

# Counter Recruitment Proposal- USLAW

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Over the last year, there has been a phenomenal effort of a broad sector of the anti-war movement to thwart the recruitment of young people to the military. On a fairly spontaneous basis, people from many different groups have engaged in efforts to educate people on the realities of military service, the endless and unpredictable nature of the contract one signs to join the military, the human costs of military service (in wartime in general and in this war in particular), the ready access the military has to student records and contact information (for HS students through the No Child Left Behind legislation and for college students through the Solomon Amendment which requires colleges to assist the military in garnering contact information on their students or risk denial of federal funds). Poor and working class students and their communities and communities of color are mostly targeted as the expectation is that youth from these communities will have fewer options for employment and costly higher education, thus contributing to an "economic draft" policy.

The purpose of Counter Recruitment (CR) work is to deprive the military of workers, i.e., soldiers, and, in a period in which a draft is very unlikely due to the wide-spread unpopularity of the war in Iraq, withhold material support for the war machine. It also protects the lives, limbs, and mental health of the young men and women who might serve under misleading information and circumstances.

CR efforts are present in thousands of cities and towns across America, often organized by local PTAs, church/synagogue/mosque social action committees, high school and college activists and their teachers, concerned anti-war activists. The network of CR activists is very loose, often totally unconnected but effective nonetheless because it is so decentralized and widespread. Most branches of the military report recruitment numbers well below their quotas. One of the best features of the CR movement is that, because it is so decentralized, it is reflective of the particular sensibilities and politics of the groups that participate. While some of the major organizations, e.g., American Friends Service Committee, Veterans for Peace, National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth, have excellent literature that can be downloaded from their websites, many local groups adapt that literature for their particular purposes and populations. Leafleting against military recruitment, distributing literature informing parents of the military's access to their children's contact information and the need for them to sign "opt out" forms to have their children's names withheld from the military, reaps incredibly supportive results: the average American is appreciative to have been given this information that they can use to protect their own children and the children of others in their communities.

Finally, CR activities provide people with anti-war sentiments concrete activities for them to participate in that connects them to the broader anti-war movement. Whether speaking in a high school class, showing a film about military recruitment, distributing flyers in a shopping mall, CR activists experience the broad opposition of Americans to this war. It is both an effective and gratifying activity that connects us to the necessary multi-faceted strategy to oppose the war.

Military Families Speak Out raises issues about the language of CR organizing. Their members ask for "Truth in Recruiting" rather than Counter Recruiting because they wish to affirm a person's choice to join the military. What they wish to actualize is truth in packaging, truth in communicating what truly awaits the soldier upon enlistment.

Thus we propose that when possible, member organizations of USLAW participate in and support CR activities, whether directly through their unions, through their religious or neighborhood organizations, or through their children's schools. This work is particularly pertinent to educators on every level and is an effective way to press teacher unions (AFT, NEA, AAUP) to not only take a stand against the war but to take action as well. UTLA, UFT (NYC), PSC-CUNY and other teacher unions have worked effectively in creating resolutions opposing military recruitment in schools and colleges and also in spearheading anti-war and CR forums in their institutions as well as direct CR activities. Activists in several cities, e.g., Chicago and NYC, have begun campaigns to have public high schools develop "opt in" rather than "opt out" policies; those campaigns offer focus and broaden discussion and participation as well. We hope that this will be a tactic that many USLAW member organizations take on as it deepens commitment to the antiwar movement, increases participation, and supports group creativity and community outreach.