

ADVOCACY 101

Political advocacy can be daunting, but it is an essential part in caring for the lives of our children. Because we know that it can feel very intimidating, we put together this primer to help educate and support you in making your voice heard.

Know the bill(s) or other legislation that you're opposing.

Using a tool such as [Fast Democracy](#), you can look for and track bills in your state about Gender and Gender Identity.

Read and understand the proposed bills.

Find out what stage your bill is in; First Read, Second Read, Assigned to Committee, on the floor for a vote, or Passed/Failed. If you are not familiar with the process, or need a refresher, see [this pdf](#) for more information.

Start by reaching out to your personal legislators.

It's okay if you don't know the name of your congressperson or your senator. There's no judgment here; but now is the time to find out. Go to [Fast Democracy's legislative lookup](#) and find your legislators. This will give you the name, address and phone number of your legislators.

You can meet your legislators in person, or call, write and email, or even all of the above. (See below).

Reach out to committee members:

If a bill is in committee, find out the names and contact information for all of the committee members. [The U.S. Congress has a website](#) with links to the legislative web pages of all 50 states. On your state's website, you can find the proposed bill, what committee the bill has been assigned to, and who the legislators are on the committee. Again, you can choose to contact the committee members in person, by phone, letter or email or all of the above. (See below).

Consider testifying in person or providing written testimony:

Your voice is powerful. Once a bill is in committee, the committee is required to have a public hearing, or the proposed bill dies. If you are able to attend in person, please consider doing so. It can be scary and intimidating, but remember that the Capitol belongs to YOU, it is the People's House, and you have every right to be there at any time.

If you cannot attend a hearing in person, you can submit a witness testimony. This is a written testimony that goes into the public record of a committee hearing. While we would like to think that all written witness testimonies are read by the members of the committee, the truth is that they are not. That is why in-person, public testimony is so powerful.

Speaking with Legislators:

It can seem very intimidating to reach out to your legislator. However, the more you do it, the less power that fear will have over you, and the more comfortable you will become. It does get easier, and we speak from personal experience.

In-person

You can arrange an appointment to speak with your legislators in person. If you happen to have a free day and don't have an appointment, feel free to stop by anyway, and try to catch your legislators. Remember, they work for YOU. While in-person meetings may be the most intimidating method of having your voice heard, it is also the most effective and the most powerful. Take along an ally as support or consider bringing your child with you if they have the desire to speak out on their behalf. **Speak from your heart.**

Don't forget to thank your legislator for their time. A follow-up email or letter soon after your meeting will reinforce the memory of their conversation with you and will give you the opportunity to elaborate on certain issues you may have forgotten in the moment or would like to reinforce.

Call

Calling your legislator's office can have an impact, particularly if you encourage other friends and allies to call, too. Often legislators get very few contacts from their constituents on a bill. If they get inundated with calls, they start to sit up and take notice.

You can have a script prepared. Know that the majority of the time when you call, you will not speak directly with your legislator, but instead with either an aide or other staff member. Here's how a call might typically occur:

Receptionist: Good morning. Senator Smith's office.

You: Hi, my name is James Johnson and I live in Senator Smith's District.

Receptionist: How may I help you?

You: I am calling to urge Senator Smith to vote against Senate Bill XXX, which {insert what the bill is about} and it will directly impact my family {insert how}.

Receptionist: I will let the Senator know.

You: Thank you. {Ask for the Senator to call you back if you wish to speak with them personally}.

Email or Letter:

Inundating an office with email or letters is also something that can make an impact. With an email or letter mail, you have the opportunity to really tell your story and explain exactly how the bill will impact you. Be concise (so it will be read) and be heartfelt. This is your child and your family on the line - make sure your legislator knows it. Find others to do the same - friends, family, colleagues or anyone you think is an ally and who can help reinforce your message.

Reach out to legislators no matter what side you think they are on. Even if a legislator is an ally, it's important to reinforce their opposition to a bill, specifically providing them with anecdotes that they can use when speaking with their colleagues or when arguing a bill in committee or on the floor. For those legislators with opposing views, remember that you can win people to your side more easily by gentle persuasion and flattery than by hostile confrontation. That does not mean that you shouldn't tell the brutal truth of your story - keep it powerful and personal, but not contentious.

How Can I Have More Impact?

There is strength in numbers. Reaching out to others is the best way to amplify your message:

- Write a letter to your local newspaper, or post comments on your online news outlet
- Ask friends, neighbors, and colleagues to contact their legislators
- Post on social media
- Respond to posts on social media

In closing:

Do not underestimate the power of your own personal story. Legislators need to know how they can represent you. Your story is more important than the nitty-gritty details of how legislation works. In some cases, it may feel like your participation is a last-ditch effort. Remember, until a final vote is cast, it is never too late to make your views known.

Last, remember the following from the Gettysburg address. Your government is “...*of the people, by the people, for the people...*” and those people include you.

**Democracy is not a spectator sport.
Active citizens do make a difference.**