

Prisoner Solidarity in the Seven Cities:

**A primer for aid, alliance, and action in
support of the Tidewater area's
incarcerated**

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[Introduction]

[State and Local Institutions: Fast Facts on Past and Present Issues]

Before jumping into **how** you can begin to ally yourself with our incarcerated neighbors, we figured it would be beneficial to provide a bit of background as to **why** it is so crucial for one to do so.

In the following section, we provide an overview of the glaringly inhumane legislation that governs our state and local “justice” systems, as well as key information on selected state and local institutions, including allegations of neglect, abuse, and out-and-out torture.

Please keep in mind that much of the information in this section may be distressing to read, and potentially even triggering, as much of it involves detailed descriptions of state-sponsored abuse, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and ableism. Engage this section at your own discretion.

The Carceral State of Virginia

...Is disproportionately large, and disproportionately black

- Virginia ranks low in violent (46th) and property (43rd) crime nationally, but high in incarceration (13th) and prison spending (11th).
- People of color are disproportionately incarcerated in Virginia, where African Americans comprise roughly 20 percent of the population, yet are the target of 47.4 percent of all arrests, and comprise 60.8 percent of state prison inmates. For every white person incarcerated in Virginia, six African Americans are behind bars.
- As a result of the figures above, 20.4 percent of African American Virginians have lost the right to vote. ([Source](#))

...Maximizes punishment for the sake of punishment; eliminates opportunities to rehabilitate

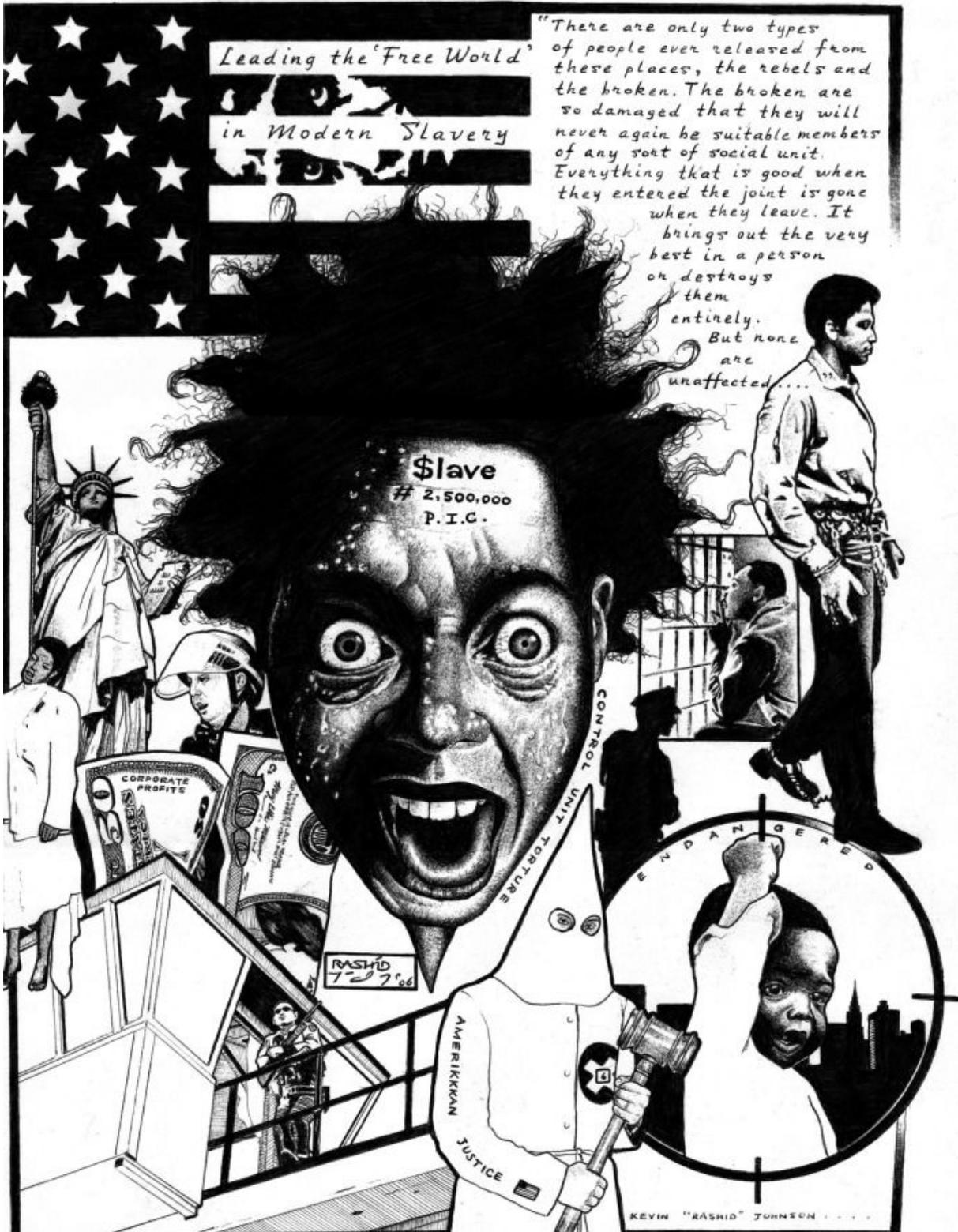
- Parole was effectively eliminated by the Virginia state legislature in 1994, during a national wave of “tough-on-crime”/“truth-in-sentencing” state legislation passed in tandem with the Clinton administration’s draconian “War on Drugs.” Felons must now serve 85% of their sentences before they are eligible for release, regardless of whether they have been on “good behavior” for months, years, or decades.
- Also in 1994, the General Assembly also passed legislation reclassifying certain nonviolent property crimes --such as the burglary of an occupied house--as violent crimes, and created stricter and more punitive sentencing guidelines based on whether or not the crime was “violent,” as well as the offender’s criminal record (including juvenile records!).
- The General Assembly, in a Senate Finance Committee 20-year retrospective, has *boasted* that actual time served per offense has increased by 91 percent since these so-called “truth in sentencing” laws were passed, up from 1.7 years to 3.3 years served on average. ([Source](#))

...Wastes tax dollars on punishing nonviolent drug offenders; does nothing to reduce illicit drug use

- In 2012, Virginia police arrested 38,349 people on drug charges, a 51 percent increase from 2002. Marijuana arrests accounted for 62.4 percent, or 23,936, of those arrests.
- Estimating law enforcement and court costs per arrest of \$1,650 for marijuana possession and \$5,260 for more serious narcotic and drug equipment arrests, the state spent more than \$94 million on drug arrests alone in one year.
- In spite of increasing arrests, illicit drug use has only increased in Virginia in recent years.

...Is riddled with human rights violations

- The state hosts two supermax prisons, Red Onion State Prison and Wallens Ridge State Prison. Both have been host to accusations of routine human rights abuses, and in 2012 Red Onion State inmates engaged in a widely-publicized [hunger strike](#).



Leading the 'Free World'
in Modern Slavery

"There are only two types of people ever released from these places, the rebels and the broken. The broken are so damaged that they will never again be suitable members of any sort of social unit. Everything that is good when they entered the joint is gone when they leave. It brings out the very best in a person or destroys them entirely. But none are unaffected...."

\$lave
2,500,000
P.I.C.

CORPORATE PROFITS

RASHID
7-27-66

CONTROL UNIT TORTURE
AMERIKKAN JUSTICE

ENDANGERED

KEVIN "RASHID" JOHNSON

Art by Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, a New Afrikan Black Panther Party member formerly held in the Greensville, VA Correctional Facility.

Sussex I and II State Prisons

[Location: Sussex County, near Waverly]

- Sussex I serves as an intake facility, processing offenders from the local jails into the Department of Corrections, and includes the state death row for men. The actual execution chamber is located at the Greenville Correctional Center.
- Sussex II has a maximum capacity of 1,352 offenders, and is a security level 4 prison. In terms of building structure, the facility is identical to Sussex I State Prison.

Hampton Roads Regional Jail (HRRJ)

[Location: City of Portsmouth]

Population: ~1100

Medical provider: Private contractor, Correct Care Solutions (CCS)]

HRRJ is known as the “deadliest jail in Virginia”...

- Hampton Roads Regional Jail is currently under investigation by the Department of Justice for alleged human rights violations; jail authorities are accused of neglecting dire physical and mental health crises suffered by disabled inmates, resulting in several inmate deaths *per year*.
- Between 2013 and 2016, inmates died nearly nine times more often in custody at Hampton Roads Regional Jail than at other local or regional jails in Virginia. ([Source](#))
- Selected inmate deaths, 2015-2017 (A complete list of the 18 inmate deaths that occurred from 2012-2016 can be found [here](#)):
 - August 2015: Jamycheal Mitchell, 24, died after losing 46 pounds over a period of 101 days at HRRJ. He was being held on suspicion of stealing *five dollars* in snacks from a 7-Eleven, but never received a trial.
 - November 2015: Mark Goodrum, 60, dies of a stroke one month into being incarcerated. He was arrested on charges of smoking marijuana in his own home, and could not afford to pay the \$100 bail for his release.
 - March 2016: William Otis Thrower Sr., 69, dies after being denied emergency medical care at least twice, including the day before he died. ([Source](#))
 - August 2016: Henry Clay Stewart, 60, was found dead in his cell after making repeated requests for medical attention. Stewart was suffering from months of uncontrolled fainting spells, coughing and vomiting.
 - March 2017: 20-year-old Jakim Funderbunk was found dead in his cell, having committed suicide. Funderbunk was known to be suffering from depression, and did not receive proper supervision in spite of being on suicide watch. ([Source](#)) ([Source](#))
 - July 2017: Frederick Mitchell, 56, dies in a hospital. ([Source](#))

- August 2017: Michael Masean Hall, 35, dies after an extended hospital stay. ([Source](#))

...and the “largest mental institution in Virginia.”

- More than 500 men and women with diagnoses of serious mental illness (SMI) are held in the Hampton Roads Regional Jail, effectively making it the largest mental institution in Virginia. ([Source](#)) ([Source](#))
- Hampton Roads Regional Jail functions as an “overflow” institution, where jails from around Hampton Roads send prisoners they feel they are unable to house. As such, nearly all inmates who are chronically ill and/or mentally ill are transferred to HRRJ. Additionally, some cities such as Portsmouth, which lack space facilities for women, transfer all of their female prisoners to HRRJ.

[View a running list of complaints about jail conditions by our contacts at HRRJ here.](#)

Norfolk City Jail (NCJ)

[Population: ~1300, more than 400 over capacity

Medical Provider: Private contractor, Correct Care Solutions (CCS)]

Overcrowded; frequently operated by same corrupt officials as HRRJ

- Norfolk City Jail is, by the Norfolk Sheriff’s Office’s admission, “the largest and most overcrowded jail in Virginia,” averaging about 1,300 inmates daily. The facility is rated to hold 878 inmates. ([Source](#)) As a result, many inmates are forced to sleep on the floor of their cramped cells.
- Norfolk City Jail has, from 1993 until his recent retirement, been under the authority of Sheriff Bob McCabe, who is under federal investigation for sexual harassment, accepting bribes and utilizing prison slave labor for personal gain. ([Source](#)) He also briefly served as the interim superintendent of Hampton Roads Regional Jail.
- Under McCabe, Norfolk City Jail has been under investigation for alleged “grossly deficient” conditions that “violate the constitutional rights of prisoners” since 1994. ([Source](#)) Complaints included inadequate fire safety measures, insect and rodent droppings in living and dining quarters, two operable toilets being shared among 48 prisoners, inmates sleeping on dirty floors due to overcrowding, and lack of access to medical care.
- Despite overcrowding, Norfolk City Jail holds many inmates for petty charges such as failure to pay child support and simple possession of marijuana. As of one week in August 2016, NCJ held 86 inmates on charges of simple possession of marijuana. If

Norfolk Jail's 86 inmates represent the average for that facility, it would translate to a cost of roughly \$1.84 million per year to incarcerate people for possession of marijuana in Norfolk alone (at a rate of \$58.69 a day per inmate) ([Source](#))

- Inmates are charged \$2.00 for each day they are involuntarily held under appalling conditions at NCJ. Under Virginia state law, it is legal to charge inmates up to \$3.00/day during their period of incarceration.

[View a running list of complaints about jail conditions by our contacts at NCJ here.](#)

Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail (VPRJ)

[Location: City of Williamsburg]

- VPRJ has been U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's designated local holding facility for detained immigrants since the agency pulled out of HRRJ due to concerns over inadequate conditions in 2014.

[Local Prisoner Support Initiatives]

Getting involved with a prisoner support group already established in our area is a great way to begin working toward improving the lives of our incarcerated neighbors. Whether you're new to prisoner support work and feel most comfortable working with those with experience to lean on, or are confident in your own abilities, and would like to build a robust movement for prisoner rights with other activists in the area. Below is a list of organizations which host an array of prisoner support programs, with links to each organization's webpage.

[Humanities Behind Bars](#)

Programs: Humanities courses and book drives for prisoners, Prison-Industrial Complex reading group, prison pedagogy reading group, film screenings

[Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia](#)

Programs: Legal support

[Messages Project](#)

Programs: Incarcerated family support

[Norfolk Prisoner Reentry T.E.A.M.](#)

Programs: Support groups for formerly-incarcerated individuals, re-entry programs, mentorship

[Portsmouth NAACP](#)

Programs: Legal support, civil rights advocacy

[Tidewater IWW](#)

Programs: Inside-outside organizing workshops, prisoner letter-writing sessions, book drives for prisoners, support for currently- and formerly-incarcerated workers and their families

[Seven Cities Writers' Project](#)

Programs: Creative writing courses and book drives for prisoners

[Step-Up, Inc.](#)

Programs: Education and pre-release evaluation, re-entry, housing and employment assistance, counseling

[Virginia ACLU](#)

Programs: Legal support, civil rights advocacy

[RISE for Youth](#)

Programs: Working to close Virginia's juvenile prisons, and re-invest savings from their closure into evidence-informed, community-based alternatives that will keep youth at home with their families and communities and keep communities safer.

[DIY: Inside-Outside Correspondence]

Starting or Joining a Working Group

Prisoner solidarity work is done most effectively in tandem within a group, organization or coalition dedicated to the same cause. Groups can share material resources, such as stationery, postage, and reading materials for the recipients

Correspondence as the basis of

Some groups are dedicated solely to establishing written correspondence with prisoners, which is an excellent means to provide a fellow human being behind bars with sorely-needed emotional support. Other groups take building the contacts, rapport, and base of knowledge regarding material conditions that one would need in order to engage in further inside-outside organizing work.

Joining an existing correspondence group

At present, the Tidewater IWW and Humanities Behind Bars host a concerted letter-writing and support strategy session on the first and third Wednesday of each month, from 6-8 pm at Slover Library in Norfolk. We are always glad to welcome new participants who have experienced incarceration first- or second-hand, or are otherwise interested in advocating for the rights of our incarcerated neighbors.

If you are unable to join us in person,

Starting a new group

[Hampton Roads Regional Jail Database](#)
[State Prisoner Database](#)

Advice for First-Time Writers

Decide ahead of time what you are and are not able to do:

Do not put your mental health at risk by engaging in traumatic associations. It is usually possible to find out what crimes a person has been accused or convicted of by searching online. The Tidewater IWW holds that nearly person who has committed a bona-fide “criminal” act is capable of rehabilitation. However, if you are not comfortable with writing to people convicted of a certain class of crimes (i.e. if you are an abuse survivor who is not comfortable writing to people convicted of sexual or physical abuse, or if you’re a recovering addict who would not want to write to someone convicted of distributing controlled substances), that is ok! *Only you can decide who you are comfortable with writing to.*

Decide what kind of correspondence you are and are not comfortable with partaking in.

From the Black and Pink guide on writing to LGBTQ prisoners:

“Given that many [inmates] have no access to healthy sexual expression inside of prison, at times they seek that through relationships with pen pals. If your pen pal writes a sexually explicit letter to you, and you do not want to write sexually explicit letters with your pen pal, it is important to be very clear with them. We encourage you to write back and be clear about the type of friendship you are looking to have and what your boundaries are about the types of things you want to write about. We suggest giving your pen pal a chance to hear from you that you don’t want to write sexually explicit letters and allow them a chance to respond appropriately.”

Additionally, it is important to realize that many (if not the overwhelming majority) of inmates have experienced or witnessed traumatic instances or patterns of violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse, poverty, the murder or death of loved ones, and participation in sex work, among other issues of an emotionally damaging nature. Many of our correspondents are forthcoming about these experiences, which can provide both the “inside” writer and their “outside” supporter with a level of emotional intimacy, trust, and a bond centered in healing that the inmate (and sometimes, their “outside” pen pal!) rarely have the chance to experience, but some may find information of this sort distressing. If you are uncomfortable with hearing about any of these experiences, it may be wise to abstain from correspondence, and engage in prisoner solidarity work in another role, such as fundraising or educating “outside” members of the public about prisoner-centered issues.

Do not make promises you cannot keep. If you’re only able to commit to responding to a prisoner once every a month or two, let them know. Do not offer other sources of aid, such as court support, financial support, or publicity, if you are not sure you can fulfill them. Tidewater IWW is glad to assist as much as we can along these lines, and though we are growing considerably as a group, our core organizers are few, and have little in the way of financial

means. If a prisoner is seeking aid that we are unable to provide, consider contacting other groups listed in the previous section, [“Local Prisoner Support Initiatives.”](#)

On using pen names:

Using a pen name minimizes the risk of corresponding with strangers. While the number of incarcerated individuals who are truly “dangerous” is far fewer than many would have us believe, there is a certain level of risk inherent in giving your full name to a person you do not already know, particularly if you have a “unique” name, and you are not using a PO Box as an added layer of identity protection. See following section on [using our PO box.](#)

Using a gender-neutral pen name can protect you from sexual harassment. Some participants with “feminine”-sounding names have been sexually solicited by the people they have written to. Some people are okay with this, but others are understandably made uncomfortable or unsafe by unsolicited advances of this nature.

Using a pen name can protect you from state surveillance. Some friends and allies of our group have been subjected to surveillance and prosecution for their involvement in outside activist work. Participating in prison-centered organizing can also put one at risk for state surveillance, especially if we’re doing our work well enough to make material gains and generate publicity for the cause. The Tidewater IWW *does not condone or engage in illegal activities*, but abstaining from illegal activity may not always protect innocent individuals from illegal state surveillance. Using a pen name and PO box return address can reduce the potential for retaliation against individual participants.

Understand the contraband and speech rules for the institution you are writing to:

Many institutions forbid so-called “dangerous” speech, such as language that openly encourages prison riots, acts of violence substance use, describes sexual acts, etc. To ensure that your letters will not be rejected and/or land your pen pal in hot water with jail authorities, ensure that your language does not obviously violate censorship guidelines, and do not suggest that the person you are corresponding with engage in actions that may put them at risk.

Some institutions also forbid certain types of stationery, colored ink, or the inclusion of blank stationery and stamps in the mail. Please check the specific contraband guidelines of the jail you are writing to before sending your mail. For your convenience, we have provided guidelines to a few of the institutions we write most frequently [in the next section of the primer.](#)

If your letters are being returned due to unjust censorship, or need advice on tailoring your language to pass prison censor, please feel free to contact the Tidewater IWW.

Ten major points on writing an introductory letter:

Your first letter to a prisoner does not need to be a work of artistic or epic scale, especially if you don't know anything about the person you're writing to. We recommend keeping it brief, and being honest and open about your intentions. Here are our recommendations for what to include (and exclude) from your first letter:

1. **A brief statement about who you are, your affiliations, and why you're writing to them:** Ex. "Hi! My name is Joe, and I'm a student at ODU who is concerned about the conditions in our local jails.
2. **How you found their name:** Are you "cold calling" them from a local jail database? Did you receive their name from a letter-writing group that was told they would like to be written to, or from another prisoner? Most people we talk to want to know why they were singled out for correspondence.
3. **What kind of correspondence you're interested in:** Do you want to find out about the conditions at the jail? Help inside organizers peacefully resist being forced to engage in unpaid labor? Or just trade poems, drawings, or personal anecdotes? If you would rather leave that decision up to the inmate (we suggest this, in most cases), let them know.
4. **How often you can write to them:** See above statement about only making promises you can uphold. Once you establish a rapport, you might offer to correspond via phone call or visitation.
5. **Other ways you can help:** If you're willing to provide more tangible forms of support right off of the bat, let them know. You can make specific suggestions (i.e. court support, or publishing their poems or art in a zine, and putting any proceeds in their canteen) or let them make their own suggestions. Usually we will save offers of this kind until after rapport has been established with an individual inmate.
6. **Ask for contacts:** Ask if anyone they know would like to be written to, and/or tell them that anyone interested in correspondence can write to our PO Box. Pass along any contacts you receive to Tidewater IWW (tidewateriww@protonmail.com). Our PO Box address is:

**Tidewater IWW
PO Box 1878
Norfolk, VA 23501**

7. **Include your return address in the actual letter:** Jails sometimes throw out envelopes, and Virginia state prisons will merely photocopy the original letter, and give the inmate a copy of the original.
8. **Number each page of the letter:** For example, write Page 1 of 4, Page 2 of 4, etc., so the recipient will be aware if part of the letter has been "misplaced" by jail authorities. You may also want to encourage the inmate to do the same. This is especially important

if you are writing about issues of a sensitive nature (i.e. institutional conditions; inside organizing campaigns).

9. **Don't be afraid to get personal**, but avoid pushiness, making presumptions about the recipient's character or what they're willing to divulge, or projecting your political beliefs onto prisoners.
10. **Don't be condescending, or make racist, sexist, classist, etc. assumptions or assertions.** This one should be self-explanatory, but it bears repeating. Prisoners are neither objects of valor nor pity; they are simply human beings, with all of the complexities, virtues, and flaws that people on the "outside" could be expected to possess.

Ways to provide material aid to an inmate:

(Again, only offer to provide support if you are able to deliver on the promise!)

- Contributing to their phone and canteen fund. If you don't possess the funds to do this yourself, you could create a crowdfunding campaign on their behalf, or (with their consent) publish the inmate's writing and art, and forward the proceeds to their canteen. [Humanities Behind Bars](#) is working on publishing zines to this end.
- Providing in-person support on court dates.
- Some prisoners may ask you to meet and keep in contact with their families. If the inmate was a "breadwinner" for their family, and the inmate and family request it, you could offer material support as needed to the inmate's family. Crowdfunding can also be a good means of accomplishing this.
- Send in books that the prisoner requests. Usually needs to be sent directly from the publisher, though Tidewater IWW is able to send used paperback books to NCJ through one of our partners.
- Providing bus fare or driving an ex-inmate to job interviews, school, etc.
- Assist ex-inmates with drafting resumes, acquiring job skills, landing interviews, finding housing, filing taxes, navigating bureaucratic barriers to societal re-integration (i.e. paperwork).

Providing publicity to repressed and/or abused inmates:

When individual prisoners, including prisoner-organizers, are targeted by authorities for repression, retaliation, abuse, and/or outright torture, drawing the attention of the public to the issue, and subsequently making the institution aware that many eyes are on them, is often sufficient to cause authorities to reverse their unacceptable behavior. Offers of publicity are best supported by the coordinated efforts of a group, formal or informal, that possesses a network wide enough to produce the desired effect. Sometimes a particular prisoner's plight can be integrated into a larger campaign to demand changes in an institution's policies and practices (i.e. campaigns for in-person visitation, better medical care, better food, eliminating censorship, etc.). The Tidewater IWW is glad to assist those who wish to raise publicity for a particular

inmate with establishing a plan of action to that end, whether or not we possess the resources to tackle a campaign on our own.

Potential methods of raising a “public profile” for an inmate or a wider, prisoner-centered campaign:

- Maintaining social media pages for inmates
- Writing letters or petitions to jail authorities and/or government officials. This can be done in support of the inmate’s parole or pardon, or to demand that
-

Other guides on writing to prisoners:

[Black and Pink guide on writing to LGBTQ prisoners](#)

Using a P.O Box for Prisoner Correspondence

For security reasons, it is often a good idea to use a mailing address that is not linked to your residence. The Tidewater IWW has reserved a PO Box for this purpose. The PO Box is checked each Wednesday, and we distribute mail to recipients at the beginning of each letter writing session. We also provide two other options for PO Box users to receive their mail:

- 1) Mail will be opened and scanned into your personal “mailbox” folder within our Dropbox, where any correspondence addressed in your name (or pen name) will be made accessible to you via a link to the folder that only you will be given access to. The digital system ensures that you will be able to read and respond to the prisoner’s letter quickly, regardless of whether you are capable of retrieving the physical letter at one of our letter-writing sessions. Mail will not be read or shared without your consent. Other than you, only the secretaries of the IWW and IWOC will be able to access your folder. Old mail may be deleted by request.
- 2) Alternatively, if you are uncomfortable with the digital system, we can forward mail to you, but we do ask that participants who elect to have their mail forwarded donate postage, or funds to purchase postage, as needed. If you are unable to do so, you must either pick up your mail at a letter-writing session, or receive your mail digitally. As forwarding mail is slower, costlier, and more laborious than distributing it digitally or at letter-writing events, we find the other methods preferable.

If you are interested in using the PO box, please email tidewateriww@protonmail.com with the following informat

[Mobilizing for Change: Inside-Outside Organizing]

The Tidewater IWW encourages anyone interested in prisoner support work to write and offer material support to inmates in whatever capacity they are willing and able to do. Keeping our incarcerated fellows' morale high, and allowing prisoners to experience friendship and camaraderie with those on the "outside" is, in and of itself, a worthy aim. We do, however, seek as an union to facilitate collective action both within and without the confines of institutions, in order to improve the daily living conditions that prisoners are subjected to. Ultimately, we want to build a world in which our traditional system of institutionalization is abandoned in favor of a truly rehabilitative and restorative system of justice, where working-class unity prevails over the barriers set among us by systemic injustice, state oppression and prison walls. We seek to accomplish this by organizing prisoners in the IWW's Incarcerated Workers' Organizing Committee.

What is the Incarcerated Workers' Organizing Committee?

The Incarcerated Workers' Organizing Committee (henceforth referred to as "IWOC") is a committee of the Incarcerated Workers of the World ("IWW")--a revolutionary labor union, founded in 1905 with the purpose of uniting the working class into a single union, a.k.a. the "One Big Union." The One Big Union, according to IWW theory, would serve as the vehicle for peacefully reclaiming the wealth and means of production hoarded by the ruling class, through a mass withdrawal of labor from the traditional wage economy. called the "general strike." While its dues-paying membership has never matched the numbers of massive trade unions such as the AFL-CIO, the IWW has achieved major successes in improving the material conditions of working-class people through the use of innovative tactics, which have since been appropriated by more mainstream unions and other activist movements. The IWW also boasts a rich culture of member-produced [folk songs](#), [slogans](#), and [symbols](#), many of which have since been borrowed by other unions or progressive movements for their own particular aims.

The IWW has survived against all odds (and the efforts of bosses and the state which serves them), and has evolved throughout the years to accommodate the changing nature of the labor struggle. One recent result of this evolution has been the formation of the Incarcerated Workers' Organizing Committee, which is our response to exponential rates of incarceration in recent decades, and the generations-wide scars that imprisonment and prison slavery have left upon marginalized communities and the working poor.

Why is joining the IWOC important for prison organizing? How do we build the IWOC?

If the incarcerated worker expresses interest in joining the union, you can send them [this application](#) for membership.

At any point, if the institution allows printed publications to be sent to inmates, keeping your pen pals

Countering the Repression of Incarcerated Organizers

[Correspondence Guidelines for Selected
Institutions]

Virginia State Prison Correspondence Guidelines

Finding Inmate names/ID Numbers

First, start at the [Virginia Statewide VINELink](#).

You can find inmates by searching with no less than the first three letters of the last name, and the first letter of the first name. You will be given a list of all inmates whose names begin with those letters. Results may be further refined by institution at the search page.

Mailing guidelines

“Incoming inmate general mail should be addressed as follows:

Inmate's full name

Inmate's state identification number (7 digits)

Name of Facility or Institution

Address and Zip Code

The Department of Corrections encourages inmate correspondence that is directed to socially useful goals. Inmates shall be allowed to correspond with families, friends, attorneys, courts and other public officials and organizations so long as such correspondence is in compliance with the Department of Corrections procedures and does not pose a threat to the security of the facility, violate any state or federal law, or violate any U.S. Postal Service regulation.

In accordance with United States Postal Regulations, all incoming inmate general correspondence may be opened, searched and may be read by authorized staff.

On April 17, 2017, the Virginia Department of Corrections will implement additional mailroom security measures aimed at detecting and eliminating contraband in DOC facilities. In institutions classified as Security Level 2 and above, all incoming general offender correspondence items will be photocopied, and only the photocopies will be delivered to the offender.

The original envelope and all enclosed contents will be shredded in the institutional mailroom once they are photocopied. In addition, for each mailing, a maximum of three 8 1/2 X 11 inch photocopy pages, front and back, will be delivered to the offender.

Inmates may not receive cash, personal checks, postage stamps or prepaid postage envelopes/postcards through incoming mail. The Department will assume no responsibility for these items mailed to inmates. Approved checks (certified/cashier's checks; Government checks; refund checks from businesses) and money orders shall be removed from incoming mail and credited to the inmate's account.

Incoming Priority or Express general correspondence is discouraged, however if urgency of a circumstance requires this, the inmate must receive prior written approval from the Warden/Superintendent or designee.

Unauthorized incoming correspondence shall be returned to the post office unopened. If opened, the unauthorized correspondence will be returned directly to the sender if known, with a written explanation for disapproval."

(Source: Virginia DOC Webpage)

[Institutions' individual mailing addresses may be found here.](#)

Norfolk City Jail Correspondence Guidelines

Finding Inmate Names/ID Numbers:

An up-to-date list of all inmates and ID numbers can be found on the Norfolk Sheriff's website using the following method:

1. Go to [this page](#).
2. Leave all search fields blank.
3. Under the "Search by Name" section, press the "Search" button.

Voila! You now have the names and ID numbers of everyone in NCJ. Pick an inmate and continue to the mailing guidelines section...

Mailing Guidelines

- “1. All incoming mail must have a return address on it or it will be returned to the post office.*
- 2. All incoming and outgoing mail will be inspected for contraband.*
- 3. All legal mail will be opened and inspected for contraband in the presence of the inmate.*
- 4. All incoming and outgoing mail must contain the inmate’s full name and ID#:*

Inmate’s Full Name and ID#
Norfolk City Jail
811 East City Hall Ave
Norfolk, VA 23510

- 5. Incoming and outgoing mail may not be bulky or contain anything other than correspondence or documents. Both incoming and outgoing mail that is found to be bulky will be opened and inspected. Items that are contraband will be confiscated, and a letter will be returned to the inmate (outgoing) or returned to sender (incoming).*
- 6. All unauthorized correspondence received from any other correctional facility will be returned to sender. Any requests for correspondence with another inmate must be approved by the Officer in Charge of Corrections or designee.*
- 7. Contraband is not permitted in the facility and will be returned to sender or destroyed. See the section on Contraband for details.*
- 8. Incoming publications (magazines, books, newspapers) must be sent directly from the publisher.”*

Reading materials

“You may subscribe to newspapers, magazines, educational or correspondence materials, and soft-bound books for Norfolk City Jail inmates. These materials must be received directly from the publisher or bookstore, and must not contain references to violent overthrow of government or any authority under which an inmate is held, drug or gang related material, information relating to the fabrication of weapons or explosive devices, or any sexually explicit material. Inmates may have in their possession a total of five pieces of reading material only (i.e. book, magazines, crossword puzzle books, bibles, dictionaries, pamphlets). This also includes items mailed to the inmates from the publisher. All books must be paperback – no spiral bindings or hardcovers allowed. Unacceptable items are returned at the expense of the inmate or sender. If the cost of returning the unacceptable items is not paid by either the inmate or the sender, the contraband will be contributed to a non-profit organization or destroyed. Any correspondence items in question require delivery approval from the Officer in Charge of Corrections.”

Items considered “contraband” include:

“All Photos/Pictures

All tobacco products or incendiary items or devices i.e. matches, lighters, etc.

Any packages

Any envelopes over 6×9 inches

Money orders/cash/checks

Stickers

Blank stationery, blank paper, stamps and/or envelopes

Mail sprayed with perfume/cologne, any unknown substance or lipstick

Musical cards, cards with ribbons, stickers, velvet, glitter, plastic or other attachments, newspaper clippings, pages torn from magazines or books or pop-up cards

Unauthorized correspondence from other facilities, jails, etc.

Magazines and books not sent directly from the publisher

Magazines and/or books containing sexually explicit material, information about the fabrication of weapons or explosive devices, any gang related material, literature advocating overthrow of government, whether sent from publisher or citizen

No return address

Gang related material/coded letters

Printed internet pages

Copies of pages from books (copyright material)

Lyrics or sheet music

Calendars/Maps

Envelopes with bubble/insulated wrap

Tattoo stencils/paraphernalia

Other”

Canteen

Norfolk City Jail utilizes an app for making deposits to inmate canteen accounts: [see here](#).

(Sources: Norfolk City Jail Inmate Handbook, Norfolk Sheriff's Office Webpage)

Virginia Beach City Jail Correspondence Guidelines

Finding Inmate Names/Mailing Addresses:

An up-to-date list of all inmates and ID numbers can be found on the Virginia Beach Sheriff's website using the following method:

1. Go to [this page](#).
2. Leave the search field blank.
3. Press the “Search” button.

Voila! You now have the names and ID numbers of everyone in VBCJ. Pick an inmate and continue to the mailing guidelines section...

Mail guidelines

"All inmates will be afforded the same correspondence privileges. There is no limit on the number of letters an inmate may send or receive. Excessive amounts of mail and correspondence will be placed in the inmate's property and/or mailed at the inmate's expense. All incoming mail/packages MUST have a Return Address. Those items without a Return Address will be sent back to the US Post Office. All legal mail will be opened and inspected in the presence of the inmate. All other inmate mail is subject to inspection and may be opened and searched prior to delivery. ALL outgoing mail must be addressed properly with NO DRAWINGS OR COLORINGS anywhere on the outside of the envelope.

All mail sent out by inmates must be sealed by the inmate. The inmate's full return address must be listed on the outside of the envelope. All outgoing mail will be sent daily except Sundays and holidays. The return address is:

**Inmate Name and OMS #
P.O. Box 6098
Virginia Beach, VA 23456**

*** Please note: Any mail sent out by an inmate and returned to this facility for any reason will be given a mail restriction write-up and will then be placed into the inmate's property box until their release from this facility. Incoming mail will be delivered without undue delay.*

Inmates will not be allowed to receive publications that violate the U.S. Postal regulations or advocate violence or rebellion against any government authority. Calendars, ordering forms with prices, catalogs, brochures, and newspapers more than 3 days accumulated will not be accepted.

Greeting cards must be no larger than 6" by 9" when fully opened.

Religious material must be provided by a religious organization and screened by the Chaplain.

Any outgoing inmate mail written on any form of VBCC paperwork will be considered contraband and will not be sent through the U.S. Postal Service.

Any other incoming or outgoing mail containing body fluids, liquids, hair or hair extensions will also be considered contraband and will be destroyed. Any incoming or outgoing mail containing hazardous material will be destroyed."

Reading materials

"The following list is provided as a guideline for authorized paper materials allowed to be kept in the cell.

Five (5) books (including religious books)

One (1) dictionary

Three (3) newspapers (no more than 3 days old)

Three (3) magazines (no more than 30 days old)

Two (2) writing tablets

Personal papers, religious materials, VBCC materials/receipts, and legal materials/copy of your warrants

Five (5) unframed photographs (no larger than a 4 x 6, no Polaroids)

One (1) photo album (must be purchased through the Caremart website) containing up to 36 pictures (all must be in the photo album)

Addresses and telephone numbers

Writing materials”

Canteen

“All deposits made to the inmate canteen fund must be in the form of a Money Order, Certified Check, or Cashier’s Check, and sent in the inmate’s name and addressed as follows:

Inmate’s Name and OMS #
C/O Virginia Beach Sheriff’s Office
Inmate Account
P.O. Box 6186
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

NO MONEY (CASH, CHECK OR MONEY ORDER) WILL BE ACCEPTED THROUGH ANY CONTROL CENTER. Any money orders mailed directly to an inmate will be returned to sender. Money mailed to the VBSO Canteen should not contain any correspondence. Inmate mail will only be accepted via the U.S. Postal Service.”

Source: Virginia Beach City Jail Inmate Handbook

Hampton Roads Regional Jail Correspondence Guidelines

Finding Inmate Mailing Addresses:

Compiling a list of HRRJ inmates poses a far greater challenge than the city jails. Unlike the city jails, Hampton Roads Regional Jail does not have an easily-datamined, up-to-date online search tool for finding inmates. As such, finding an inmate’s mailing address takes a few more steps.

First, start at the [Virginia Statewide VINELink](#).

You can find inmates by searching with no less than the first three letters of the last name, and the first letter of the first name. You will be given a list of all inmates whose names begin with

those letters. Results may be further refined by institution at the search page.

Search Page Example:

Virginia Statewide VINE

VINE Service Number (800) 467-4943

Please choose a path and follow the steps to perform your search.

Enter the Offender ID or Offender's First and Last Name.

1 Last Name **2** First Name [Open Advanced!](#)

Facility Name Date of Birth Age Range

Search Results:

Virginia Statewide VINE

VINE Service Number (800) 467-4943

TTY (866) 847-1298

If you do not see the result you are looking for please try narrowing your search or refer to the Quick Help for more information.
We have found 3 match(es) based on the information you entered.

[Search again](#) [Why can't I find the offender or court case I'm searching for?](#)

Offender Name:	SMITH, J. [REDACTED]	Custody Status:	In Custody	<input type="button" value="Notify Me of Status Changes"/>
Age:	19	Location:	Hampton Roads Regional Jail	
Race:	African American	Contact Facility:	Hampton Roads Regional Jail	
More Info				
Offender Name:	SMITH, [REDACTED]	Custody Status:	In Custody	<input type="button" value="Notify Me of Status Changes"/>
Age:	41	Location:	Hampton Roads Regional Jail	
Race:	African American	Contact Facility:	Hampton Roads Regional Jail	
More Info				
Offender Name:	SMITH, [REDACTED]	Custody Status:	In Custody	<input type="button" value="Notify Me of Status Changes"/>
Age:	27	Location:	Hampton Roads Regional Jail	
Race:	African American	Contact Facility:	Hampton Roads Regional Jail	
More Info				

Once you have confirmed that an inmate exists at HRRJ under a given name, click "More Info." Record the inmate's name and ID number, then call HRRJ's inmate information hotline at (757) 335-6260. You will run through an automated menu prompt in order to find the inmate's unit and pod numbers.

In order, state the following words loudly and clearly, pausing for one or two seconds between each to ensure the prompt is advancing: 1) "Inmate" 2) "Name" 3) "[Inmate's Name]" 4) "Yes" 5) "Location."

After passing the "location" prompt, you will be given the inmate's unit and pod numbers. Record them. You should now have all of the information you need in order to send mail to the inmate.

Mail guidelines:

"Inmates are allowed to receive mail from friends and family while detained at the Hampton Roads Regional Jail. Please adhere to the following mailing instructions and rules:

**INMATE'S NAME
HOUSING UNIT AND POD
HAMPTON ROADS REGIONAL JAIL
P.O. BOX 7609
PORTSMOUTH, VA 23707**

- *All inmate mail will be rejected if it contains cards of any kind (birthday, greeting, holiday etc.), letters written on colored notebook paper (yellow, blue, green etc.) and letters written with a marker or crayon. All letters must be written in either black or blue ink on white paper, no exceptions.*
- *Any material which violates postal regulations or contains obscenity, blackmail, contraband, or threats.*
- *Any material which contains plans of criminal activities, maps, or plots to escape, and any material which communicates information designed to encourage inmates to disrupt the facility by strikes, riots, fights, racial or religious hatred, or other prohibited acts.*
- *The Hampton Roads Regional Jail will not accept items for inmates that are free or incentives for purchasing or receiving publications or other items.*
- *Only pre-approved packages are accepted.*
- *Contraband consists of stamps; envelopes; staples; tape; glitter; glue or any sticky substance; photos or drawings larger than 4×6; sexually explicit photos; stickers or address labels; plastic cards or plastic covered cards; personal checks or cash; blank stationary or blank paper; information about the fabrication of weapons or explosive devices; and magazines, books or newspapers that do not have prior approval."*

Reading materials

"All property items entering the Hampton Roads Regional Jail must have prior approval from the Superintendent or designee before being mailed or brought to the facility. Inmates may receive newspapers, magazines, or soft back books if they are mailed directly from the publisher. Prior approval is required before placing the order. The publication may be denied if it is too big or threatens security. All publications will be checked for contraband."

Source: Hampton Roads Regional Jail Inmate Handbook

Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail Correspondence Guidelines

Finding Inmate Names/ID #s:

See the section on finding inmate names and ID numbers at HRRJ.

Mailing address and guidelines:

**Name and ID#
9320 Merrimac Trail
Williamsburg, Virginia 23185**

“All mail sent to an inmate at the Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail must include the sender's name and mailing address in the top left corner of the envelope or postcard.

Failure to include your return address will most likely result in your mail NOT being delivered and your letter destroyed.”

“All incoming, regular mail will be opened and inspected for contraband.

Please do not place stickers on envelopes.

Newspapers, magazines and books may only be received if the inmate obtains prior approval from the Director of Security. If approved, these items must come directly from the publisher. Articles from the internet may be received depending on content and quantity.”

Items authorized to be received through the mail:

“Money Orders

Mail pieces no larger than 6” x 9”

Cards no larger than 6” x 9” (no musical devices or strings – homemade cards shall not be plastic coated or sealed in any manner)

Written pages (no blank sheets)

Newspaper or magazine clippings (no pornography)

Pictures (no larger than 4” x 6” (no polaroids or pornography))”

“The only items that can be brought into the facility for an inmate [during a visit] are a religious necklace 1/8 inch in diameter, 18 – 20 inches long. The cross or emblem can be 1”x ½” - plain with no stones. You may bring clothing in for a Jury Trial only. All medications or medical items must be approved by the Medical Department and all prescriptions must be current and in the original container.”

Items not authorized to be received through the mail:

“If it is not listed above, then it is not authorized unless permission from the Director of Security has been obtained via an Offender Request Form.”

Source: VPRJ Website, jailexchange.com

[Other Resources]

[Prison Activist Resource Center](#): Provides an excellent directory of national and regional prison abolition and prisoner support organizations and resources.

[Global Political Prisoner Database](#), maintained by the LA Anarchist Black Cross.

[Incarcerated Workers' Organizing Committee Blog](#): More information on the branch of the Industrial Workers of the World devoted to supporting and organizing workers behind bars, including newsletters and updates on ongoing US-wide campaigns.

["Let the Crops Rot in the Fields"](#) by Free Alabama movement.

["Are Prisons Obsolete?" by Angela Davis](#): The quintessential argument for prison abolition-not-reform, in handy-dandy PDF format.

["Abolition Now! Ten Years of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex"](#): A book authored by members of Critical Resistance, a prison abolitionist network. See also: [The Abolitionists' Toolkit](#).