

VISIT
BEFORE
YOU
VOTE



Overview:

In many states the corrections allocation is the largest line item in the state's budget, yet the vast majority of elected officials have no experience with what really occurs behind the walls.

One Voice United recognizes the critical need for Lawmakers, Governors, Policy Writers, and newly elected Officials to gain firsthand insight into the challenges faced within America's prisons.

Purpose:

Visit Before You Vote is a national campaign created to educate and engage decision makers on the realities of corrections before they make sweeping changes to policy or vote on funding decisions.

Objectives:

- **Engagement:** Encourage lawmakers, governors, policy writers, and newly elected officials to visit correctional facilities and engage in meaningful discussions with frontline staff to gain insight into the realities of working within America's prisons and jails and the impacts their decisions have on their work and lives.
- **Education:** Foster dialogue on critical topics such as understaffing, facility constraints, recruitment and retention, staff wellness, and programming/ policy implementation and limitations. Encourage decision-makers to consider these perspectives when shaping future corrections policies and budget allocations.
- **Advocacy:** Empower frontline staff by providing them with a platform to voice their experiences and concerns directly to decision-makers, fostering a sense of inclusion and accountability in the policymaking process.

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Outreach Best Practices

- Determine the specific standing committees and subcommittees that have a direct impact on corrections issues.
- Know which electeds represent your facility, which electeds have a facility in their district, and which electeds may already have a pre-existing relationship with you or your Union or hold a leadership position.
- Where a relationship exists, reach out to the elected personally
- Where no relationship exists, reach out to the electeds office and ask to speak with their government affairs or chief of staff
Distill your issues into digestible statements using the Four Pillars
- Use personal impact stories
- Seek to build relationships through understanding

[Date]
[Name of Elected Official]
[Title]
[Address]
[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear [Name of Elected Official],

As a representative of the dedicated men and women who serve on the frontlines of our state's correctional facilities, I am writing to extend an invitation for you to participate in our "Visit Before You Vote" campaign.

The purpose of this campaign is to engage elected leaders on the realities of corrections work and create an open dialogue before you are asked to vote on policy reforms or make important funding decisions.

As an organization, we believe that it is essential for elected officials, such as yourself, to have a firsthand understanding of the challenges and issues faced within corrections. By witnessing the conditions and hearing the experiences within our facilities, you will gain valuable insight that can inform your policy making decisions.

We understand that your schedule may be demanding, and we want to ensure that this visit is as informative and constructive as possible. To that end, [Insert Union Name] would like to personally lead you on the tour and provide an in-depth understanding of the daily operations, living conditions, and unique challenges faced by correctional officers and staff.

We are confident that by working together, we can effect positive change and your participation in this campaign would demonstrate your commitment to understanding the complexities of corrections and your dedication to serving the best interests of our state.

We look forward to hosting you at one of our facilities soon and are eager to work with you and your office to address the issues facing our correctional system and find solutions that benefit both our members and the communities we serve.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

VISIT BEFORE YOU VOTE

I, _____ from _____
[Legislator's Name] [district]
in _____ hereby pledge to
[State]
participate in the "Visit Before You Vote" campaign initiated by
_____ and One Voice United.
[Union Name]

By signing this pledge, I commit to:

Participating in a guided tour of a jail or state prison facility within my state before casting a vote on the corrections budget or new criminal justice policy.

Engaging in meaningful dialogue with front-line staff to better understand the realities and challenges of working within the corrections system.

Utilizing the knowledge gained from this visit to inform my decision-making process regarding policies and budget allocations that affect the safety and well-being of correctional staff and those impacted by the correctional system.

I acknowledge the critical importance of understanding the challenges faced within America's prisons and jails and recognize the need for firsthand insight before making decisions that impact the working conditions and lives of correctional staff.

Signed,

Legislator's Signature

Title/Position

Date



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Visit Before You Vote – Facility Tour Briefing Packet

One Voice United's work is centered around 4 core pillars of the correctional system – recruitment & retention, staff training, staff wellness and conditions of confinement. Below are recommended topics and questions for the facility tour framed around the four Pillars.

The Four Pillars: Framing the Tour

1 Recruitment & Retention:

Discuss challenges in staffing, effects on facility operations and safety, and the importance of competitive compensation and support for staff.

Suggested questions for Administrators: What are the current challenges in staff recruitment and retention? How does staff turnover impact facility operations and safety?

Suggested questions for Staff: What is the impact of these staffing shortages for you during your shift? On your life at home? Do these challenges affect how long you may stay in the occupation?

2 Staff Training

Emphasize the need for ongoing, comprehensive training programs covering mental health, de-escalation techniques, and rehabilitation strategies.

Suggested questions for Administrators: What are your core duties and do you feel adequately trained to perform your duties effectively, and can you tell me a bit about content and timing of your most recent training session, including any focus on rehabilitation or re-entry?

Suggested questions for Staff: Reflecting on your training history, how frequently have you received training, and what areas do you believe should be emphasized in future training programs to enhance your effectiveness?

3

Staff Wellness

Address the critical issue of correctional officer wellness, including mental health support, stress management, and access to wellness resources.

Suggested questions for Administrators: What wellness programs are available for staff? How is the effectiveness of your wellness program measured and evaluated? Are these programs administered internally or are third parties involved in program development and counseling?

Suggested questions for Staff: What does wellness in corrections look like for you? Do any of the current wellness programs serve your vision of wellness? In what way do they succeed or fail? Have you been invited to help design or implement these programs? Moreover, given your role on the front lines, what type of voice do you have in new policies that the department rolls-out?

4

Conditions of Confinement

Highlight the interrelation between conditions of confinement (their living conditions our working conditions) and the overall safety and well-being of both staff and the incarcerated.

Suggested questions for Administrators: How do current conditions affect the safety and well-being of staff and inmates? How do current staffing ratios impact the ability to provide programming and recreational opportunities for the incarcerated population? What improvements are needed?

Suggested questions for Staff: What is the most personally challenging element of prison work? Can operational, administrative, or facility changes address that challenge? What physical changes are needed in this prison? What would those changes make possible?