

BRING BACK BALANCE SENTENCING REFORM CAMPAIGN

ACTION TOOLKIT

April 2011



*Kit will soon be available online at www.aclunc.org and www.aclu-sc.org . For a copy via email or additional information, please contact Shayna at sgelender@aclunc.org in the Central Valley and Northern California or Clarissa at cwoo@aclu-sc.org in Southern California.

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Dear Civil Liberties and Social Justice Activists,

Over the last several months, we have had the pleasure of visiting a number of communities and college campuses, and continuing our work with our partners on civil rights issues in California. During those visits and our recent work together with you, we have met community and student leaders who are using their First Amendment rights to speak out against the cuts happening to higher education and social services through the state budget process.

We began the current state fiscal year with a \$26 billion deficit, which after one round of cuts signed into law by the Governor, now stands at a staggering \$15 billion. We have also heard many people express their frustration that prison spending has increased considerably in recent years – including in this year’s budget - while funding for higher education and social services has been slashed. The Governor’s major criminal justice realignment plan, which he signed into law, is in a state of suspended animation – only taking effect when funding is secured and only yielding savings in future years if implemented according to plan.

As we watch this crisis unfold, we can’t stand by and hope that state leaders solve these problems for us. Our ideas must be part of the solution. Our voices must part of the conversation. And our feet must be part of the movement. That is why the ACLU is launching our **Bring Back Balance Sentencing Reform Campaign: Balance the budget. Balance our priorities. Balance the scales of justice.** We can find solutions to restore balance to our state sentencing laws. We’ve done it before, we can do it again.

Ending the system of mass incarceration in California and in our country – and replacing it with solutions that promote real public safety and true opportunity - is a vital long-term goal. This is one of the defining civil rights issues of our time. To share just one of many facts for why so much is at stake: there are more African Americans under correctional control today -- in prison or jail, on probation or parole -- than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began. This year, in the midst of the state budget crisis, we will press the Governor and legislature to include real sentencing reforms as an integral part of the solution to balance the budget, balance our priorities, and balance the scales of justice. What we accomplish this year will lay the foundation of a long-term campaign for smart corrections reforms and real public safety. We need your help.

Join us.

As you and countless other activists throughout the state contact legislators and educate the public about the budget crisis, the ACLU of California looks forward to working with you to put these balanced solutions forward as workable alternatives to the deep and painful cuts that politicians are threatening for our state. Enclosed is an action kit to help you get involved in this critical campaign.

Please feel free to contact us about statewide actions in this campaign and about anything you may be planning in your community related to the budget crisis.

In solidarity,

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How Smart Cuts to Corrections Can Save California Hundreds of Millions of Dollars

The ACLU has developed a package of simple but significant criminal justice sentencing reforms that will improve public safety while saving California hundreds of millions of dollars. We know from our recent visits to campuses and community groups that these reforms interest students and community leaders for two reasons. First, the extreme inequality and unfairness of excessive sentencing directly affects all California residents. Second, the enormous cost of corrections diverts scarce state budget dollars from public safety priorities, higher education and other critical health and social services. The two specific reforms below would free up hundreds of millions of dollars:

- *Sentencing Reform #1: Make possession of small amounts of drugs a misdemeanor instead of a felony.* Over 9,000 people are locked up in state prison today for these offenses at a cost to taxpayers of hundreds of millions of dollars per year, with sentences as long as three years.
- *Sentencing Reform #2: Make low-level, non-violent property offenses misdemeanors instead of “wobblers” that can be felonies.* A “wobbler” is an offense that prosecutors can charge either as a felony or as a misdemeanor. If charged as a misdemeanor, the maximum sentence that can be imposed is one year in a county jail. When charged as a felony, these offenses carry sentences as long as three years in state prison. Changing low-level, non-violent wobblers to misdemeanors would result in significant savings.

In addition, the ACLU and our coalition partners have for sometime been calling on the Governor to cut this: the death penalty. If we replace California’s ineffective death penalty with permanent imprisonment, we will save \$1 billion in five years. That’s money that could be better spent funding local government including effective public safety programs. To learn more about the Cut This campaign, please visit www.aclunc.org/deathpenalty. Local actions in support of the campaign are organized by county based coalitions, including the Los Angeles County Coalition for Death Penalty Alternatives, www.enddeathpenaltyla.org.

These reforms alone will not offset the billions in cuts to other programs or the new revenues that are needed, but they need to be part of the solution. After years of fiscal crisis that has amounted to double-digit deficits each year, one area of the budget – corrections – has been immune to these cuts and its funding has actually increased. It’s time to approve smart cuts to corrections to save California hundreds of millions while preserving public safety.

Getting Involved in the Bring Back Balance Sentencing Reform Campaign

The Bring Back Balance Sentencing Reform Campaign has some simple tools tied to fulfilling our goals for this campaign. Although the actions and events will vary by community – from teach-ins to town halls, from letter-writing tables to spirited rallies, certain common elements will connect all the events:

- Letters to Governor Brown, Senate pro tem Steinberg and Speaker Perez to support sentencing reform – beyond realignment – in the state budget and legislatively. These letters can be customized in certain cities to also include a local legislator. In addition, the letter can be used to ask other organizations, important civic, community and elected leaders, and others to participate in the campaign.
- Online petition/Letters to Governor Brown, Senate Pro tem Steinberg and Assembly Speaker Perez, which will also automatically be sent to the local assembly member and state senator.
- A great campaign logo image and message – which will be unveiled on billboards in Los Angeles and San Francisco – and will be available in large format as posters and standing signs for local events.
- A story collection process to collect video messages to Governor Brown, Senate leader Steinberg and Speaker Perez. We are looking for the unique stories and voices of Californians for why they support sentencing reform as a way to balance the budget, balance our priorities and balance the scales of justice. Select videos will be posted online on a You Tube Channel.
- A photo collection process of Californians taking their picture next to a handmade sign with their message to the Governor and legislative leaders for why sentencing reform must happen now. Each photo will have the person, their sign, and the sign will have their city and name if they choose. Photos will be posted online and individuals can link their Facebook or photo site to their photo to encourage others to take action as well.

Here is what you can do to get involved:

1. **Participate in an Event or Action Near You:** ACLU is planning community and campus events throughout the state. To get involved in the Bay Area and Central Valley contact Shayna Gelender at sgelender@aclunc.org; (415) 621-2493 x384. To get involved in Southern California contact Miguel Cruz at macruz@aclu-sc.org; (213) 977-9500 x255.

2. **Plan Your Own Event or Action:** If you or your organization wants to plan an event or action on this campaign, great! We are happy to strategize with you. Please contact Shayna in the Central Valley or Northern California or Miguel in Southern California.

Although there are multiple types of actions and events being planned, there are five typical formats:

- Teach-In/Town Hall – This is a format that is an indoor setting, whether a meeting room, classroom or a larger meeting hall or church. The program includes a) an informational presentation about the state budget crisis and the growth of the prison budget, b) description of the sentencing reform solutions, c) the opportunity to take action by signing letters and participating in the photo/story collection, and d) getting the feedback of participants about their vision and values for public safety and California's corrections system.
 - Letter-Writing/Phone in Day. This is typically outdoors in a campus plaza, or busy community location such as outside an area with many state/local/court offices, or busy neighborhood gathering location (supermarket, public transit hub, etc.). There will be prominent signs available. People can collect letters, have people call their legislators offices, and also do video stories and photo collection. This can also be done as a lunch break at an office, at a conference, big coalition meetings, annual meetings or fundraising dinners of community groups, at the end of a church service, etc.
 - In-District Lobby Visit: It is imperative that Assembly Members and Senators continue to hear from diverse groups of constituents about the impact of budget cuts on our lives and about the alternative solutions proposed in the Bring Back Balance Sentencing Reform Campaign. If you are planning an in-district visit, great! If you want to reach your legislators but don't have time to do a visit, call them on your lunch break and invite your colleagues to also make calls. See pages 16-17 for details.
 - House Parties: This is a format that is similar to the teach-in described above, but hosted by a community member in their home or other setting. It includes an emphasis on having people make a small financial contribution to support this campaign and the work of the ACLU overall. This combines education on a key issue that many Californians are concerned about with an opportunity to take action and make a lasting difference. See #4 below for details.
 - Marches/Rallies: To raise the visibility of this issue in the community, these events would be more public and high-energy, involving lots of people and making a public statement about the need for sentencing reform as part of a balanced budget.
3. **Educate Your Community:** If you are a writer, blogger, or tweeter, get the word out about the importance of these issues. See page 13-14 for details.
 4. **Support the Campaign:** The work of ACLU is made possible by our donors and members. Help keep us strong and vital so we can continue the critical work of the Bring Back Balance Campaign by becoming a My ACLU Advocate by recruiting your friends to join ACLU. Details at www.myaclu.org. Through the My ACLU Campaign you can earn civil liberties scholarships and grants for each 10 new members. Contact Bonnie Akimoto at bakimoto@aclunc.org; (415) 621-2493 x365 or Phyllis Silverberg at psilverberg@aclu-sc.org; (213) 977-9500 x222

Governor's Realignment Plan: What it does and does not do

On April 4, 2011, Governor Brown signed into law AB 109 that would keep individuals convicted of low-level felony offenses at the county level, either on probation or in jail, for terms of 16 months, two years or three years, rather than state prison, where many people convicted of these offenses are currently required to do their time. Although signed into law, the policy change is contingent on the securing of new funding for county law enforcement.

This bill is a major criminal justice reform proposal. It is a significant and very important piece of legislation. It adopts a long-standing goal of criminal justice reform advocates – which is to focus state prison incarceration on people convicted of violent and serious offenses, and to send other people to county jails or impose alternatives to incarceration. The realignment plan also addresses issues related to parole reform.

However, there are several significant limitations to the current realignment plan. The ACLU of California's package of criminal justice sentencing reforms can help:

- 1) The ACLU sentencing reforms achieve much greater savings than just the realignment alone – and save both state and local costs, as well as court costs. For example, felony sentences for drug or non-violent property crimes can be up to 3 years long. While housing those inmates locally may cost less than in state prison, sentencing reform would ensure that those sentences are not excessive in length, whether served in state prison or county jail. Changing the maximum sentence for simple drug possession from the current 3 years to be instead only 1 year will save state and local costs. In this way, our reforms will help balance the budget, and also balance our priorities for higher education, K-12 education, health and social services, and other vital programs needed for public safety.
- 2) The ACLU sentencing reforms can take effect with or without new funding. The realignment plan, though, depends on the legislature spending even more money on the criminal justice system upfront, with the hope of more savings in the future. The ACLU sentencing reforms simply save money now.
- 3) The ACLU sentencing reforms can provide greater consistency in how the law is applied in different counties, while providing adequate flexibility and discretion to local jurisdictions. Currently, there is great variation in sentencing for low level offenses from county to county. In one county, a person may be given treatment and probation while in another, the same person may get a three year sentence. These reforms will still allow flexibility but reduce the disparities.
- 4) The ACLU sentencing reforms eliminate felony convictions for non-violent low-level offenses. Felony convictions- regardless of whether the sentences are served in state prison or county jail – often result in lifetime barriers related to obtaining employment, housing, or education.

For immediate release: Monday, April 11, 2011

New Poll Finds Strong Majority of CA Voters Believe Too Many People Imprisoned, Favor Reducing Drug Possession Penalty from a Felony to a Misdemeanor

Voters More Likely to Vote for Candidates Who Support Reducing Drug Possession Penalty

Sacramento – A new statewide poll released today finds that nearly three-quarters (72%) of California voters support reducing the penalty for possession of a small amount of illegal drugs for personal use from a felony to a misdemeanor, including a solid majority who support this reform strongly. The March 21-24 survey of 800 California general election voters was conducted by Lake Research Partners. Poll results and analysis are available online [here](#).

This poll offers important proof that most Californians do not approve of lengthy prison sentences for drug possession for personal use. At a time when California is slashing funding for education and health care while billions of dollars in incarceration costs remain untouched, this poll finds that Californians believe that too many people are incarcerated for too long.

Key poll findings include:

- * 56% believe that too many people are imprisoned in California.
- * 72% favor reducing the penalty for personal drug possession, including majorities of Democrats (79%), Independents (72%), and Republicans (66%), as well as majorities of voters in every corner of the state (regional data available upon request).
- * 51% believe that those caught with a small amount of drugs for personal use should spend fewer than 3 months (27%) or no time at all (24%) in jail.
- * 41% say they'd be more likely to support a candidate who reduced the penalty to a misdemeanor, compared to 15% who say they'd be less likely.

"We found a widely, and intensely, held belief among voters that California imprisons too many people and can no longer afford to spend billions on prisons amid massive cuts to education and social services," said Daniel Gotoff of Lake Research Partners, which designed and administered the survey.

"This is a voting issue now. Politicians stand in the way of this popular reform at their own risk."

"Support for reducing drug possession penalties crosses all the partisan, regional, and demographic lines that normally divide California voters," said Allen Hopper, an attorney with the ACLU of Northern California. "Solid majorities of Republicans, Democrats and Independents from every corner of the state overwhelmingly agree that it's time for a new approach. We need to stop wasting precious tax dollars on unnecessary, expensive jail and prison sentences."

"Sacramento's plan to keep people convicted of personal drug possession at the county level doesn't address the belief of a majority of Californians that drug possession shouldn't be a felony and that people shouldn't be locked up for longer than three months for this offense," said Margaret Dooley-Sammuli, deputy state director in Southern California for the Drug Policy Alliance.

The current penalty in California for possession of heroin or cocaine is 16 months to 3 years in prison. Last week Governor Brown signed AB 109, which keeps drug possession for personal use a felony and retains the long sentences, but provides that lock-up would happen in county facilities.

That law's future is uncertain, however, as it only goes into effect if voters approve the governor's plan to extend a series of taxes otherwise set to expire this year. "Californians aren't just interested in saving money. They're also interested in seeing people contribute to their families and communities," said Kris Lev-Twombly, director of programs at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. "California voters want to see that people are not burdened with a life-long felony record for drug possession that makes it tough to find a job or support a family. Current penalties work against individual, family and community well-being and public safety."

"Californians clearly and strongly reject the state's misplaced priorities that have pushed funding toward jails and prisons and away from schools," said Alice Huffman, president of the California State Conference of the NAACP. "The California NAACP urges the State Legislature and the Governor to listen to voters and reduce the penalty for drug possession for personal use from a felony to a misdemeanor."

Facts about Drug Possession and Incarceration in California

Number of People Incarcerated in State Prison

- 9,185 people (5.5% of the prison population) are incarcerated in a California state prison for a simple drug possession offense, according to [the latest CDCR census](#) (June 30, 2010).
- Of the total prison population, 24.8% have no current or prior serious or violent conviction. For men, the rate is 23.2% and for women it is 49.4%.

Number of People Annually Going In and Out for Possession

- In 2009, a total of 7,574 people entered prison on a felony drug possession offense (about 630 per month). Of these, 4,562 (60%) entered prison as new admissions (i.e. not from parole) and 3,012 (40%) were parolees who entered prison with a new term for a drug possession offense, according to the [latest CDCR report](#) (April 2010). (*Note: These do NOT include parolees who returned to custody for a drug-related technical violation of parole.*)
- In 2009, 8,819 people were released to parole (about 735 per month) following time served for drug possession, according to [a CDCR report](#) (February 2010).

Number of People on Parole:

- 15,734 people are on parole in California for simple possession, according to [the latest CDCR census](#) (June 30, 2010). (Down from 16,230 at end-2009, according to an [earlier report](#).)
- Of the total parole population, 56.9% (or 61,853 people) have no current or prior serious or violent conviction, according to [the latest CDCR census](#) (June 30, 2010). For women, the rate is 77.1%.

State Spending on Corrections Compared to Higher Education

In 1998, California spent 13% of the total state general fund on higher education and spent only 8% of the total state general fund on state prisons.¹ In 2008, the state of California spent the same amount on higher education as it did on state prisons—approximately 11% of the total state general fund went to each.² This steady decrease in funding for higher education has not stopped. In fact, Governor Brown has proposed cutting higher education funding from the \$11.6 billion it received in 2010 to \$9.8 billion in 2011.³ This is in addition to cutting over \$5 billion dollars in healthcare and social services for elderly people and people with disabilities.⁴ The budget for state prisons, however, has remained at over \$9 billion since 2007.⁵

¹ Legislative Analyst's Office, Answers to Frequently Asked Questions, 1 (2009) http://www.lao.ca.gov/sections/higher_ed/FAQs/Higher_Education_Issue_18.pdf

² *Id.*

³ Summary Charts: California Budget Proposal 2011 11(2011) <http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/pdf/BudgetSummary/SummaryCharts.pdf>

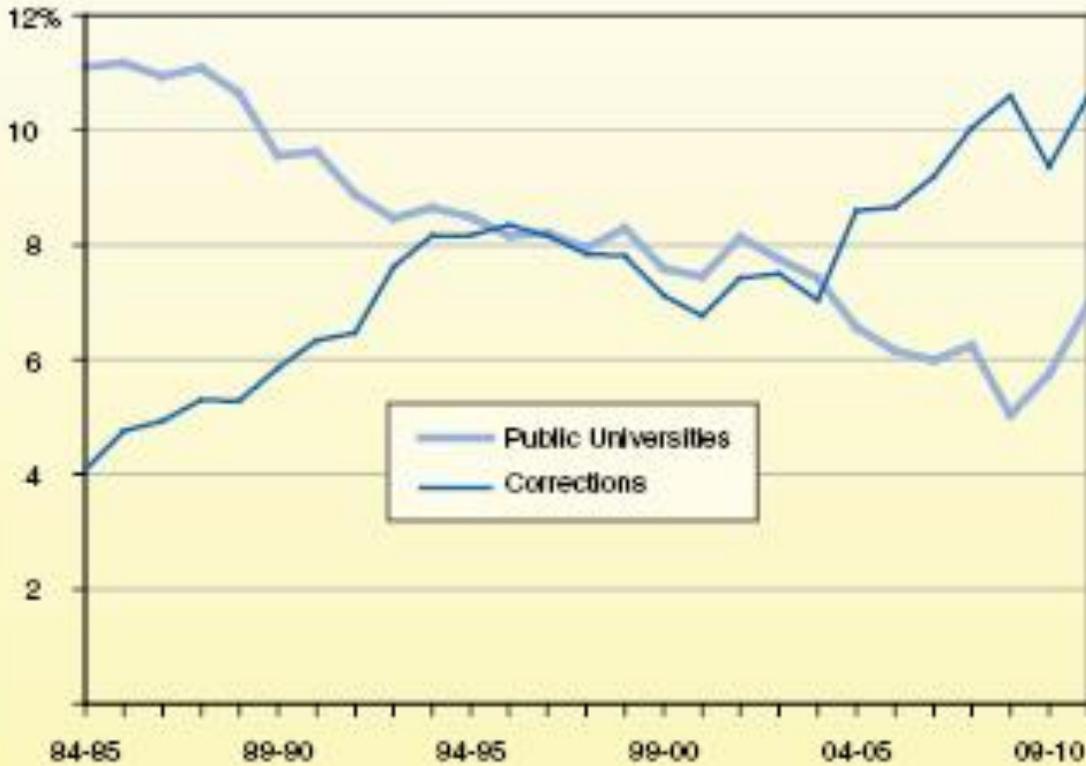
⁴ *Id.*

⁵ California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, <http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Budget/index.html>, Summary Charts: California Budget Proposal 2011 11(2011) <http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/pdf/BudgetSummary/SummaryCharts.pdf>

Figure 1

Percentage of State General Fund Spent on Corrections and Public Universities

(2010-11 shares are proposed.)



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⁶ Legislative Analyst's Office, Prisons vs. Universities Proposal Would Unwisely Lock Up Budget Flexibility (2010) http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2010/edu/educ_prisons/educ_prisons_012610.aspx

What Are We Talking About? Messages to use when speaking or writing about the Campaign

➤ **We need to bring back balance in California, Sentencing Reform helps:**

- balance the budget – sentencing reform reduces court, state prison, and local jail costs, allowing scarce taxpayer dollars to be used to meet other important public safety priorities, like investigating and solving violent crime
- balance our priorities – the money saved through sentencing reform can be used to meet other important public safety priorities – such as investigating and solving violent crime - and provide for opportunity for Californians – such as social services and affordable higher education
- balance the scales of justice – felony prison sentences for low-level non-violent offenses - such as simple drug possession – are out of proportion, and can result in life-long barriers to employment, housing, and education.

➤ **Bringing balance back to the scales of justice means that the punishment must fit the crime**

- That means we don't send people to prison for possession of a small amount of drugs. A recent poll of California voters found that over 70% believe the penalty for this offense should be three months or less in jail – not the current penalty of up to 3 years in state prison.
- That means we don't send someone away for life for stealing pizza, as happens now to a person who has certain past convictions.
- That means we don't punish someone for life with the label "felon," keeping him from getting a job or going to school, when his only crime was petty theft or simple drug possession
- That means we redirect as many people as we can to drug treatment or alternatives, rather than send them to state prison for a long sentence.

➤ **Balancing our priorities means we have funding for education, health care, *and* safety**

- California prison spending has risen too fast and consumes too much of the state budget. Sentencing reform helps control prison costs while protecting public safety. It means we can have adequate resources for other priorities – such as affordable higher education or mental health services.
- For too long, politicians have been protecting spending on corrections. Now, spending on prisons exceeds what we spend on higher education.⁷
- Long prison sentences for minor non-violent offenses divert needed resources from other public safety priorities – such as investigating rapes and murders that are currently unsolved.

➤ **A truly balanced budget is one that balances cuts to wasteful spending on corrections with cuts in other areas**

- A budget that only cuts education and core services – while corrections is untouched - is not a balanced budget
- A truly balanced budget also brings balance back to the scales of justice through sentencing reform
- Sentencing reform is a way to balance the budget beyond what the Governor's realignment plan does.

⁷ Legislative Analyst's Office, Prisons vs. Universities Proposal Would Unwisely Lock Up Budget Flexibility (2010)
http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2010/edu/educ_prisons/educ_prisons_012610.aspx

Educating Yourself, Educating Your Community

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To inform your community, write Letters to the Editor & post and comment about sentencing reform:

Basics of Writing a Letter to the Editor

1. **Keep it short and on one subject.** Many newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters (almost all limit to 200 words or fewer) and have limited space to publish them. Keeping your letter brief will help assure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper.
2. **Make references to the newspaper.** Many papers will only print letters that refer to a specific article. Here are some examples of easy ways to refer to articles in your opening sentence:
 - I was disappointed to see that The Post's May 18 editorial "School Vouchers Are Right On" omitted some of the key facts in the debate.
 - I strongly disagree with (author's name) narrow view on women's reproductive rights. ("Name of Op-Ed," date).
 - I am deeply saddened to read that Congressman Doe is working to roll back affirmative action. ("Title of Article," date)
3. **Be sure to include your contact information.** Most newspapers will only print a letter after calling the author to verify his or her identity, address and full name. Newspapers will not give out that information, and will usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.
4. **Send letters to weekly community newspapers too.** The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the easier it is to get your letter printed. The East Bay is home to several alternative newspapers and other media.

- 5. Use extra style elements and punctuation sparingly.** It may appear to make your point stronger, but editors do not like to print letters with arguments in **ALL CAPS BOLD FACE**, or excessive exclamation points. Let your prose make your argument, not your style.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Editor:

According to a new poll, 72% of California's voters agree: people should not go to prison for possession of a small amount of drugs for personal use. At a time when California is slashing funding for education and health care while billions of dollars in incarceration costs remain untouched, too many people are incarcerated for too long.

One simple sentencing reform – making possession of small amounts of drugs a misdemeanor instead of a felony – would save California taxpayers hundreds of millions annually. A portion of these dollars can be transferred to local authorities to provide rehabilitation and drug treatment programs.

It's time to make California smart on crime to promote and preserve public safety. The Governor's realignment plan isn't enough. What we need is real sentencing reform.

Basics of Commenting to and Posting Your Own Online Media

- 1. Respond Immediately.** The online news cycle is very short with new blogs, articles and videos being posted 24 hours a day. The more “popular” a website or blog is – measured by how many times it is viewed and commented on – the more likely it is that other people will see it and your comments.

To make sure you don't miss a good news story or blog post, you can set up alert system to send updates to your email address. Visit www.google.com/Alerts and enter:

- a. the search term you want to monitor – e.g. “California budget” or “budget crisis”
 - b. what kind of media you want to monitor – recommended: News, Blogs, Videos, or Comprehensive
 - c. how often you want to receive updates – recommended: once a day
 - d. where you want updates to be sent – recommended: primary email address
- 2. Always identify yourself.** When posting comments to Blogs, YouTube or even online media, always identify yourself with your real name, not an online pseudonym you may use for social networking sites. Some blogs require to you to register an account with the website before posting your own content, and in those cases you can create a different username, but never represent yourself as blogging for an organization or group of people.
 - 3. Be Brief.** Try to keep comments to news articles under 250 words, and comments to blogs or YouTube videos under 100 words. Blog posts or diaries should be no more than 5-6 short paragraphs.
 - 4. User Interactive Content.** You can make your comments more informative, concise and interactive by including hyperlinks to other websites. Hyperlinks also allow you to use fewer words, by directing people to other websites.

Invite Your Friends to a Campaign Action

Helping to turn people out to a Campaign action is very helpful and easy to do!

1. Commit to an activity you personally will participate in (such as a teach-in or house party).
2. Think of 5 people you know who are also interested in these issues.
3. Set aside 15 minutes of your day to call these friends and invite them to go with you. Leave voicemail messages, send texts, and/or follow-up with emails if you don't reach the person when you call.

Here is an example of what you can say:

“Hi, friend. I wanted to check in with you about an interesting ACLU project that I am involved in. It’s called the “Bring Back Balance Sentencing Reform Campaign”. This campaign addresses the budget crisis which I know is of concern to us all these days. Basically, we’re proposing sentencing reforms and smart cuts to the corrections system that would save hundreds of millions of dollars that could be used for education, public safety and social services. I am going to (insert activity) on (insert date). Would you like to go with me?”

4. Follow up with an email sending those folks information about the campaign at www.aclunc.org or www.aclu-sc.org.

Lunch Time Phone Banking

Invite your colleagues to get involved in this campaign without having to leave the office. If you work for a mission-driven organization in the areas of healthcare, social services, legal services, civil rights, social justice, or education, chances are your organization is very concerned about the budget crisis.

Here is what you can do:

1. Choose a week day where you can actually take a lunch break. Set aside 30 minutes or an hour.
2. Email your colleagues to invite them to come to your office or conference room with their cell phones at that time to call local state Assembly Members and Senators about the demands in the Bring Back Balance Sentencing Reform Campaign.
3. Bring copies of this short phone script with the name and phone numbers of local legislators in your area. Go to <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html> to find the legislators in your area.

Names & Phone Numbers for State Legislators:

State Senator _____

State Assembly Member _____

Sample Phone Script:

"Hi, my name is _____ and I live in (town) and work for (organization). I am calling today to let (decision maker's name) know that I am very concerned about state budget crisis and I have some suggestions for smart cuts to corrections that would save hundreds of millions of dollars for education, public safety and vital social services.

A balanced budget must include sentencing reforms.

Specifically, if the legislature changed the sentencing laws to make drug possession for personal use a misdemeanor instead of a felony, our state would save hundreds of millions per year. Converting low-level non-violent property crimes to misdemeanors is another important step.

If you're planning a phone bank, great! Let us know about it by contacting Shayna Gelender in Northern California at sgelender@aclunc.org; (415) 621-2493 x384 and Clarissa Woo in Southern California at cwoo@aclu-sc.org; (213) 977-9500 x241.

In-District Constituent Lobbying

For this campaign to succeed, legislators must hear consistently, from many of their constituents, in their home districts. Arranging meetings with your state assembly member and senator is a very valuable contribution to the campaign. Here is a check-list of how to go about it:

- ✓ **Build Your Team:** Reach out to fellow community members who could go with you, people from your own organization or other groups, especially people who can tell personal stories about how the budget cuts are impacting their lives. Examples may include college students who are struggling to pay tuition or can't get classes or people who rely on health and social services programs that are being cut.
- ✓ **Identify Your Legislators:** Find your legislators and their contact information here:
<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html>
- ✓ **Make the Call:** Call the legislator's office and say that you are a constituent who wants to meet with the legislator about the budget crisis and bringing back balance to California. You might want to say you are one of the few groups calling with something that can be cut. (Typically, legislators are only in their district offices on Fridays. You can also meet with staff on another day of the week.)
- ✓ **Follow-up:** Follow-up your request for a meeting by mailing or faxing a letter, reiterating who you are, where you live, any organizational affiliations you may have, and the reason – and urgency – for the meeting. If you have other constituents who will attend with you, include their names and information in the letter.
- ✓ **Get the Meeting:** Once you have a date and time for your meeting, contact Ashley (amorris@aclunc.org) in Northern California or Clarissa (cwoo@aclu-sc.org) at ACLU/SC who will help prepare you for the meeting by giving you the latest campaign information, discuss the relevant “ask”, and send you materials to leave with the legislator's office.
- ✓ **Prepare:** In advance of the meeting, with your team review the campaign materials and talking points. Decide who will cover which issues, who will take notes, and who will make “the ask” – that is, what commitment you want to get from the legislator.
- ✓ **Have the Meeting:** Meet 15 minutes before with your team to review the plan. Proceed with the meeting. Collect the business card of whomever you meet with.
- ✓ **Report Back:** Shortly after the meeting while it is fresh in your mind, call Ashley or Clarissa to tell her what happened and to plan out next steps.
- ✓ **Follow-up:** Send a thank you note to the person you met with, reiterating key points discussed, “the ask”, and reminding the staff member of anything promised to do. Check back in about a week to follow-up.