

*So you're going to be an activist ...*

## **Important things to know about your rights**

Before hitting the streets, making that speech, or writing that letter to the editor, there are some things to make sure you're clear about.

- Have you had some pre-training and discussion with your sponsoring group?
- Do you have people in your group who have had experience with protesting?
  - Have you reviewed your signs to make sure they are readable, easy to understand on camera and clear in meaning? *Clever CAN sometimes be used against you.*
  - Are messages free of *libel* and *defamation*?
- Do you at have at one or two spokespeople to talk with the media?
  - Do others know that it's wise to refer media folks to the designated spokesperson or spokespersons?
  - Others may be interviewed, but make sure your protestors know what your group's message is and what you're trying to get across. BE CONCISE!
  - Your group may want to have a formal statement ready to hand out. Reporters like to go back and look at a single fact sheet as they're preparing their stories.
- Do you understand the procedures of what might occur if you're arrested?
  - Does your group have legal counsel on call in case there's a need to help secure your release from jail?
    - Do you understand bonding procedures?
    - Do you have the phone number of an attorney or someone you KNOW will be reachable during the time you are protesting?

<https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/legal-information/your-right-free-speech-and-protest>

## **Freedom of Speech**

It can come as a shock to people that while Freedom of Speech and Peaceful Assembly are indeed among the freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, many times being able to speak freely comes with *consequences*. And, those *consequences* can sometimes impact you negatively: financially, emotionally and in some cases even be physically injurious or life-threatening.

It's also important to understand what slander, libel and defamation are all about.

Quickly some basics:

1. Truth is a defense against charges of slander (spoken) and libel (usually in print). The plaintiff (person bringing the lawsuit) must prove that he/she was defamed.
2. <http://defamation.laws.com/defamation-laws/libel-vs-slander>
3. <https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/legal-information/your-right-free-speech-and-protest>

**MOST IMPORTANT:** Virtually anybody can sue somebody else for just about anything. Read up on SLAPP lawsuits, where individuals have been dragged into long, extensive lawsuits by those who know that they can outspend and outlast folks with limited legal and monetary resources.

<https://cldc.org/organizing-resources/slapp-suits/>

\*\*Prior to your protest make sure you've talked with local authorities, know what the rules are re: keeping your protest on public sidewalks, etc.