

Legal Orientation for New Volunteers

Common Ground Legal Collective consists of volunteer lawyers, legal workers and law students committed to using law as a tool for social change and to empowering individuals so they may liberate themselves from the shackles of the legal system. Some of our specific work includes:

- A free legal clinic every Saturday in the 9th Ward – legal problems range from insurance dispute resolution, contractor fraud, FEMA, family law and succession.
- Dissemination of legal information including pamphlets on know your rights and how to resolve insurance disputes and general legal aid to the NOLA community.
- Support class suits by gathering plaintiff data and information.
- Prisoner exit interviews.
- Criminal Defense and Habeas Corpus Petitions
- Legal Observer coordination for marches and demonstrations
- Coordination of legal aid throughout New Orleans with NOLAC, Pro Bono Project and Loyola School of Law Clinic Program

If you are interested in volunteering with legal, contact Soleil or Miles at (504) 717-7324

Some quick things to be mindful of during while volunteering with Common Ground:

- Police are a tool of the state used to preserve existing classist and racist political and legal structures.
- The New Orleans Police Department is one of the most corrupt in the United States.
- The “criminal justice” system in New Orleans is not “just” at all. Persons are routinely harassed, assaulted and locked up by police in absence of probable cause or in absence of any wrongdoing whatsoever.
- Prisoners are routinely subjected to abusive conditions while incarcerated in Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) and receive woefully inadequate legal defense before the Court.
- Although there may be some genuinely honest and friendly police officers, generally, police are not your friends. It is best to stay as far away from police as possible.
- NOLA police will not hesitate to lock you up if you challenge their authority. If you have an encounter with NOLA police and decide to assert your constitutional rights, you will probably go to jail. To avoid jail, be as deferential and as conciliatory as possible to police. If you do choose to assert your rights in confrontation with the NOPD realize that our resources are minimal, and avoidable issues are a drain of time, money and energy that could be more effectively utilized in other ways.
- Although we encourage you to have a good time in NOLA, please be aware of your surroundings. If you are pissing in the street, smashing bottles, acting stupid, etc., the police will not hesitate to lock you up. NOLA has laws against public intoxication and open containers. The only legal container is a plastic cup. You will spend at a minimum of twelve hours in jail and will probably have to pay a \$300 fine for each offense. Jail and fines are not fun.
- If you do decide to go out to have a good time, please let someone know where you are going. Also remember, you can't call cell phones from prison, because all calls must be made collect.
- If you are arrested, it is advisable to give the police your name and address. Contact someone as soon as possible to let him or her know you are in jail. You will go before a judge within 48 hours for a bond hearing. You may be released on your own reconnaissance or bond may be set as high as \$5000. Once bond is set, you may be released if you are able to post bond.