

ALF
**PRISONER
SUPPORT**
the basics

Bite Back Magazine

It is perfectly legal to write letters of support to imprisoned A.L.F. and direct action activists. While it can be intimidating to write to someone you don't know, becoming a friend with a prisoner is well worth it. Even a short postcard may decrease a prisoner's feelings of isolation, and raises their spirits. Letters can be simple. Talk about yourself, your hobbies, interests, or what music you listen to. Prisoners may be interested in the campaigns of your local animal rights group. If you have questions about what prison is like, ask!

It can sometimes be difficult to make contact with prisoners. The prison bureaucracy intentionally acts to limit access between prisoners and the outside world. There are some simple rules to remember when writing to prisoners:

Assume that all letters to prisoners are opened and read. Don't write about anything that is going to get you or the prisoner you are writing to in trouble.

Letters are frequently delayed. Be patient, but do not always expect a reply. Prisoners may have limited resources to respond to each letter they receive.

Include the prisoner's number next to their name on the envelope. Don't forget to include a return address (write the return address on the letter as well, as envelopes are sometimes thrown away).

Prisoners are frequently moved. Before writing, check Spirit of Freedom (<http://www.spiritoffreedom.org.uk/>) for up-to-date information.

Before you send anything in addition to a letter, ask the prisoner what they can and can't receive. Every prison has its own rules. Simple things like stickers may be prohibited. It is also nice to ask the prisoner what is most needed.

Most prisons allow books to be sent to prisoners. Often books must be new, and sent directly from the publisher or bookstore (or Amazon.com). Prisons in California and many other states only allow paperback books. Prisoners may also be purchased subscriptions to magazines or newspapers.

Prisoners appreciate stamps (stamps may need to be sent as a book of stamps) or prepaid envelopes.

Some prisoners can receive money (i.e., money orders/ cashiers checks).

Prison rules also vary regarding visits and phone calls. In New York and other states, phone companies add a surcharge to collect calls from correctional facilities.

Make a note in the letter of all enclosures so that the prisoner can make sure everything made it through.

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