After the Court Date

The Judge will dismiss the lawyers and your loved one when the court appearance is over. Other people's cases might still be occurring, so you still can't talk loudly. If your loved one is not being held in jail, you will be able to exit with them and leave together. Your loved one may need to talk to their attorney afterwards. You can let them know that you are waiting for them, and then give them privacy. It can be a good idea after a court appearance to offer to see them to their house or take them out for some food.

Be sure to care for yourself, too. It can be upsetting to see a loved one in court. Before you head to court, make a plan to care for yourself afterwards. Maybe take a walk in a favorite spot or arrange a phone date with a friend.

What Else Can I Do?

Sometimes court support isn't something that we can do or it isn't what our loved one wants. Don't worry – there are so many ways to show up for our community. You can:

1. **Visit your loved one in jail.** Look at page 1, suggestion number 2 for tips on visiting.
2. **Send your loved one a letter.** Look at page 2, suggestion number 3 for tips on how to find the address. Black & Pink publish a helpful "Pen Pal Guideline" on their website.
3. **Help coordinate court support.** If you can't safely attend but others can, consider putting together a phone tree or coordinating a meeting space before and after court dates. Be creative!

SRLP would like to thank Lindsay Adams, Nadja Eisenberg-Guyot, and Milo Inglehart for support with this brochure.

NYC Criminal Court Contacts

Bronx Criminal Court
215 East 161st Street and 265 East 161st Street
General Information: 718-618-2400

Brooklyn Criminal Court
120 Schermerhorn Street
General Info: 347-404-9400

Manhattan Criminal Court
100 Centre Street
General Info: 646-386-4511

Manhattan Supreme Court
111 Centre Street
General Info: 646-386-5750

Queens Criminal Court
125-01 Queens Boulevard
General Info: 718-298-0792

Staten Island Criminal Court
26 Central Avenue
General Info: 718-675-8558

SYLVIA RIVERA LAW PROJECT

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination or violence.

SYLVIA RIVERA LAW PROJECT
147 W 24TH ST, 5TH FLOOR
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SYLVIA RIVERA LAW PROJECT

Community Guide to NYC Court Support

A Guide for Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming, and Intersex People Providing Court Support for Others in NYC

What is Court Support and Who Can Do It?

Court support means attending someone's court appearances to show solidarity and remind the person that they have your support throughout this difficult and often isolating process. It also lets the District Attorney (the prosecutor) and the Judge know that your loved one is connected to a community. In addition to positively affecting your loved one's criminal case, this show of support can help your loved one stay safe inside the jail, as officers and others will see that they have a supportive community.

Most court support is simply **being there**. It can feel like nothing is happening, but **your being there matters**.

Anyone can attend a court appearance that is open to the public. Going to support someone at court does not require having identification or subjecting yourself to background screenings. That said, if you are **under- or un-documented or have an open warrant**, you will probably want to avoid going to court.You can look at *What Else Can I do?* on page 6 for other ways to show up.

Make Sure Court Support is Wanted

Before you attend someone's court date, make sure that they actually want community support. If the person has asked you directly or you have seen a request on social media – great! If the person's feelings are less clear, you may want to check in. If they are not being held in jail, you can ask them directly, ideally privately. If they are in a jail, there are a few ways you could find out if they want support:

1. Ask people who know the individual well and have talked to them recently. Remember, some people do not want court support because their court appearance will reveal private information or because they don't want people to see them on these hard days. There are many valid reasons why people might not want court support.
2. You can try to visit them inside. You should be able to look up where they are being held by going to the New York City Department of Corrections (DOC) "inmate lookup" website. Visiting hours

are listed on facility websites, which you can find by typing in "NYC DOC facility visiting" into a search engine or by calling 311 and asking an operator. You should know that visiting can be an emotional for both of you. Learn more about your rights and how to plan a visit by going to https://srlp.org/action/help-us-make-visits-to-nyc-jails-more-humane/ or by reading SRLP's *Solidarity in Action: A Guide to Visiting Incarcerated Community Members*.

3. Write a letter. Unfortunately, this option may be too slow for some court dates. While a detained person in NYC can call out, you cannot call them, so writing a letter may be the best option. You can find the address where your loved one is held by following the instructions given above. When you write to your loved one, make sure that you write your loved one's name on the envelope **exactly** as it appears on the website (or as shared by the 311 operator) and that you include their Booking and Case Number.

Get Information About the Court Date

The best way to get information is from the person you are supporting. The person you are supporting can tell you when and where the next court date is. They can also tell you their attorney's name and contact information so that you can introduce yourself.

If you can't get the information from your loved one, you can look it up on WEB CRIMS, a website run by the New York State court system. Go to: https://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/webcrim_attorney/AttorneyWelcome. You can find your loved one's case by using their case number, summons number, or the first and last name they were arrested under. The name they were arrested under might not be the name you know them by. This search will list the next court date, the court location, and "part." A "part" is just a fancy term for a room in the court house. Sometimes the part will focus on particular types of issues such as drugs or veterans' rights. **A list of criminal court phone numbers is on the back page of this brochure.** Write all of this information down and take it with you when you go.

Most court appearances are open to the public. You can call the court to ask if you think this appearance might be closed. Have your loved one's name and their case's Index Number available. **A list of criminal court phone numbers is on the back page of this brochure.**

If you can, call or email your loved one's defense attorney and let them know that you will be in the audience. Attorneys like to know in advance so that they can point you out to the Judge or so that they can talk to you. Attorneys mark their case files "family in court" so that they know to look for you.

Entering a NYC Criminal Court

The NYC courts are open to the public. The courts do have the right to restrict who can be in the space. You will need to go through a metal detector in order to get to the courts. If you have a reason to think that you cannot safely go through the metal detector - due to a pacemaker or other device - tell one of the officers. It can be a good idea to bring a doctor's letter with you as well. You will have to agree to a pat down if you cannot go through the metal detector. You have the right to a pat down by an officer who most closely aligns with your gender identity. You may also refuse the pat down; however, if you refuse the pat down and the metal detector you will not be able to enter. Refusing a pat down or search **should not** lead to an arrest.

You will need to put any items you bring with you through a scanner. You also need to take off watches, belts, and large jewelry. Weapons (including, mace and even sharp utensils like forks), alcohol, and drugs are prohibited inside the court house. You can "check" any legal items with the guards and retrieve them later.

At the time of this publication, none of the NYC criminal courts have gender-neutral bathrooms. As in any public space in NYC, you have the right to use the bathroom that most affirms your gender identity. If you experience harassment while trying to use the bathroom you may want to check out the Commission on Human Right's *Guide to Equal Bathroom Access*, available on their website.

If you can't find the court part you are looking for, you

can ask for assistance at the information desk or from any court officer. It can be intimidating to ask an officer for assistance, but they often know a lot about how the court is structured and it is their job to provide you with respectful assistance.

Once you have found the courtroom, you can double-check that you are in the right spot by looking for your loved one's name on the paper posted beside the room. You need to look for the name they were arrested under. **This might be a legal name or another name the individual goes by.**

During the Court Date

Now that you have found the right courtroom, feel free to enter. The courtrooms are locked before 9:30 am, so you may need to wait outside if you arrive early. Once you are inside, you will notice long wooden benches and a wooden fence or barrier. The benches closest to the Judge are reserved for attorneys and court officers. You can sit anywhere else. Here are some important things to remember:

- You will **not** be able to use your cell phone in the courtroom. You must put it on silent.
- You will **not** be able to eat or drink in the courtroom.
- In many courtrooms, reading materials (books, magazines, newspapers) are also **not** allowed.
- You may **not** speak above a whisper and may not have extended conversations in the courtroom.
- Except for religious or medical reasons, you may **not** wear a hat or head-covering in the court.
- While the court appearance is ongoing, you may **not** interact with your loved one, their lawyer, the prosecutor, the Judge, or anyone else who is part of the proceedings.
- You **cannot** hold signs. Court support is not a rally or an intervention. That won't help your loved one and can sometimes have serious repercussions, such as arrests or increased charges.

If you do any of the above, the court officers may give you a warning before asking you to leave the court.

Unfortunately, there is no way to know when your loved one will be called. Court generally begins at 9:30 am,

but be aware that you may be waiting for a while. There is usually a lunch break between 1:00 – 2:15 pm and courts can stay open until 6:30 pm. If you are there at arraignments (the first court appearance after arrest), there is also a night shift from 5:00 pm – 1:00 am. You are free to exit the courtroom at any time.

If you have questions about the order or structure of the day, you can ask the bailiff. The bailiff is a court officer who usually stands near the barrier between the audience and the court. The bailiff can also identify your loved one's attorney for you. If you haven't yet, try to speak to the attorney before the court appearance explaining that you are there to support. **Please do this only when the court is not in session.** This means you need to wait until no one is appearing before the Judge.

If your loved one is being held in jail, you may want to prepare yourself for seeing them in court. Your loved one will be escorted into the court by uniformed court officers. Your loved one will be handcuffed. Sometimes "mittens" are placed on their hands, which means that their hands are covered in large foam cylinders, allegedly to prevent them from hurting themselves or others. Unless you are attending an actual trial, your loved one will probably be in a DOC uniform (light brown or green scrubs). They may also look different – maybe tired, maybe without their usual hair styling, probably without any makeup.

If they don't know you are coming, they may be too tired or scared to look around so they might not see you right away. Don't call out to them. That could result in your being removed. Remember, you can always write or visit them afterwards letting them know that you were at the court appearance and that you are thinking of them.

It can be hard to tell what is happening once the case has been called before the judge. People often speak softly to try and preserve privacy and legal jargon might be used. **Remember that the important thing is that you are there.** Your being present has an impact even if you don't immediately see the effect.