days of publication.

Always remember to review the paper's instructions for LTE submissions. Different papers have different requirements.

Remember to answer the following questions before getting started:

1. **Are you responding to an article or opinion piece?** *If so, make sure you reference it in the first sentence of your LTE;*
2. **What is your thesis?** *If there were one thing you want readers to take away from your LTE, what would that be? Is there a call-to-action? Are you disagreeing with an article? If so, why?*
3. **Why now?** *Why is the topic you are writing about particularly timely now and why should readers care?*
4. **How do you fit in?** *If appropriate, feel free to tailor your LTE based on your personal experiences and expertise;*
5. **How will you submit your LTE?** *Some papers have dedicated email accounts through which they field LTEs, while other newspapers offer the option of submitting directly through a form on their website;*
6. **What is the word limit?** *Newspapers typically require that LTES be around 150-300 words long, but you should always confirm submission requirements;*
7. **What information are you required to submit?** *In addition to the letter itself, newspapers often ask that writers include their full name, mailing address, email address, or phone number (or some combination of those). Be prepared to submit that information, but know that is generally not for publication.*

For additional tips and sample letters, check out this great [resource](#) from CURB.

Topline Bail Reform Messages:

Everyone deserves equal access to justice and freedom.

Our communities are safer and healthier when they are whole. Money bail tears them apart.

Basing someone's freedom on wealth – not flight or public safety risk – denies them a fair chance at justice and does not make us any safer.

SB 10 offers comprehensive and workable solutions to promote the economic security, wellbeing, and safety of our communities. Other states have adopted reforms like the ones proposed under SB 10 with great success.

Facts/Data:

- In California, over [60% of people in jails](#) are awaiting trial or sentencing, costing California taxpayers \$5 million a day.
- As compared to the rest of the country, California keeps far more people in jail while they await trial but has lower court appearance rates than other states.
- [Kentucky](#), for example, releases about 70% of people awaiting the resolution of their cases; 89% of those make all their future court appearances and 92% are not re-arrested while they are on pretrial release.
- Even just a few days in jail can cost someone their car, job, housing, or child custody.
- Research shows that jailing people while their case moves forward puts them at higher risk of being convicted, taking a plea deal, and receiving harsher sentences.
- [Research](#) also shows that Black people are assigned higher bail amounts than white people accused of similar offenses. Specifically, bail bond amounts for Black men are 35% higher than bond amounts for white men. For Latino men, they're 19% higher than for white men.
- A [recent report](#) found that the bail industry strips San Francisco city residents of \$15 million a year with nonrefundable fees. Over \$9 million of that came from black and Latino families.

SB 10 will:

- Help make sure people aren't locked up simply because they are unable to pay to get out of jail while their cases to move forward;
- Shift away from a system where your freedom depends on your bank account balance, to one with case-by-case determinations to promote safety and ensure people return to court;
- Prioritize services to help people make their court appearances while their cases move forward.
- These reforms build upon common sense solutions adopted in other localities that have significantly reduced their use of commercial bail, such as Kentucky, New Jersey, and Santa Clara, California.

Sample Letters:

Other States Have Done It

It's not very often that I say: wow, if Kentucky did it... so should we! But when it comes to bail, it's time for California to get with the program. In a recent column, George Skelton took issue with SB 10, a comprehensive bill to reform California's deeply unjust and inequitable money bail system. SB 10 adopts workable solutions based on best practices and reforms that other states like Kentucky have already adopted with stellar success. For example, Kentucky currently

releases about 70% of defendants waiting trial and 89% of them make all their court appearances. 92% of them are not re-arrested while they're on pretrial release. Let's just say California's number are not even close... So what's the hold up? California lawmakers should pass SB 10.

Public Safety

California's bail system is reprehensible. SB 10 offers comprehensive and meaningful reforms that will ensure everyone has equal access to justice and freedom, and that no one will be locked up simply because they can't afford bail. Currently, wealth – not flight or public safety risk – determines if someone is released. That doesn't make us any safer. On the contrary, wealthy people who can afford bail can go free quickly, while moderate or low-income people sit in jail when they don't have to. It's time California does the right thing in the name of justice, public safety, and human dignity.

Don't Buy Into Bail Industry's Fearmongering

California lawmakers should not buy into the bail industry's deceitful fear mongering tactics. This predatory, for-profit industry has a clear financial incentive to derail reforms, and it's important to remember the human costs and wealth loss that California's money bail system leaves in its wake by allowing the bail industry to hold justice and people's freedom hostage. What California needs is a justice system that works for everyone. SB 10 is just the bill to help get us attain a fairer and more equitable system.

Costs Argument

While it's important to be practical about how the government spends taxpayer dollars, it is also important that the state act in the best interest of the people, justice, and public safety. California's bail system is decimating our communities. In San Francisco, the bail industry strips city residents of \$15 million per year with their predatory, nonrefundable fees – fees people don't get back even if their charges are dropped or they are found innocent. Of those \$15 million, the bail industry takes over \$9 million from black and Latino families. This isn't the way our justice system is supposed to work and it's the state's moral obligation to fix this problem. At the end of the day, bail reform comes down to one question: what price tag we are willing to put on justice, public safety, and community wellbeing?

Host a Film Screening and/or Teach-In

Film Screening

Sign up to host a screening of Brave New Film's "The Bail Trap: American Ransom," and you will receive all of the materials and resources you need to host a successful event.

You can sign up [here](#) to host a screening near you, and Brave New Films will also add your event to their website!

Teach-in

Part of your event might include a teach-in.

One way to educate your community is through a **teach-in**. Teach-ins are defined as "educational, interactive forums where people come together to focus on and discuss a topic. They are meant to be practical, participatory, empowering, and action-oriented."

You might want to model your teach-in off of the [Transformative Bail Reform Popular Education Curriculum](#), which contains interactive activities and actions on bail reform. This includes:

- Introductions and icebreakers
- A bail bingo activity
- Facts or fiction activity
- History of criminalization activity
- Case study activity
- Action steps (you can tailor your action steps to you or your group's capacity)
- Informational resources

Visit Your Representatives - A Guide to In-District Meetings

A lobby visit provides an opportunity for you to tell your elected official, in person, what you think about a certain issue and to encourage them to take action.

SCHEDULE YOUR MEETING:

- **Identify your elected official.** If you don't know who your elected official is, simply go to <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/> and enter your address. From there, you will be able to see your Senator and Assemblymember.
- **Locate the District Office near you.** From your representative's website, you will be able to locate their district office address and contact information. Some elected officials have several district offices. If that's the case with your representative, simply find the office closest to you.
- **Call the office and ask to set up a meeting.** Introduce yourself to the staffer who answers the phone. Let them know you are a constituent and would like to set up a meeting with your representative to discuss your issue. PRO TIP: Elected officials are typically at their in-district offices on Fridays so, while you can set up your meeting for any day during the week, Fridays are your best chance to speak directly with your representative rather than their legislative aid.

PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING:

- **Do your homework.** Make sure you know the issue you are planning to discuss. Determine your strongest and most important talking points, and try to think of personal or local examples to support those points. If you are meeting about a specific bill, know the bill number. In this case, SB 10. Have a good idea of what interest your member has – or could have – in your issue.
- **Decide who will attend the meeting.** Bringing more than four or five people can be hard to manage. Keep it small, but bring people who represent different groups that have an interest in the legislation.
- **Plan your meeting.** Time is limited. Be sure to identify who will speak on each issue and who will take notes. Assign roles for each person and make sure to have a timekeeper.
- **Be aware of the goal.** What is it you want your elected official to do – vote for or against the bill? Make a commitment to introduce or co-sponsor legislation? Be sure to stay focused on the goal for the meeting.

DURING THE MEETING:

- **Be prompt and patient.** Elected officials run on very tight schedules. Be sure to show up on time for your appointment, and be patient – it is not uncommon for legislators and staff to be late or to have your meeting interrupted by other business.

- **Keep it short and focused!** You will likely have 20 minutes or less with a staff person, and as little as 10 minutes if you meet with your elected official. Make the most of that brief time by sticking to your topic.
- **Speak with passion.** Believe in what you say, and say it respectfully and with conviction.
- **Introduce yourselves.** At the start of the meeting, each participant should briefly introduce his/herself. If you are a constituent, it is important to make that clear. Be sure to bring up any other connections, such as memberships in the same groups, common friends, or previous meetings. You can also thank the legislator for previous votes or actions that you supported.
- **Provide personal and local examples of the impact of the legislation or issue.** Be sure to demonstrate how the issue affects, or will affect, real people, the legislator, his/her constituency, and his/her district or state. Facts, data and numbers always help drive the case for certain legislation but don't forget about the real-life impacts and stories from the heart.
- **Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."** If you don't know the answer to a legislator's question, it is fine to tell him/her that you will get that information for him/her. Never make up an answer to a question – giving wrong or inaccurate information can seriously damage your credibility. And do follow-up with the requested information after the meeting.
- **Always be respectful.** If you are talking about an issue about which you and your legislator disagree, it is easy to get frustrated. But keep your cool. Listen to his/her concerns. Don't argue, but if appropriate, explain or clarify your position. There may still be an ask, such as asking him/her to allow the bill to be debated. A legislator with whom you disagree on one issue may be the champion on another issue you support, so it is important not to alienate him/her.
- **If the legislator is friendly, make an ask.** The ask could be to introduce or co-sponsor legislation, vote a certain way, etc. After making the ask, pause and give the legislator a chance to respond. Be open to an alternative commitment or to no commitment at all. It may be that he/she needs more information, so ask if there's anything you can provide. A friendly legislator might also let you know what he/she is hearing from other legislators, provide an update, or help strategize.
- **Set deadlines for a response.** Often if an elected official hasn't taken a position on legislation, he/she probably will not commit to one during a meeting. Ask when you should check back – and who you should follow-up with – to find out how your legislator intends to respond to your request. Be sure to get the contact information for the relevant staffer to follow up.
- **Leave behind.** Leave a few pages of information for the legislator. Also, leave your contact information so that he or she can get back to you about the issue. Don't forget to thank the legislator or staffer for his/her time.

AFTER THE MEETING:

- **Compare notes.** Right after the meeting, briefly compare notes with everyone in your group. Make sure you are on the same page about what the legislator committed to do and what follow-up information you committed to send.

- **Report back.** Report the results of your meeting on our [Sign-Up Form](#).
- **Say thanks and follow up.** Each person who took part in the meeting should promptly send a personal thank you note to the elected official, even if the legislator did not ultimately share your views. This also provides the opportunity to send any requested follow-up materials or information.
- **Deadlines.** If the legislator or staff member doesn't meet the deadline for action you agreed to during the meeting, ask him/her to set another deadline. Be persistent but flexible!

Good luck! Remember that your legislators work for you. Also, remember that legislators face hundreds of issues each session, and it is likely that you know more information about your issue than your legislator does.

Printable Materials and Fact Sheets

Below is a list of fact sheets and handouts on bail reform - all included in [this folder](#).

1. [Bail and Criminal Justice Outcomes](#)
2. [Bail and Mental Health](#)
3. [Bail and Poverty](#)
4. [Bail and Public Health](#)
5. [Bail - Impact on Communities of Color](#)
6. [Bail Reform General Flyer](#)
7. [“Selling Off Our Freedom” - A California Snapshot](#)
8. [Senate Bill 10 Fact Sheet](#)
9. [Bail - Costs to Taxpayers and Individuals](#)
10. [“Selling Off Our Freedom: How Insurance Companies Have Taken Over the Bail System”](#)
11. [The Basics of Pretrial Service](#)
12. [Why Women and Families Need Bail Reform](#)

Tell Us What You're Doing!

If you took any of the actions outlined in this Toolkit, please let us know! [Sign-up here](#) to let us know how you will be supporting Bail Reform in California. Thank you so much for your support.

Appendix A: Let's talk about Race and Racism

Engaging in conversations about bail reform will also require the discussion of racism and intersecting oppressions within our criminal justice system. These may be difficult conversations to have and may require the delicate task to recognize one's own status of privilege or lack thereof. Below are different resources to help you understand these intersections and how they shape the experiences of all people impacted by our criminal justice system.

Primers and additional resources on Race and Racism:

- [An Introduction to the Intersectional Approach Model for Policy and Social Change – a primer from the Women of Color Policy Network](#)
- [RACE: Are We So Different?](#) – This project of the American Anthropological Association looks at race through the lenses of history, human variation, and lived experience. The website offers interactive activities, a robust section on resources, and a virtual tour of the RACE museum exhibition.
- [Interpersonal Racism \(.pdf\)](#) – a short conceptualization from the American Psychological Association
- [On Racism and White Privilege \(.pdf\)](#) – a publicly-available excerpt of *White Anti-Racist Activism: A Personal Roadmap* by Jennifer R. Holladay, M.S. (Crandall, Dostie & Douglass Books, Inc., 2000)
- [Structural Racism \(.pdf\)](#) – a short primer on structural racism from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
- [Racial Justice Toolkit](#) (download pdf)

A few examples of organizations that offer anti-racist trainings

- [Catalyst Project](#) (The Anne Braden Anti-Racist Training Program for White Social Justice Activists)
- [Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training](#) (assorted trainings and workshops)
- [Dismantling Racism](#) (assorted trainings and workshops)
- [Training for Change](#) (Diversity & Anti-Oppression workshops)
- [Healing from Toxic Whiteness](#) (an online training program for white people committed to racial justice)

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns or need additional support, please contact us:

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