

As can be seen from the proposed text, the legal worker amendment makes it very explicit that volunteer legal workers should be considered eligible for membership in the Guild. This amendment shouldn't be necessary. The existing definition was obviously designed to allow anyone with any history of helping others navigate the legal system to join the organization as a legal worker. Unfortunately, a few chapters have unilaterally redefined "legal workers" to mean "only those who have paid employment in the legal industry", subverting both the intent and plain language of the existing definition. This practice is a bad idea for many reasons. It's racist and elitist, for reasons that should not require explanation. It deprives those chapters of talent, especially in the ones that don't even let volunteer legal workers become legal observers. It further widens the gulf between the world of activists and the world of lawyers by shutting out the people most likely to have a foot in both camps. It hurts the Guild's reputation, which is already on pretty shaky ground in some circles. Volunteer legal workers are the backbone of mass defense and prisoner support efforts nation-wide. Legal support hotline operators, bail fund administrators, political prisoner support committees, etc. are a vital component of resistance to state repression. We should be encouraging them to join the Guild, not keeping them out.

The amendment is meant to close this loophole by clearly stating that all legal workers are eligible for membership in the Guild, regardless of whether their work is paid or not.

I am aware of two objections to this amendment, neither of which hold water. One is that volunteer legal workers are such a dangerous security risk that they must be excluded to protect against infiltration by enemies of the Guild. This is ridiculous. If the FBI, or even a decent size municipal police department, wanted to infiltrate a chapter they could easily find a friendly law office to provide cover for their agent. The only way to prevent infiltration is to vet members on an individual basis, regardless of their membership category. At the plenary, we heard horror stories of malicious LOs, having presumably wormed their way into a training, pointing out protesters to police. As a member of the Mass Defense Steering Committee, I can testify that we have heard nothing previously about these issues. With the exception of a single incident in which a right-wing troll stole an LO hat, we are not aware of any instances of LO programs being infiltrated by any adversary.

The other objection, also raised at the plenary, is that legal observers require additional legal education beyond that offered in LO trainings. This too is a ridiculous assertion. The Mass Defense Committee's legal observer manual, released in 2019, describes no such requirement, and the steering committee has not received any suggestion to insert one. LO trainings take no more than two hours maximum. Thousands of LOs across the country manage to do an exemplary job despite having no legal training except that offered by their chapter's mass defense team.

I urge everyone to vote in favor of the legal worker amendment, so that volunteer legal workers will finally be welcome in every chapter.