[Date]

The Honorable [First/last name]

[Office, e.g., U.S. House of Representatives]

ATTN: [Scheduler, if any. Call the elected official’s office first to find the name and contact information of the scheduler and the correct process for submitting the invitation]

[Address]

Dear Representative/Senator/Governor/Mayor/Councilmember \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your [vote for or support of an initiative related to criminal justice reform]. We greatly appreciate your efforts to address the urgent need for criminal justice reform in [city and nationally, if applicable]. At \_\_\_\_\_ [name of organization] we are committed to\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_[mission of organization].

We would like to invite you to participate in an important discussion on \_\_\_\_\_\_ [date] to discuss

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [goals of your screening event].

Our hope is to enable a wary public to better understand the transformative power of prison education to save money as well as lives, and we would be honored if you would participate in a panel discussion following the screening of FIRST DEGREE, a new award-winning documentary film about a remarkable college behind bars that prevents inmates from returning to prison. The screening will be held at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_[location] tentatively scheduled on [date, start and end times]. The event is hosted by [host organizations] and will feature prominent community leaders \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [include names/titles/organizations, if known]. We expect an audience of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [expected attendance, diversity of constituents].

The expression “sent up the river” was coined by individuals who were sent up the Hudson River to do their time at the infamous Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York. FIRST DEGREE finds hope in this seemingly hopeless place by exploring an unusual prison education program that appears to keep Sing Sing inmates from being sent back up the river after their release. Nationwide, over half of released inmates return to prison within five years, but for the past 14 years, less than 1% of the inmates who earned their college degrees at Sing Sing returned to prison.

As you know, we are working on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [more detailed description of organization’s current initiatives]. This event will serve as an opportunity to speak with concerned constituents [and the media, if known] and to spark discussion and action aimed at reducing recidivism and mass incarceration in our community.

Please do not hesitate to let us know if we can answer any questions or provide additional information. We hope you will join us for this timely film and important discussion. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[CONTACT INFORMATION]

**Follow up**

If the scheduler confirms the elected official’s attendance, thank them, confirm the event details, provide the name, title, organization, and cell phone number of the person who will greet them at the event, and ask if the official has a press secretary with whom to coordinate publicity efforts. Confirm the event again with the scheduler closer to the event date.

If you do not get a response, try again and briefly emphasize the prominence of community leaders who will attend, media outlets or star reporters who are interested in covering the subject, or a specific local story about prison education. Use any updated information as an opportunity to contact the official again, as in, “We are pleased to inform you that Mayor \_\_\_\_ will join us for the post-screening discussion.”

If the invitation is not accepted, ask if another date or time would be more suitable or if a member of the staff can attend.

If the invitation is still not accepted, thank the official and scheduler for their consideration.

**At the Event**

Make sure the individual you appointed to meet the elected official is present and ready to greet him/her upon arrival. The official should be made aware of any press that is at the event; likewise, any press in attendance should be notified of the presence of any elected officials. Confirm with the official when and for how long they should speak.

**After the Event**

Send a thank-you note to the elected official, along with any photos, news coverage, or statements from attendees that may be of interest. Indicate that you will continue to follow their efforts in the issue area and that you look forward to continuing to work together.