



Guidance on Writing Letters to Neighbors at the DC Jail

Sample Letters

Check out sample letters, cards, and drawings [here](#).

Why Letters?

We started this tradition at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic back in 2020; it was a bleak time. Folks were stuck inside for the holidays, unable to travel to visit their families. It was especially bleak at the Jail. D.C. Jail was on an indefinite, inhumane lockdown. Hearings were delayed. Neighbors who should have been home for the holidays were instead spending them alone.

On the outside, to combat the loneliness and distance of Covid, people started embracing an older, more personal means of communication: writing letters to one another. Letters are a great and oft-forgotten way of expressing our emotions to those we care about, in-depth. Taking the time to write a letter is an act of love, and receiving a letter reminds us that there are people who care about us and whose lives are intertwined with ours, even if they are far away. The pandemic is officially over and most of us have gone back to our old pre-Covid routines, but at D.C. Jail, it is still a bleak time, especially around the holidays. Our neighbors need comfort, and letters offer comfort. That's why letters.

Ideas of What to Write About

- Your favorite quote and what it means to you
- What you have been doing over the course of this year
- A hike you took, a hobby you've taken up, an insight you've gained this year
- Books, movies, and other things that have recently been meaningful to you

Letter Dos

1. **Do** write a friendly, encouraging, and relational letter.
2. **Do** write a letter by hand or type it.
3. **Do** feel free to decorate your letter.
4. **Do** feel free to include photos or videos of places and things.
5. **Do** remember that neighbors may celebrate different holidays.

Letter Don'ts

1. **Don't** include any personal information (last name, address, phone number, or email).
2. **Don't** include photos or videos that have peoples' faces in them.
3. **Don't** include questions or comments about crime or legal advice.
4. **Don't** include punitive or judgemental messages.
5. **Don't** include explicit or inappropriate language.

Tips for Children's Letters/Drawings

- Aim for something friendly, encouraging, and relational.
- Share something you like to do, a favorite book and why it's special, an important lesson you've learned, or something you really care about - and then ask what our neighbors at the jail like to do, what they find special, or what they care about.
- Paint, color, draw, stencil, or share any kind of art!
- (Note: We found that we needed to have a conversation first with our children so that notes and drawings weren't about getting out of jail or being in jail.)

When and How to Submit Letters

- [Upload your letters here](#) anytime before **Dec 28, 2025** (we share them in two batches, one with letters through Dec 21 and one with letters from Dec 21- Dec 28). (If you want, [sign up for a reminder here](#))
- For handwritten letters or drawings, take a photo or scan and upload. (Genius Scan app makes scanning easy.)