



# CITE AND RELEASE MESSAGING GUIDE

## GOAL

The goal of this guide is to give groups advocating for local jurisdictions to enact a cite and release ordinance messaging to gain public support. This guide aims to provide messaging that can be used by all groups so there is a unity in how we want cite and release issues to be talked about.

## PROBLEM TO OVERCOME

We need to **stop** using messaging around cite and release that places the humanity of one category of people over another, and we need to redefine public safety. For example, we need to stop saying that cite and release addresses nonviolent, low-level offenses, which is why people should support it. Instead, we want cite and release to be seen as a tool to reduce arrests and help people avoid the devastating consequences of arrests, such as losing jobs, benefits, and being deported.

We need to talk about moving people toward supporting community-valued solutions and away from accepting punitive approaches by:

- Establishing a shared value around coming together to overcome the problem.
- Defining the opposition: officials who believe every offense merits an arrest and punishment; the unjust and racist criminal legal system.
- Highlight how cite and release would help people by avoiding the negative consequences that arrests have on people’s lives, such as housing, employment, immigration, access to social services, mental health, family life, etc.

The talking points below include both values-oriented messaging and education. Educating the public moves people on policies, but education alone cannot move people in our direction on overall orientation toward the issue – that takes a values-based narrative.

## CORE MESSAGING SUGGESTIONS

- Establish the shared value
- Name the opposition, their tactics and their motives
- Collective call to actions

### *Establish the shared value messaging suggestions:*

- We all struggle at some point in our lives.
- Imagine if people weren’t locked away for their mistakes, but instead offered a way to heal.

- Cite and release is responding to alleged crime in a different way. It is solution-oriented and avoids damage to people's lives.
- Cite and release means a person is not immediately arrested and detained. Being arrested and incarcerated costs taxpayer money that could be put toward real community needs, like housing, health care, mental health services, and other social services. It means saving money that can be divested from law enforcement and re-invested in our community.
- A cite and release ordinance is one tool for our communities to fight back against systems of policing, criminalization and incarceration.

***Name the opposition, their tactics and their motives messaging suggestions:***

- Despite that cite & release was signed into Texas law in 2007 (well over a decade ago!), some lawmakers still believe that all mistakes must be treated the same: with arrests and punishment.
- They also refuse to see how systems of policing and incarceration have disproportionately harmed marginalized communities, and white supremacy has permeated every crevice of law enforcement on the local, state and federal levels.
- Given a choice to make an arrest or issue a citation, police officers often opt for arrest due to longstanding biases deeply ingrained in law enforcement culture, the financial incentive from a large number of arrests, or for fear of repercussions from superiors.

***Collective call to action messaging suggestions:***

- Cite and release ordinances are another step toward decriminalizing marginalized communities, such as Black people, communities of color, immigrants, and low-income people.
- Cite and release ordinances help mitigate racial profiling in policing and avoid the harmful effects of an arrest, such as deportation, losing your job, and barriers to finding employment and housing. Arrests and incarceration, no matter the length, tear apart families and destabilize our communities.
- Being arrested will give a person a criminal record that can cause long-term harm. And in a time of a global pandemic, it can mean the difference between life or death. COVID-19 is rapidly spreading in jails. Cite and release means no immediate incarceration.
- Cite and release is a first step toward defunding the police. It's one tool in our toolbox. So let's use it - let's reduce police officers' ability to arrest, let's keep thousands of people out of jail, and let's use it as a building step as we continue to push for what our communities really need to thrive.

## ALTERNATIVE MESSAGING SUGGESTIONS

<i>Instead of saying...</i>	<i>Consider saying...</i>	<i>Why it matters</i>
Nonviolent, low-level offenses	Citation-eligible offenses  Infractions  Certain offenses  Offenses eligible for citation under state law	By emphasizing “non-violent” and “low-level,” we are implying that individuals accused of higher level or violent offenses deserve to have their lives destroyed through arrests and punishment. We should strive for inclusive messaging that does not place the humanity and dignity of one group over another.
Cite and release saves money that can be used for other public safety priorities or for law enforcement to focus on dangerous/serious crime.	Cite and release saves money which can be used to meet the community’s real needs, such as housing, health care, and social services.	We want to redefine public safety with a divest/reinvest framework. By stating that cost savings should be funneled back into law enforcement, we are allowing them to continue inflicting harm on our communities.
A person issued a citation will still be punished (i.e. have to go to court and answer for their crime).	A citation or other alternatives to arrest avoids immediate and painful incarceration, and allows officers to practice another way to respond to harm, instead of punitive arrest.  For cite and release <b>diversion</b> campaigns: Instead of being arrested, charged and punished, an individual will have an opportunity to complete an alternative diversion program to avoid the devastating effects of having a record.	We want to pivot away from punishment and towards a community-based response.
Cite and release is mainly good for the community because it saves taxpayer dollars.	Cite and release is a solution-based approach which avoids the devastating and long-lasting effects of arrests on people’s lives. It makes good sense because it helps to ensure healthy, thriving communities and saves taxpayer dollars.	It is important to prioritize values-based messaging around the humanity of all community members. While we can still use arguments about cost savings/taxpayer dollars, those should always be secondary to our real goal, which is avoiding the devastating consequences of arrest.
First-time offenders deserve a second chance to turn their lives around.	Anyone being charged with citation-eligible offense(s) should not be criminalized — everyone deserves the opportunity to live a life without the devastating consequences of an arrest record.	We want to move away from implying that cite and release is only for first-time offenders, and they are the only ones that should get the opportunity of a citation. We need to decriminalize all of these offenses.