

NLG HOTLINE MANUAL



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Proprietary Material of the National Lawyers Guild

Prepared by the Mass Defense Steering Committee

Note: This general educational material does not constitute legal advice or encouragement to take action.

Contact a local attorney for additional questions.

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Introduction

The legal hotline is integral to legal support for protests and their broader social movements. Its purpose is to provide a point of contact for any legal issues that activists may encounter. Legal Observers can call the hotline to report names of those arrested. Protesters can call it to report arrests, instances of excessive force, and other abuses by police. Most importantly, the hotline is there for those arrested and confined for demonstrating, so that those folks will have somewhere to ask for emergency action, relay requests, report on jail conditions, and receive updates and information from the outside world.

This document is written with the worst case scenario in mind: starting a hotline from scratch in an area with little legal support infrastructure, during a sudden upswing in demonstrations, such as we saw following the police murder of George Floyd in 2020. However, many of the recommendations within should be relevant to more established hotlines. The system we describe in this manual is not necessarily the only one possible, but it is based on existing hotlines with strong track records.

For security, the Appendix is only available upon request by NLG members.

CHAPTER 1: SET UP

The Team

Running a hotline is a collaborative effort. For a major protest, it's good to have a core group of about five or more local organizers who can devote significant time to the project, and a larger crew, with some possibly working remotely, who can take regular shifts answering the phone and bottomline specific tasks. This might sound like a lot, but recruiting is much easier when lots of people are getting arrested.

Everyone on the team should be vouched for to ensure they aren't a police infiltrator or informant, understand basic security culture, and aren't going to cause too much personal drama. Ideally, the core organizers should know each other and be comfortable working together. If the team needs to be expanded beyond the social circles of the core organizers, then secondary vouching is probably acceptable. In other words, vouching privileges can be extended to trusted comrades who aren't themselves on the hotline team.

Chapter 1: Set Up – The Team

Don't be afraid to turn down someone's offer of support who can't be vouched for – you aren't accusing them of anything by turning them down, just taking a basic security precaution. In addition, someone who cannot be vetted can be assigned to less sensitive tasks while they build trust. Previous experience with legal support is helpful, but not an absolute requirement – that's what this document is for. It will also be helpful if someone in the group has experience with technical issues and digital security.

Ideally, everyone on the team, or at least the core organizers, will be members of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG). The immediate benefit of Guild membership is to keep the hotline under the same umbrella as the NLG's Legal Observers (see appropriate subsection in Other Legal Support Functions below). In the longer term, joining the NLG allows the hotline team to participate in the broader networking and educational opportunities the organization offers, strengthening resistance to state repression across the country. Sign up at <https://nlg.org/join>.

If an uprising persists long enough, some of the original team members may need to step back.

Chapter 1: Set Up – The Team

It's a good idea to develop solid processes for recruiting, training, and onboarding new people to replace folks as they leave.

Consider forming a small working group to bottomline onboarding and vouching. Training documents will need to be written for the various aspects of hotline operation, and kept up to date as procedures evolve and tools are upgraded. It's also good practice to have rookies partner with more experienced folks for their first time in a new role (a Jitsi call can work well for this).

No one team member should become indispensable. At the logistical level, this means that all Signal groups should have more than one admin; all login credentials should be known to multiple team members; and all administrative privileges should be shared among several administrators. The efforts should be able to continue more or less unscathed if key members get arrested or are otherwise incapacitated.

Similarly, decision making authority should not rest solely in the hands of a single individual. In practice, the best approach seems to be to divide the work of the team into discrete roles and establish working groups for each one (see Ongoing Support and Other Legal Support sections below for examples).

Chapter 1: Set Up – The Team

It can be helpful for working groups to operate in a federated way and make autonomous, consensus-based decisions related to their roles.

For ongoing protests, the hotline team will attract a constant stream of volunteers who, while vouched for one way or another, will not all know each other or even live in the same city. The impacts of abusive or disruptive actors and authoritarian tendencies can be mitigated by ensuring equitable participation, horizontal organizing practices, and accountability to team ground rules.

Team members should be encouraged to avoid burnout by stepping back when they start to feel overwhelmed. Communication is important. Handing off work to others is far preferable to a team member simply disappearing when they can't fulfill every task they volunteered for.

Confidentiality

Information about an arrestee should never be shared with anyone who doesn't need it. Police, right-wing trolls, sensationalist media outlets, and other adversaries are all hungry for details about activists and protesters, especially those who are facing charges.

As the main custodian of information about arrestees, the hotline team has a responsibility to keep it secure, but also to make it available to those who need it. Team members must keep themselves secure as well. Police are more than willing to attack social movements with every repressive tool at their disposal, and they often focus on support roles such as legal or medic support. For these reasons, security considerations permeate every aspect of hotline operation and legal support in general.

The best source of guidance concerning who should be told what about particular criminal defendants are the defendants themselves. An arrestee might, for example, ask that their father be told nothing; that their boss be informed that they won't be at work tomorrow but not why; and that a designated supporter be given all available information about their case.

Chapter 1: Set Up – Confidentiality

When in doubt it is best to err on the side of silence. It is good practice when denying a request for information to also not reveal the reason for the denial. You can simply say, *"Sorry, but I'm unable to share that information."*

Information can be divided roughly into four categories – public, semi-public, for team members only, and highly secure.

If government names and mug shots of arrested protesters appear in the media, which can happen following some demonstrations, this can be considered **public information** (though defendants should still be referred to by their chosen names).

Semi-public information is technically public, but not widely known, such as case details that can only be found by a search on a government web site. Semi-public information should still be guarded fairly strictly, since an adversary might not know how to find it on their own.

Chapter 1: Set Up – Confidentiality

Some information is helpful to **team members** but should not be shared for privacy and security reasons. For example, an arrestee's chosen name, and names and contact info for their designated support people.

Knowledge of potentially illegal actions committed by protesters is an example of **information that should never be recorded**, regardless of how secure you think your communications are. The same goes for any advance knowledge of upcoming protests that are not being publicly announced.

Digital security is of utmost importance. Ideally, any applications or software the team is using should be secure not only against hackers, but also against court orders from the state. Sometimes, security best practices have to be sacrificed in the interest of quickly establishing a hotline, but such compromises should be made knowingly and with the intention of rectifying them as soon as possible. For more on this topic, see Appendix A: Basic Digital Tools and Appendix B: Advanced Digital Tools below.

The Phone Number

A dedicated phone number is essential to a hotline. Protest organizers and demonstrators need a single number to memorize, or at least to carry or write down before going to an action. This number should not be changed without a very good reason.

Resist the temptation to use someone's personal phone number, especially since you don't know how long the protest will last. If you're in a hurry to get the number set up, there are a couple of options. One is to get a shared phone and pass it around to whoever is taking calls. The other is to use a Google Voice number, and forward the calls to the personal numbers of the people on shift. Google Voice is much more convenient and allows participation by out-of-towners, but unfortunately some jails do not let their prisoners call internet-based phone numbers. Before going public with a Google Voice hotline number, check the phone policy at every jail where protesters in your area might be held. Sometimes this information will be on the jail web site, but if not, you might have to call and ask.

Chapter 1: Set Up – The Phone Number

If Google Voice is allowed by all your local jails, it's the best option for a rapid response. Just make sure to create a dedicated account for the hotline instead of using one that can be traced to a person or organization.

If Google Voice isn't feasible, you should use a burner phone. Keep it charged, keep it safe, keep it topped-up with minutes, and pay for it anonymously in cash. Have a handoff system that records an entry every time the phone changes hands. Anybody on the team should be able to find out instantly and accurately who's got the phone at any given time.

A dual approach could also work, whereby the burner phone automatically transfers calls to a Google Voice number, which in turn transfers them to the personal numbers of hotline operators. This should be tested thoroughly before deployment, however, as some jails do not allow transferred calls. If a jail detects this system in action, your number might get permanently blocked. You will need to test it with the assistance of a prisoner who doesn't mind making multiple calls to your private test number. If the test number doesn't get blocked after a week or so, you should be able to use that setup.

Chapter 1: Set Up – The Phone Number

Note that some jails don't allow calls to burner phones. In this case, you have a couple of options to preserve the anonymity of the phone team. One option is to anonymously obtain a pre-paid calling plan by using a pseudonym and paying cash. This can be done at some phone dealers, but depending on the carrier and the jurisdiction, the dealer might require ID from the customer.

We suggest trying T-Mobile and Metro by T-Mobile first. The second option is to use a burner phone from AT&T. Since AT&T uses the same network for their burner plans as for their long term plans, jails will theoretically be unable to tell which one the team is using. This should still be tested before deployment, however. Don't get an AT&T burner phone at an AT&T dealer – they'll make you show ID. Instead, pick it up at a big box store.

Despite the convenience of Google Voice, it does have some drawbacks. It only offers one line per number, meaning that a call will not get through if another caller is already on the line. Calls have to be triaged in busy situations (calls from jail take top priority), and there is no guarantee that callers who don't get through the first time will bother trying again.

Chapter 1: Set Up – The Phone Number

Google will also cooperate with law enforcement in the matter of wiretaps and subpoenas (see Hotline Security section below). For these reasons, you might want to consider a more advanced Voice Over IP (VOIP) solution, especially if there is no urgent need to be up and running as soon as possible. This is addressed in Appendix B: Advanced Digital Tools below.

Publicizing the hotline number can be tricky. Ideally, every protester and activist in your area would know the number, but no one else. Letting the hotline number be too widely known can result in a flood of calls and doxxing attempts by right-wing trolls, but of course keeping the number too secret renders the hotline useless. A reasonable middle ground is to spread the number through Signal chats, listservs, activist meetings, and at protests through word of mouth and flyers, while keeping it off the internet. However, local conditions should dictate the approach taken.

While changing the hotline number should be avoided if at all possible, you may not have a choice. The original number might be blocked by the jail, or deluged with abusive calls, or cut off by its provider.

Chapter 1: Set Up – Hotline Security

These calamities are not particularly likely to occur, but potentially devastating should any of them come to pass. It's a good idea to have a backup number. The backup number should be known by the hotline team, select protest organizers, and long-term prisoners. Keep in mind that prisoners will not have access to a secure line. Procedures should be put in place to switch to the backup number quickly if necessary. Consider giving the backup number to all arrestees when they first call if the primary number is known to be at risk.

Hotline Security

Ideally, all calls to the hotline would be encrypted from end to end, so that police could not eavesdrop even with a warrant.

Unfortunately, there is no way to accomplish this for calls from a jail. All jails record calls from prisoners, which is why callers should always be cautioned not to say anything incriminating during the call. Calls from a protest are somewhat easier to keep secure, but there are still real security threats. One such threat are cell-site simulators (aka IMSI catchers).

Chapter 1: Set Up – Hotline Security

These devices are commonly known by one of the popular simulator brands, Stingray. They act as portable cell towers and are often deployed by police at protests. Stingrays allow law enforcement to read protesters' SMS text messages, listen to phone calls, harvest the numbers of nearby phones, and even block service entirely. In addition, police could potentially have a wiretap on the hotline phone, or possibly on the phone of a caller.

But these threats should not rule out the use of a hotline. Even a hotline that is theoretically vulnerable to eavesdropping by police is still far preferable to no hotline at all. Depending on the security level of the hotline, operators can tailor what is said over the phone to limit potential interception of sensitive information (see What to Say section for details).

If you are using Google Voice, make sure the account is protected by a strong alphanumeric password that is known by everyone on the team. Do not use this password for any other account. Turn off two factor authentication – while 2FA adds an extra layer of security for individuals, it gets very annoying in group settings.

Chapter 1: Set Up – Hotline Security

As of this writing, Google will generally allow logins without complaint from devices that have been connected to the account previously, although it might object the first time a team member logs in or does so from a new device or IP address.

If you are using a physical phone, keep it in a safe place at all times. Do not bring it to protests. Secure it in the same way as a team member's personal phone (see Device Security subsection in Internal Communications section below).

In situations where the hotline is known to be under direct surveillance by the state or flooded with calls from alt-right trolls, hotline operators may wish to take calls on burner phones or their own Google Voice numbers instead of their personal phones. Neither option is completely secure (and burner phones run about \$35 per month, plus the cost of the device), but this measure does add an extra layer of concealment for operators.

Dealing with Jails and Courts

It is essential that a hotline team have a good understanding of all relevant policies of the jails and court systems in their area, along with contact information. For easy reference, this information can be compiled in an online cheat sheet available to team members. Below is an incomplete list of hotline functions and issues to consider.

Phone Numbers: While it is always preferable to look up information about defendants online, many jail and court websites provide only limited information. In some jurisdictions, a phone call will be necessary to, for example, find out when a defendant will be arraigned, or to ask if an arrested comrade is in a particular jail. Relevant jail phone numbers should be included in the cheat sheet. Try to include any secondary numbers you can find in addition to the main contact number. These numbers often connect directly to an office without going through a phone tree. Numbers for the medical department, chaplain's office, and bail desk are particularly useful to record.

Chapter 1: Set Up – Dealing with Jails and Courts

Websites: Some municipalities' websites have basic search pages for court cases and jailed prisoners. If available, these pages allow legal support volunteers to track arrestees' and defendants' cases, find out how much their bail is, what their charges are, and more. Links to these pages should be included in the cheat sheet. Link shorteners such as <https://tinyurl.com> can be useful if a link is long and hard to remember. If a jail does not have its own prisoner search page, it might be outsourcing that function to Vinelink (<https://vinelink.com>). Vinelink provides very little information about prisoners, and does not cover all counties, but the site can sometimes confirm that a person is in a particular jail and list their ID number.

Physical Locations: When trying to extract information about a particular case or defendant, sometimes there is no substitute for showing up in person. Wear suitable attire, be polite no matter what, and bring whatever information you already have, even if the people where you're going can look it up. The addresses and room numbers of all relevant courtrooms and offices should be included in the cheat sheet.

Chapter 1: Set Up – Dealing with Jails and Courts

Phone Call Duration: All jails cut off phone calls after a predetermined amount of time. Find out what this limit is at every jail the hotline will be receiving calls from and include it in the cheat sheet. Knowing exactly how much time you have to talk to a prisoner will affect the conversation significantly, especially as first-time callers will likely not know about the time limit.

Paying for Phone Calls: Typically, jails charge either the caller or the receiver for phone calls, with the possible exception of an initial call when a prisoner first arrives. Generally this is done through a third-party contractor such as Global Tel Link (GTL).

Commissary, Letters, Books, and Visits: In the worst case, defendants will be in jail awaiting trial for weeks or months, sometimes scattered across multiple facilities. It's a good idea to have a public guide for people who inquire about how to provide long-term prisoners with support or basic necessities. You should research every relevant jail's commissary deposit procedures, as well as prisoner mail and book policies, and put it in a handy online document that can be given to supporters. Visitation policies should be included as well.

CHAPTER 2: HANDLING CALLS

What To Say To Callers

Exactly what to say when an operator first answers a call will depend on a host of factors, but it's still essential to have a rough script flowchart. A sample script can be found in Appendix E.

There are a few statements operators must make to anyone who calls, especially from jail. All callers should be reminded that the line is not secure. This is especially true for incarcerated callers, but even a call from a protest might be being monitored by police.

Callers should also be informed that nothing said on the call is legal advice. A typical beginning might sound something like "*Legal support, this is Marge. I can't give you legal advice, and this line is not secure, but how can I help?*"

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – What To Say

Operators should be familiar with the following types of callers and scenarios:

Legal Observers calling from a protest to report arrests:

Operators should record the names of the arrestees, and birth dates if they're known, as well as the LO's assessment of where the arrestees will be taken.

Journalists trying to get information and/or statements: Don't talk to them, not even off the record, not even if they're with a friendly outlet. The hotline team might or might not want to establish a media relations arm, but either way, it's not the job of hotline operators to field press inquiries, especially if there's only a single phone line.

Friends and supporters of arrestees calling for updates about their arrested comrades: Or possibly trolls pretending to be friends and supporters. It can be hard to tell the difference. In the absence of knowledge about the caller, you will have to play it by ear, but the default response should be to tell them nothing, and possibly get their contact information so someone can get in touch later if their need to know can be confirmed.

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – What To Say

In addition, get whatever information you can about the arrestee the caller is supporting, but keep in mind it might not be accurate. See Confidentiality section above for more details.

Protesters reporting arrests or police violence: Operators should direct the caller to any NLG Legal Observers on scene (who can be recognized by their bright green hats). If none are present, the caller should be asked to attempt to get the names of arrestees without getting arrested themselves. They can do this by shouting to the arrestee from a safe distance or asking the arrestee's companions for the information. If the caller is a potential witness in a lawsuit or criminal case stemming from the protest, the operator should record the caller's contact information.

In some instances, a caller will report arrests but will not be able to identify the arrestees. If this happens, the operator should get physical descriptions of the arrestees and ask how many people were arrested. Record the information so that further research can be done to locate the arrestees.

Protesters should be discouraged from saying anything incriminating about themselves or anyone else.

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – What To Say

In general, there is no reason to permit callers to admit to anything that might get them or others in trouble. In addition, discussing anything related to the circumstances of someone's arrest should be avoided.

Callers who are not affiliated with protesting or activism: Few hotlines will possess the resources to help prisoners unrelated to the protest who get hold of the number and decide to call. You should establish priorities and ground rules for determining the scope of acceptable calls, and operators should know how to politely refuse to talk to callers who fall outside the team's purview. You should, of course, refuse to engage with trolls and alt-right antagonists.

Recent arrestees calling from jail for the first time: It's important to remain calm and project steadiness and confidence, so as not to further traumatize and upset people who may be having a very hard time already. Lead with the disclaimer above, and be prepared to interrupt if the caller tries to say anything potentially incriminating. Get the caller's full legal name and date of birth. This information will be necessary to track the caller in the legal system as their case progresses.

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – What To Say

Next, ask if the caller is experiencing a medical emergency. If they are, remember to remain calm and reassuring, and consult the Emergency Calls subsection below for next steps. You will still need the defendant's legal name and date of birth.

If the caller is not experiencing a medical emergency, the operator should collect and record some basic information, including the caller's preferred name, their pronouns, and anything else that might cause them to experience targeted abuse by jail staff, such as being Black or transgender. If the information is not readily available online, try to get the caller's jail ID number, charges, and the date of their next court appearance, but don't waste time on it otherwise. Record any requests the caller may have. These might include such things as alerting a supporter or family member of their arrest, asking someone to go to their house to feed pets, collecting their car from impound, and much more.

If possible, try to find out who the caller would like to keep informed about their situation, and how to verify the identity of these supporters if they call. This information will come in handy when friends and relatives of arrestees call the hotline asking for information about their loved ones.

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – What To Say

Similarly, operators should ask who should not be informed about the caller's situation (see Confidentiality section above). Also, ask the caller if they would like to be bailed out should the situation arise. They will likely say yes, but it's good to make sure, since some arrestees will prefer to stay in jail for political or other reasons. Get the caller's contact information on the outside, so that they can be contacted after they get out of jail in order to coordinate ongoing support as their case unfolds. A comprehensive list of other facts to collect, if time allows, can be found in Appendix D.

Throughout all of this, the operator must keep an eye on the clock. In fact, for jails with strict call time limits, you might want to start an actual timer. Be prepared for the call to end before you get all the information you need, and prioritize accordingly. The top priority is getting the caller's full legal name and general medical condition. Their date of birth will help distinguish them in web searches if they have a common name. The caller's jail ID number will be required to deposit money in their commissary and arrange visits, but you can skip asking for it if the number can be found online. If you know you won't have time to ask everything, concentrate on these basics and try to get to any requests the caller has.

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – What To Say

Near the end of the call, urge them to call back as soon as they can in order to answer any remaining questions, or just to give further updates about their situation.

Undocumented immigrants: In the case of undocumented immigrants calling from jail, care should be taken to avoid discussion of the caller's immigration status in case jail personnel are eavesdropping on the call. Such information falling into the wrong hands could complicate the caller's immigration status or result in their deportation. Try to get the name and contact information of a supporter who can provide sensitive details securely. At most, ask the caller if they need an immigration lawyer, but even this should be avoided if possible.

Emergency calls: Given the abysmal health care and rampant disregard for human life exhibited by most jails, hotline operators should be prepared to support callers experiencing severe medical distress. If a caller is undergoing medical issues, start by getting their full legal name and date of birth, as noted above. Also find out what part of the jail the caller is in – their housing unit and cell number if they have been processed into housing, or intake if not.

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – Providing Support

Find out exactly what symptoms the caller is experiencing, what they think is causing them, and what they would like done about it. Be sure to record this information in detail.

Providing Support

Depending on the nature and seriousness of the caller's emergency, there are several ways to provide support.

NOTE: There are a variety of ways to support arrestees experiencing issues in jail, including lawyer visits, phone zaps, noise demos, media attention, and prioritizing their bail. Arrestees should be asked for their consent before employing any of these measures, since they will likely involve public attention. However, consent may be difficult if, for example, a caller reports another arrestee being held incommunicado while experiencing an acute medical emergency. In cases like this, it's probably OK to proceed without explicit consent, although maybe start with a lawyer visit before initiating a public campaign.

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – Providing Support

Lawyer Visits: The hotline team should be in contact with lawyers willing to represent defendants charged with protest-related offenses. See Other Legal Support Functions section for details. Operators should contact one or more of these lawyers to visit anyone being denied critical needs and/or suffering from severe medical issues. Lawyers are theoretically allowed to visit any prisoner they want, but may be restricted from doing so by jail officials under various pretenses. Nonetheless, it's worth the attempt. Getting a lawyer inside on short notice will send a clear message that the defendant has outside support, and is also a good way to reassure the prisoner, convey information, and press demands in person.

Phone Zaps: A phone zap involves overwhelming a jail's phone system with calls, all demanding that the prisoner get their critical needs met, such as their asthma inhaler, prescription, transport to the hospital, etc. Faxes can be effective as well if the jail has a fax number. The idea is to both impress on jail officials that the prisoner has support and that there will be consequences if they are harmed or neglected, and harass officials until demands are met. Organizing a phone zap on short notice requires that the hotline team have good connections with the broader legal support and activist communities.

Chapter 2: Handling Calls – Providing Support

Noise Demos: A noise demo is when supporters amass in front of the jail with noisemakers, bullhorns, and their voices in order to make their demands known in a way that's hard to ignore. Noise demos take longer to organize than other forms of pressure, and incur some risk of additional arrests, but can be an effective escalation if demands are not granted quickly.

Media Attention: While there is no guarantee that the mainstream media will cover jail-related issues, let alone protest-related issues, it may still be worth pursuing coverage. Consider working with an existing media team, if one exists. But if not, developing and circulating press releases can result in crucial coverage without too much effort. You may want to start with independent and left media outlets that will be more sympathetic to activists. Coverage by independent media may also compel additional coverage by mainstream outlets. A press release in conjunction with a press conference, rally, or noise demo may persuade local TV news stations to send crews.

Bail: Arrestees facing medical or other emergencies should be the top priority for getting bailed out. See Bail Fund subsection in Other Legal Support Functions below.

CHAPTER 3: INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Internal Communications and Record Keeping

It is very important when collecting information from callers to use a secure system to record it and share it appropriately. Likewise, it is important for hotline operators and other legal supporters to communicate securely. For isolated protests, when few people are arrested, it might be sufficient to take notes in an online document and communicate in a Signal chat. However, for a major uprising, you will need a more capable system.

It helps to employ a spreadsheet when more than a small handful of people are arrested, using one row for each defendant, and recording all relevant details of each case. Secure online spreadsheet platforms include Cryptpad and Grist, among other providers. See Appendix A: Basic Digital Tools and Appendix B: Advanced Digital Tools for more details.

Chapter 3: Internal Communications – Record Keeping

In a multi-role organization, team members need a way to filter and segregate large amounts of incoming communications. Texting apps like Signal are poorly suited for segregating communications properly while still keeping team roles connected. Slack was developed to address this problem by allowing separate channels for each working group and/or topic, but Slack is much too insecure for use by a hotline team. Instead, more secure alternatives like Keybase or Mattermost should be considered.

Again, consult the Digital Tools appendices below for details.

Device Security: If a team member is arrested in possession of their phone and/or computer, the secure apps they're using could become compromised. Advanced preparation and a prompt response is crucial in order to maintain communications security if a team member is detained.

All team members should lock down their devices. Phones should be encrypted with an alphanumeric password of at least 12 characters. Insecure authentication methods like fingerprints and facial recognition should always be disabled. Screen notifications should be disabled to the extent possible, especially for Signal.

Chapter 3: Internal Communications – Record Keeping

Laptops should have full disk encryption enabled, again, with a long alphanumeric password. If an arrest appears imminent, the person should make every attempt to turn off their phone and/or laptop, since this makes device storage encryption much more effective.

If team members attend a protest, they should bring burner phones and leave the phones they use for legal support at home. Signal accounts should be protected with a PIN to prevent police from taking over the account.

Once a team member's phone is known to have been taken by police, chat administrators should quickly cut off that phone's access to any sensitive information. Passwords should be enabled or changed for all Cryptpad documents. When changing a password, Cryptpad will destroy the previous version of the document. If using Mattermost, the user's account should be disabled and not restored until the user is known to be out of custody. Similar measures should be taken with any other shared app to which the user has access. Any login credentials used by the team member for communications apps and/or collaborative platforms should be changed.

Chapter 3: Internal Communications – Record Keeping

In Signal, disappearing messages should be set to no more than a week, and you should consider reducing this time limit further if repression escalates. Taking this precaution will prevent the police from reading older group texts if they gain access to a team member's phone. In addition, team members should utilize Signal's new “user name” feature, which replaces phone numbers with handles chosen by the user.

If a team member does get arrested, they should be immediately removed from all Signal groups, and it is recommended that everyone else in the group change their handle and display name. This will prevent the police from tying user names to real-world identities or other Signal groups. Team members should also be sure to protect their account with a PIN, to prevent account theft. Keeping a separate burner phone solely for Signal is an added layer of protection, but is more expensive.

CHAPTER 4: OTHER LEGAL SUPPORT

Ongoing Support

Ongoing arrestee and defendant support, whether from friends and family, the local legal community, and/or the broader social movement they are a part of, can be crucial to their well-being and effectiveness at fighting their charges. In addition to answering hotline calls, team members can perform tasks to gather information about arrestees in need of support. Depending on the situation, the following roles can be performed by hotline operators during slow periods, or by specialized working groups who collaborate closely with the folks holding down the hotline.

Arrestee Tracking: In many cases, the hotline will not hear about arrests directly. In other cases, an arrestee or someone else will call the hotline, but not be able to convey all the necessary information. Arrestee tracking fills in these gaps with open source research. A tracker should search broadly. They can crawl local court websites for new arrests with typical protest charges such as Riot or Failure to Disperse. They might also look up an arrestee's case to find their next court date, jail ID number, and other data.

Chapter 4: Other Legal Support – Ongoing Support

A tracker could also call an arrestee's contact people to pass along requests. Anyone doing tracking should be familiar with extracting information from user-unfriendly websites and often-hostile jail bureaucrats in their local area. Social media research skills can come in handy to get in touch with arrestees and their supporters when contact information is not readily available.

Court Observing: The fastest way to find out the result of a court proceeding is to be there in person. For this reason, court observers should be present at bail hearings, arraignments, trials, sentencing hearings, etc. Observers should be familiar with the locations and access policies of local courthouses, as well as how to view hearings that are streamed online. They should also be prepared to take notes, since electronic recording devices are prohibited in courtrooms everywhere.

Prisoner Support: A prisoner support working group could coordinate solidarity efforts for long-term prisoners among defendant support crews and other interested parties. Prisoner support working groups can be used to keep track of which prisoners want letters and/or public support.

Chapter 4: Other Legal Support – Other Functions

They can also maintain informational resources on jail letter, book, visitor, and commissary policies; help publicize events such as letter-writing nights; and possibly arrange commissary deposits, although this function can also be performed by a local bail fund (see Other Legal Support Functions section below). Ideally, a prisoner support working group wouldn't do most of the work of prisoner support themselves, but can promote and facilitate community efforts.

Other Legal Support Functions

The following key roles and groups will invariably need to coordinate with the hotline team on a regular basis. Even if some or all of these roles and groups fall under the same organizational umbrella as the hotline team, it's important for good communication channels to exist.

Legal Observers: Legal Observers (LOs) are trained NLG volunteers who go to protests to record police activity in order to act as witnesses for demonstrators. Some LOs may testify and/or provide evidence in criminal or civil cases.

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One of their tasks is to get the names of arrested protesters and call them in to the hotline. In addition, LO coordinators for local NLG chapters will potentially need to coordinate with defense lawyers in order to send them the appropriate LO notes.

Lawyers and Lawyer Coordinators: Support from the hotline team can be instrumental in helping to pair protest-related defendants with experienced attorneys. While finding attorneys can sometimes be challenging, and often harder when many of the defendants are facing felony charges, the hotline team can keep track of which defendants have lawyers, who those lawyers are, and how individual defendants feel about the quality of their representation. Ideally, an established organization like the local NLG chapter can step up to coordinate recruiting and educating lawyers so each defendant can secure representation. The hotline team can then feed the lawyer wranglers a regularly updated list of defendants in need of attorneys.

If defendants are left to find their own representation, the hotline team can develop a referral list of experienced criminal defense attorneys and movement-oriented lawyers.

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The hotline team should also be familiar with the policies of local public defenders offices, as many defendants will have to turn to them for representation.

Bail/Solidarity Fund: Most major cities have their own bail funds, sometimes backed by the National Bail Fund Network. Different bail funds have different policies about who they will support and how much bail they can afford for each defendant, but all of them should assist arrested protesters. The hotline team can support the local bail fund by keeping track of upcoming bail hearings and their outcomes, and alerting the fund as soon as a defendant can be bailed out. If there is no bail fund in your area, you could look into starting one. A number of existing funds were launched originally to support protesters and continued operating after the uprising that inspired them subsided.

In the absence of a bail fund, arrestees will have to rely on some combination of individual fundraising, the generosity of friends and relatives, and professional bail bondsmen, if necessary. In this case, the hotline team should develop a working knowledge of the habits and practices of all the local bond companies in order to inform supporters.

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Jail Vigil: People getting out of jail after days or weeks of confinement will deeply appreciate being met outside the gate with snacks, beverages, ride offers, and hugs. Jail vigils often spring up spontaneously following mass arrests, but with an ongoing protest, more deliberate organizing will be necessary. If jail support infrastructure doesn't already exist, the hotline team can help develop it. In the case of existing infrastructure, the hotline team should keep vigil organizers apprised of when people are getting out, so the vigil can take a break during slow stretches. A vigil is also a great place to meet arrestees in person, conduct out-take interviews to obtain information they might not have conveyed to hotline operators, and determine what support they might need with their cases going forward. See Appendix C for a list of supplies to bring to jail vigils.

Support Crews: It is very helpful for defendants to have dedicated support crews, especially if they are going to be in jail for a long time and/or are facing serious charges. When talking to prisoners, hotline operators can record the names and contact information of friends who could form support crews.

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A small group focused on the needs of a single defendant ensures the defendant doesn't slip through the cracks, taking a lot of pressure off the hotline team's prisoner support working group. It can be helpful for each support crew to have a liaison who acts as a single contact to the hotline team, which will relieve operators and trackers from having to figure out how to get in touch when they have crucial information to share. The liaison can be a hotline team member who is familiar with prisoner support, or a support crew member who is plugged into the broader legal support effort. It is also important to vouch for all liaisons.

Scanner Monitors: One role that can be helpful for tracking the activity of police is a scanner monitor, who can listen to publicly available radio transmissions on apps like Broadcastify. For obvious reasons, these volunteers should be vetted with security requirements of their own. Monitoring police scanners is a good way to find out about arrests as they are happening, although details may be limited. In a pinch, the hotline team can monitor the police themselves, but police transmissions have uses that are not confined to legal support. Ideally, a separate organization will handle scanner monitoring and dissemination of the resulting information to appropriate parties.

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Fundraising: The effort to raise legal support funds can be done by a separate organization, such as a bail fund, or by an internal working group. Either way, the hotline team will need money for things like burner phones, secure hosting, office supplies, and more. Raising money tends to be easier when protesters are getting arrested, and it's important to strike while the iron is hot. Once the crisis is over, people will be less motivated to donate.

Guidance on raising funds is beyond the scope of this manual, but there are a couple of precautions to keep in mind. First, check the policies of your online fundraising platform to make sure it allows money to be raised for legal support. Regardless, it's good practice to regularly transfer funds into your bank account in case the page gets shut down and the company tries to take back or freeze donations. Second, you may want to open a dedicated bank account for hotline funds instead of relying on someone's personal account.

