How to Become a Prisoner Advocate

Unfortunately, there are many people who are serving time in our prisons today. It is even more unfortunate that while these people are paying dearly for what they did by serving out their sentences, they are, often times, deprived of the most basic civil rights that we all take for granted in this nation. While we may all agree that one has to suffer the consequences of his/her actions when breaking the law, it follows that we also agree that the laws of the land must be upheld under all circumstances. This means that while a person is incarcerated, he/she is still entitled to his/her basic rights under the constitution. Prisoner Rights Advocates are the people who see that this remains true.

What is a prisoner rights advocate?

Simply put, prisoner rights advocates are people who play a vital role in assuring that inmates across the nation have their rights protected. They are people who dedicate themselves to this cause and work diligently to preserve the law of the land for the free, as well as the imprisoned.

Is a prisoner advocate a volunteer or is it a paid job?

Both. Prisoner advocates may be volunteers or work for pay. Their main function is to help inmates maintain their constitutional rights. Some lawyers do this kind of work on a volunteer basis, while others make a career in this field.

What are the job requirements for a prisoner advocate?

The requirements for a prisoner’s advocate vary depending on the country. To become a legal prisoner’s advocate in the United States, and in order to interpret the law in a common law jurisdiction, one must have an LL.B degree (Bachelor of Laws) and also a Diploma in Legal Practice.

Note: All lawyers who have passed the Bar are permitted to act as Prisoner’s Advocates.

What are some of the specific things that a prisoner’s advocate may become involved with?

A prisoner’s advocate is there to ensure that all of the rights of the prisoner are preserved. These include medical attention/healthcare for prisoners, proper treatment of inmates, counseling, and standing up for a beaten inmate who may be afraid to seek help elsewhere. Prisoner’s advocates also assist prisoners with pre-conviction services, pre-sentence reports, and post-conviction remedies.

Who might be interested in becoming a Prisoner Advocate?

People who are strongly opposed to the death penalty often enter this field. They feel that they are putting some action to their voice. If you are against the death penalty, you may be interested in learning more about this field. You may want to start by getting to know more about a person in prison on a personal level and the life he/she is leading behind bars. By joining a prisoner group on Yahoo, for instance, you may be able to become pen pals with a prisoner. This way you will get to know a real person who is serving a sentence. This will most likely enlighten you and you can then decide if you wish to take things further from there.

Are there groups that protect prisoners’ rights?

Yes, there are groups, PARC for example, that are committed to finding out about and making public all forms of institutionalized abuse or discrimination within the confines of the prison. This includes sexism, racism, ableism (discrimination against the disabled), classism, and heterosexism. These groups work in unity with prisoners and ex-prisoners. They also provide assistance and support to friends and families of those who are or who have been incarcerated. These groups also work toward building strategies and procedures that foster safety in our communities. Prison advocacy groups such as this also work with teachers and activists on prison-related issues.

How can obtain more information about working in this field?

You can begin with the ACLU, the American Civil Liberties Union of your state. This organization has been in existence since 1920 with their main responsibility being the preservation of human rights under the US Constitution. Here you will find all the information you need about becoming a representative for their
organization or becoming a prisoner advocate for an outside agency.

Are there private companies that hire people to be prison advocates?

Yes, there are independent statewide companies that hire Prisoner Rights Advocates. These vary among states; however, all companies maintain the same focus, which is to protect and ensure the constitutional rights of individuals who are incarcerated. You can easily do a search on the Web for companies that are specialists in Prisoners Rights Advocate hiring and training.

Are there other avenues to explore if I want to consider working in this field? Yes, you can check with pro bono lawyers. These are lawyers who work for free or for very little, as a way of volunteering their time and expertise to assist the underprivileged, since often times, these people become victims of the bureaucracy because they cannot afford suitable expert counsel. By contacting a known pro bono lawyer in your area, you should be able to get the name of a Prisoners Right Advocacy establishment near you.

Please see the following articles for more information about jobs related to public interest law:

- Human Rights Attorney at Home and Internationally
- Advocacy Jobs: What They Are and How to Get Them
- Make a Career Change as Public Defender
- How Lucrative Is a Career as an Animal Welfare Attorney: Advice by Anna Morrison-Ricordati