# **General Guidelines**

Courts are a tricky place and we need to engage in certain practices and norms around respectability and professionalism, even if we disagree with them, in order to make sure our comrades have the best possible chance to be granted bond and stay out of pre-trial custody.

The judge considers 2 main questions at a bond hearing:

1. **Is the person a flight risk?**
2. **Is the person a threat to the community?**

The goal of your letter should be to persuade the judge that your comrade is deeply connected to the community and therefore not likely to hurt anyone or flee custody. Do you have specific information (stories, experiences, etc.) that can show this?

* **Start your letter with your strongest argument**. This could be a long record of volunteer service or your specific credentials as an important community member. Remember, volunteer service doesn't need to be at a traditional non-profit - many of us have spent years working on projects to help our community members and these are great examples of commitment and safety in the community.
  + Dave has been a committed volunteer distributing meals to the community in Woodruff Park for 5 years every Sunday morning.
  + I have served as the council member for District 7 for 10 years.
* **Be concise**. Judges are busy and value efficiency. Keep your letter to 1 page and only make your best arguments.
* **Don't address guilt or innocence**. This can make things complicated, especially as your comrade’s legal strategy might evolve down the line – if you feel really strongly that you want to touch on those issues, it's best to check with your comrade's lawyer first to run what you want to say by them.
* Remember that unless a record is voluntarily sealed, **your bond letters will become part of the public court record**. If there's information that you wouldn't want to be shared with the public, it's best to leave it out of your letter.
  + Generally, only the court will bother to read bond letters. However, if your comrade is facing intense public scrutiny or their case becomes a high-profile story, there's a higher likelihood that unconnected people, including right-wing provocateurs, might look up and potentially share court documents.
  + There's no need to put your phone number, email, or complete home address in your signature. If you wouldn't want your boss to know that you used company letterhead or included your place of work in your signature, don't.
* Type your letter, double-check for spelling and grammar errors, and then sign your letter (either electronically or by hand to scan and upload)

# **Guiding questions for your writing:**

* Is your comrade thoughtful or compassionate? Do you have specific stories of times they've been exceptionally kind to people? Does your comrade have good relationships with friends, family, and loved ones? Mention specific examples.
  + Aaron has an extremely gentle heart and cares deeply about the plight of community members who are less fortunate than him. Every winter, he volunteers to go around the city and helps drive homeless people to warming shelters so they don't have to spend the night outside in the cold.
  + Ana has been my close friend for 7 years. When I broke my leg, she drove me to appointments and did all of my grocery shopping since I was unable to.
* Is your comrade a "productive member of society"? Are they in school, do they have a job, are they a member of a faith community? Judges like hearing about things like this because it demonstrates roots in a community, indicating that your comrade is less likely to be a flight risk. Try to specify how long your comrade has been a member of those groups.
  + John has been a neighborhood handyman for 3 years and has worked on homes all over the Grant Park area and has dozens of long-time loyal customers.
  + Jason has been a student at Georgia State University studying English for 3 years. He always attends class and hopes to become a high school teacher in Dekalb County
  + Jeremy graduated from Grady High School this summer. He has worked at CVS for 7 months and is up for a promotion to day shift manager because he is such a trusted, loyal employee.
* Do you personally believe the alleged offense is out of character? Without discussing guilt or innocence, is it unlikely that your comrade would violate the law in the future? What makes you think so?
  + John babysits my children regularly. I trust him with my children because he is extremely gentle, and I do not believe he will have any future contact with law enforcement.
* Talk about how your comrade has dealt with or grown from hardships or setbacks if you're able to.

# **Example Letter**

Remember! This is just an example! Judges want to see you speak from the heart, and just the fact that you are taking time out of your day to write and submit a letter shows them how loved and important your comrade is as a community member. Use this as a guide to inspire your own letter, and remember you can do this!

[date]

Honorable [Judge's name]

[address of courthouse]

Re: [your comrade's case number/case title or just your comrade's full name]

Dear Judge [name]

Richard Huntsinger is a dedicated member and volunteer with the Housing Justice League for the past three and a half years. Richard would always volunteer to help with whatever project needed extra people and could always be counted on to stay late to get the job done. Richard is very thoughtful and kind. He would always take time to make sure that new volunteers would feel comfortable and welcomed. When we canvassing neighborhoods to empower tenants to know their rights, Richard would always listen carefully to the stories of others. This past year as the pandemic has caused economic and health crises for many individuals, Richard was on the front line making sure people had access to resources. Much of the work that Richard did was unpaid and thankless. This did not stop his dedication and commitment to helping his community. Having graduated from the University of Georgia a year after Richard, we have both spent the past few years trying to figure out what direction to go in our careers. It can be a challenging time for a young person, switching jobs or occasionally being without work as you try to find where best you fit in. Richard never let setbacks in a job get in the way of his commitment to serving and volunteering to better his community.

Since I have known Richard, he has always been very reliable. He is there for friends and strangers if they need him. Richard has a large community of loved ones in Atlanta who support him. I know that Richard is committed to continuing to support Atlantans in need and does not plan on going anywhere. I am confident that Richard will abide by all conditions the court sets for pretrial release.

Sincerely,

## ***Your Name***

Your Name

[you can put your specific city here if you live in the same city as your comrade in order to drive home the point that they are a vital community member with strong ties]