

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

Dehumanizing Language and What to Do:

At any point in which you have contact with an external party, whether it be a legislator or a journalist, they may use language that is dehumanizing. JLUSA has a toolkit on [person-first](#) language. Sometimes these descriptors of directly impacted people are said with malice but often it is merely ignorance. When speaking with a policymaker whom you are trying to influence, you often want to mirror back the appropriate terminology. If they keep saying “ex-con,” you should respond with something that incorporates person-first language like “formerly incarcerated.” With a legislator and a journalist, you can often use that moment to say actually the appropriate term is “X.” Expound and suggest that you appreciate the opportunity to explain why it is so critical to use the appropriate language.

Instead of	Use this
<i>“Felons, Criminals, Convicts, etc.”</i>	People convicted of felonies
<i>“Inmates, Prisoners”</i>	Incarcerated people
<i>“Ex-Con”</i>	Formerly incarcerated people
<i>“Defendants”</i>	Those accused of a crime



You should prepare yourself and any others for the possibility that when engaging with others they might hear something offensive. This is one of numerous advantages to advocating in groups. In the heat of the moment you or someone else may need to take a moment and collect yourself. If you search “instant ways to self-soothe” and other permutations of this phrase, you may find some exercises that will ground you. Acknowledge that it is OK to feel upset. Ultimately you will get the most out of the exchange by de-escalating but also modeling better language and teaching the person what is appropriate to say and what is not. If there is continued harassment on their end, it is OK to end the conversation early.

They are likely not someone who is persuadable on the issue at hand. Advocacy is important, but your own well-being is most important!