

Statement in support of the 2022
NLG Constitutional amendment to the Legal Worker definition

By Kris Hermes

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My name is Kris Hermes (he/him) and I wholeheartedly support the Legal Worker amendment!

I've been a Legal Worker member of the National Lawyers Guild for more than 20 years, and I've had the pleasure to serve as Chair of the Legal Workers Caucus and the Mass Defense Committee, and with the National Office staff as the Interim Mass Defense Coordinator.

I was fortunately welcomed as a Legal Worker member of the NLG without a history in the legal profession. But, that had to do more with **where** I joined the Guild than any consistently applied organizational policy.

The NLG was founded in 1937, in large part, as an alternative to the American Bar Association's exclusionary membership practices.

This amendment carries that spirit of inclusion, and aims to fight against exclusionary practices that still exist within the organization.

Plain and simple, this amendment aims to clarify the definition of who is **eligible** to become a Legal Worker member of the Guild.

It will bring Guild membership policy in line with the organization's principled objection to exclusion based on unpaid labor.

Currently, the definition of a Legal Worker member allows chapters to refuse membership to those of us who do not work in the legal profession, but who want to volunteer with the Guild to support their comrades and challenge the legal system. Some of us who don't work in the legal profession also want to work with the Guild to help advance social movement goals.

Some might ask, what's the big deal? Does it really hurt the Guild to require its members be employed in the legal profession?

By tolerating membership exclusion based on paid labor, the Guild will continue to reflect the racial and class exclusion entrenched in the legal profession.

But, with a commitment to anti-racist and anti-classist praxes, we can change that. We want Legal Observers, especially Legal Observers of color, to join our organization as Legal Workers. Why wouldn't we?

And, if activists are radicalized on the streets, or as a result of a brutal arrest, or through the carceral process, and they want to work with the Guild to push back against a repressive legal system, why wouldn't we welcome them with open arms?

Opponents say that accepting members regardless of their paid labor or choice of profession makes the Guild vulnerable to infiltration. But this is a fallacious argument. The truth is, we are vulnerable to infiltration regardless. Exclusion based on profession and paid labor will not prevent infiltration.

Let's not be lazy in discerning who we organize with. Let's not find comfort in membership practices that reflect the exclusion of the legal profession rather than the social movements we support.

This amendment was developed by NLG Legal Workers and Mass Defense Committee leadership. It's supported by the Legal Worker Caucus, the Mass Defense Committee, The United People of Color Caucus, the Mass Incarceration Committee and at least 10 chapters from across the country.

In reality, most chapters already have an inclusive policy that welcomes Legal Worker members who don't work in the legal profession. This amendment simply reinforces those practices and prevents exclusion based on paid labor.

Please vote yes to approve this Constitutional amendment!