

**A How to Guide:
Getting an Anti-Torture Resolution Passed in Your City**



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<http://illinois.cat.wordprs.com>

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Introduction:

In January 2012 the Chicago City Council unanimously passed the Anti-Torture Resolution. This is the first time that any city in the United States has voted to condemn torture on the city, state, and federal level. This is a major victory, one that we hope other cities and towns across the United States will repeat.

The resolution opposes:

1. The City of Chicago police torture of Black men carried out by former police commander Jon Burge and his crew (the officers under his command).
2. The use of prolonged solitary confinement in Illinois state prisons.
3. The treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo and other U.S. torture sites outside the United States.

See the complete resolution at: <http://illinoiscat.wordpress.com/torture-free-chicago-resolution/>

In order to help you pass a similar resolution in your city, the Illinois Coalition Against Torture (ICAT) has prepared this brief “How to” guide. It is geared to helping anti-torture activists and human rights supporters pass an anti-torture resolution where you live. We hope that it will help you to mobilize others to work to end U.S. government torture on the local, state, and federal level. If you have any suggestions for ways to improve this guide or any questions about our work, please contact us.

I. Your Local Context Matters!

To begin, you need to identify what example of torture people in your community most strongly oppose. Therefore, one of the first and most important things to do is to determine what incidents or examples of torture generate the most opposition from people in your community. Have there been any well-publicized cases of torture by the local police? Has there been any outcry about the torturous conditions experienced by people in prisons or jails in your area or state? Have people opposed the U.S. government’s use of torture internationally? If any or all of these issues have generated publicity or opposition, lead with them. If none of them has, you might need to do some research to establish and make known local examples of torture. We suggest that you then link your city and state’s practices of torture to the federal government’s use of torture.

The key example of torture in Chicago was the case of Police Commander Jon Burge and the officers under his command. From the 1970s until Burge was fired in 1993, Chicago police officers tortured detained Black men, subjecting them to electric shock, beatings, and partial suffocation. The widespread coverage of the case, combined with well-organized public opposition and lawsuits against Burge and his crew, helped our efforts to get people to call for a torture-free Chicago and the Chicago City Council to pass the resolution. The U.S. government’s practice of torturing people

in Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and elsewhere were also well known and opposed in Chicago.

II. Organizing for the Resolution!

Our goals regarding the resolution were two-fold. (1) We wanted to use our work around the resolution to educate people about and mobilize them against government use of torture. (2) We wanted to get the resolution passed.

a. Drafting the Resolution

In order to ensure the passage of a resolution you need to obtain the support of a local government official(s) who will introduce the resolution into the governing body, steer it through the body, and advocate for its passage. Once we determined that we wanted to launch the campaign to pass the anti-torture resolution, we contacted a local City of Chicago Alderman, Joe Moore. Various members of ICAT had a relationship with him and we knew that he opposed torture. We then presented him with our draft of the resolution. He read it and made important suggestions for revisions, which we accepted.

This leads us to another important point. We determined that in order to have the resolution pass, we needed to be flexible. We had wanted to include certain points, such as reparations for the survivors of torture and a halt to the payment by the City of Chicago of Commander Burge's legal fees and pension. However, Alderman Moore convinced us that if the resolution contained these points, it would not pass City Council. After discussion, ICAT decided that it was more important to have the resolution pass than to retain all our demands and we agreed to take out these points. This decision allowed us to work with Alderman Moore, without whom it would have been impossible for us to bring the resolution before the City Council.

b. Organizing public support against torture

Since we wanted to use the campaign to mobilize people to oppose torture, we also developed several educational and organizing tools. Prior to launching the campaign, ICAT had held several successful educational programs that discussed the U.S. government's use of torture on the local, state, and federal level. These programs generated public awareness about the issue, established ICAT as an organization that was committed to working against torture, and educated people and members of ICAT about the practice of torture and the need to oppose it.

In order to reach beyond our base, ICAT also developed a petition campaign in support of the anti-torture resolution.

The petition states:

- (1) I support the Chicago City Council Resolution against torture.**
- (2) I want to live in a city that opposes torture.**
- (3) I want to reaffirm the importance of everyone's civil and human rights.**
- (4) I don't want to have to spend one penny for the defense of torturer, as the City of Chicago has done in the multi-million dollar lawsuits involving Burge and other police officers.**

We decided to use an online petition to reach people in and beyond Chicago, indeed from all over the world, and include them in the anti-torture resolution campaign. People in roughly thirty countries signed the petition, which was a very impressive demonstration of the importance the global human rights community placed on the work. We also developed a hard copy of the petition, which allowed us to speak face-to-face with people about the issue of torture and the resolution at programs, on the street, and at demonstrations. Combined, these two petitions allowed us to reach thousands of people. Although we had initially set a goal of obtaining 500 signatures, we managed to get over 3,500 signatures. We consider this a great victory!

The petition itself should be short and easy-to-read and understand. We wrote a leaflet explaining the resolution for those who wanted to know more. At the end of the campaign, we presented both the on-line and the hard copies of the petitions to the City Council so that the Aldermen had tangible proof that thousands of people from all over the world urged the City of Chicago to pass the anti-torture resolution.

c. Working with Local and National Organizations

ICAT worked with anti-torture, peace and justice, and religious groups on a local level. ICAT also works with the National Religious Coalition Against Torture (NRCAT). We encourage you to join with like-minded local and national organizations. One advantage of working with a national organization is that it can help publicize your work across the country. For example, NRCAT sent out regular announcements about the resolution and urged readers to sign the petition. It also helped a member of ICAT to publish an editorial about the resolution in the *Chicago Tribune*. See "Chicago's ban on torture should spur others to act too," January 25, 2012, by Sister Benita Coffey.

http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-01-25/news/ct-oped-0125-torture-20120125_1_torture-chicago-police-cmdr-solitary-confinement

d. Media Strategy

We know that getting the story of the resolution out to the media is very important. However, we fell short on this. In retrospect, we should have developed a better media strategy from the beginning of the campaign. We could have done a much better job of contacting radio and TV stations and writing letters to newspapers and on-line publications. By not doing this, we missed important opportunities to educate people about the resolution.

We were able to speak on the local affiliate of National Public Radio, as well as community, religious, and university-based radio stations. The more avenues you explore, the greater are your chances of getting your message out. We also used social media, such as Facebook, to alert people to the anti-torture resolution.

We held a press conference on the day that the resolution was presented to the City Council. We suggest that you do so as well when your resolution comes up for a vote. Elected officials such as U.S. Congressman Danny Davis and Alderman Joe Moore spoke at the press conference, as did torture survivors and family members, professors, and human rights activists.

Several factors contributed to making the press conference a success. First, a variety of speakers spoke. Second, because Alderman Moore supported the press conference and the resolution, he arranged for us to hold the conference directly outside the site where the City Council would hear the resolution. As a result, the space was very accessible for the media. Third, we found that the use of visuals was very effective. Mothers and family members of tortured sons held pictures of and spoke about their children and loved ones during the press conference. The media focused on them and their pictures, both of which provided powerful testimony of the depth of suffering that the Chicago police inflicted on the people they tortured as well as their families.

e. The Hearings

If you hold hearings, we suggest that you invite speakers who represent a variety of experiences and viewpoints. As with the press conference, torture survivors and family members, professors, human rights and anti-torture activists, and elected officials spoke. We held the hearings right after the press conference, so many of the people who spoke at the conference also spoke at the hearings. We encourage those who testify to be knowledgeable, concise, and direct.

What we could have done better!

(1) We should have developed and implemented an outreach plan to local and national groups to encourage them to organize for and support the resolution.

(2) We neglected to develop a strategy to reach out to local officials to urge them to support the resolution.

(3) As discussed above, we did not develop a media strategy on either a local or national level to let people know about the resolution.

(4) We should have been better informed about other political activities in our area and worked more closely with the groups carrying them out in order to build ties between our different but related areas of work.

Good luck with your anti-torture resolution! Let us know how it goes!

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www.illinoiscat.wordpress.com (website)