



# LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TOOLKIT LGBTQ+ AND TWO SPIRIT EQUALITY



**ACLU**  
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## Let's talk about how we can all advocate for and defend LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit equality.



Decisions made during the annual sessions of the South Dakota Legislature have a deep and lasting impact on our state's people and communities. As new laws are created and others repealed or written, it's important to ensure that these changes preserve and strengthen our constitutional rights.

The ACLU of South Dakota monitors a wide range of issues at the legislature. Our education, organizing, and lobbying efforts are aimed at informing both lawmakers and the public about the civil rights and civil liberties implications of the bills proposed by our elected officials. The stakes are high for legislative action in 2022, and we must defend and protect the civil liberties of all South Dakotans.

### **S.D. LAWMAKERS NEED TO FOCUS ON REAL ISSUES, NOT DISCRIMINATORY BILLS**

Every year, issues that matter most to South Dakotans are ignored as some South Dakota legislators continue to attack the LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit community and erode their rights with bills that stoke fear and hatred amid discriminatory rhetoric.

Bill after bill seems fixated on the incorrect notion that some of our friends and neighbors are not entitled to the same dignity and respect as others. Bills to prevent transgender athletes from competing. Bills that would allow health care providers, medical institutions, and health insurance providers to refuse care to a patient on religious, moral, ethical or philosophical grounds. Bills that would ban transgender people from obtaining birth certificates that accurately reflect their identity.

The more we legislate solutions in search of problems, the more our communities suffer. It's time we stop these attacks and focus on issues that matter to the people of South Dakota.



# Everyone has the ability to make change.



## START BY CONNECTING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

Your elected officials are all in office for one reason: to represent you. They need and want to hear from you. Contact them and let them know where you stand on the issues!

With the exception of those in leadership roles, most elected officials in South Dakota have no staff or admin team. That means your senator and representatives will be the ones answering when you contact them. The amount of response an elected official gets on a certain issue can help determine its importance in their eyes. For example, if an elected official is getting a dozens of calls, emails, and letters saying “vote NO on XYZ,” it will make a big impression. Conversely, if they’re not hearing anything from their constituents, they’ll assume no one cares or what they are doing is permissible. Do you know who your legislators are? Or what their thoughts are on issues that matter to you? Find their contact information at [sdlegislature.gov](http://sdlegislature.gov) or use your smartphone to scan the QR code on the top right.

Whether you’re calling or writing your elected officials, **tact is key. Be kind, be firm, be honest, and share your personal story.** Facts are important, but personal and relatable stories can play a powerful role in changing hearts, minds, and votes.

- **Make it short and sweet:** If your elected official is receiving dozens of letters or calls about certain hot-button issues, you’ll want to make your point quickly and directly.
- **Tell your story and make it personal:** The more personal your letter is, the more compelling it will be. Tell your elected official how their decisions affect you, your family, and your friends.
- **Problem, solution, action:** In the letter be sure to include the problem, the solution, and the action you want to see taken. (i.e. “*Trans kids are under attack and it is your duty to defend the people you were elected to represent. Vote on HB 123.*”)

## SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Lawmaker,

I am writing to urge you to vote no on House Bill 1234 when it hits the Senate floor.

Everyone should have the chance to play sports. It’s that simple. Transgender students – whether they’re in high school or college – are no different. The South Dakota High School Activities Association even has a policy in place for trans athletes right now. Likewise, the NCAA also has clear policies on the inclusion of trans student-athletes and their participation in intercollegiate athletics.

No one is harmed by making sports accessible to everyone.

Instead of leveling the playing field, this policy will place hurdles in front of athletes just because they’re transgender. I’m urging you to vote no on House Bill 1234 and focus on issues that really matter to South Dakotans.

Please vote no on House Bill 1234.

Thank you.

## MORE WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

**Get to know your legislators:** What committees do they serve on? What is their professional background? This information can be helpful in building a relationship with your lawmakers and talking to them about civil liberties issues. Go to [sdlegislature.gov](http://sdlegislature.gov) to access their contact information. South Dakota legislators can be reached at 605-773-3251 during session.

**Follow along at home:** Find live and recorded audio of committee and floor hearings on South Dakota Public Broadcasting’s Statehouse website or the SD.Net app. Follow #SDLeg on Twitter for breaking news and coverage.

**Attend a legislative coffee or cracker barrel:** These public forums are where you can connect with your legislators. Coffees and cracker barrels are often planned by local community groups or chambers of commerce. Don’t miss your chance to hear your elected officials’ views and ask them questions about topics that matter most to you and your community!



## **Get your friends involved to help advocate for and defend LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit equality.**

The more people who can engage with legislative advocacy, the better. Your elected officials will respond if they feel like there's a groundswell of support or opposition from their constituents. It only takes a few voices to make a big impact!

**Ask your family and friends.** The best way to start is with the people closest to you in the community. Let your family and friends know what you are up to and they'll be excited to help you out.

**Talk about the issue of LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit equality in community spaces.** Are you a member of a local civic organization, do you attend a place of worship regularly, or are you involved with a local sports team? Any one of these places could be an opportunity to find an ally. By dipping your toe in the water in these spaces with people you already know, you might be surprised at how many like-minded people you find.

**Make it fun.** Consider hosting a house party or happy hour (either virtual or in-person). This is a great opportunity to share the goals and resources from this toolkit with your team and get them excited about making a real difference in your communities. It's also an opportunity to have a little fun in the process.

**Keep them connected.** Consider starting a Facebook group or an email/text chain for your legislative advocacy efforts. Share advocacy materials and updates from the movement, post local events that might be of interest, and consider organizing regular check-ins or meetups. The goal is to keep everyone informed and engaged. Note: If you decide to do regular meetups (either virtually or in-person), this is a great opportunity share your personal stories and brainstorm testimony ideas as a group.



# Share your story.

## WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper can be an extremely effective way to influence public opinion and shape legislators' views. Letters to the editor reach a large audience and are often monitored by public officials. Plus, they're fun to read. The "Letter to the Editor" section is often one of the most widely read sections of the newspaper!

### Follow these tips:

- **Keep it short.** Most newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters and have limited space to publish them. Typically aim for 200 words.
- **Make it personal.** Share your own story or experiences – don't worry about trying to be an expert. Start by talking about who you are, then describe a problem or concern, then talk about a solution.
- **Include your contact information.** Many newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify their identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information, and will usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.
- **Sign it and send it to one of your local newspapers.** Check out [aclusd.org/editor](http://aclusd.org/editor) or scan the link on the bottom right of this page.

## SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**Not too long ago, my husband I and were sitting in the doctor's office talking about the HPV vaccine with our long-time family doctor. Should our son get this shot?**

**We knew the HPV vaccine protects boys against HPV infections that can cause cancers of the anus, penis, and mouth/throat in men. Plus, when boys are vaccinated, they are less likely to spread HPV to their current and future partners. But we knew that many people have strong opinions on why their sons (or daughters for that matter) should not be getting the vaccine. So we wanted to discuss the shot with our doctor, and he was happy to oblige.**

**But who wasn't a part of this conversation? Our elected officials. Medical decisions should be made between patients and their doctors – not politicians.**

**That's why I've been so disheartened to hear about House Bill 1234, legislation that would criminalize medically necessary care for transgender youth. What business do politicians have in legislating the medical care of South Dakota's youth? The state should not be interfering in the doctor-patient relationship. Our transgender friends and neighbors in South Dakota deserve better. We all do.**

## WHERE TO PUBLISH YOUR LETTER

Make sure your message is heard by publishing to your local newspaper or a statewide publication. Here are a few publications to consider.

- Brookings Register
- Argus Leader
- Rapid City Journal
- Pierre Capital Journal
- Bryant Dakotan
- Dakota Herald
- Freeman Courier
- Lakota Country Times
- Miller Press
- Sioux Valley News
- Yankton Press & Dakotan



## Use social media to create change.

Social media is a powerful tool to use to build momentum around your opposition to anti-LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit legislation and to educate your community. You can use social media to rally and thank your supporters and to respond to your opposition. Be sure to use relevant hashtags like #SDLeg or #TransGirlsAreGirls when posting on Twitter and Instagram. If you see your friends posting content during session, be sure to retweet and like their commentary! It will help ensure your message gets across, too.

### Use various social media platforms to reach different audiences.

- Use **Facebook** to reach supporters broadly. Post content on your own personal Facebook wall to create interest or share in advocacy groups and invite your current friends to join.
- Use **Twitter** to insert yourself into the conversation and reach a substantial number of users, even members of the media. When using Twitter, make sure you use relevant hashtags in your tweets. Consider using handles to call out or speak directly to other Twitter users too. This tactic can be a great way to informally engage with your lawmakers. Find their handles at [aclusd.org/sdleg-twitter](https://aclusd.org/sdleg-twitter).
- Use **Instagram** to reach a variety of people who are passionate about the issues in a visual way. Use relevant hashtags in your posts and stories. You can easily direct people to message you on how to get involved.

### SAMPLE POSTS

*Feel free to modify and personalize these – put them in your own voice and add who you are (“As a parent...,” “As a teacher...,” “As a student...,” “As a South Dakotan...”).*

- **Like all health care, health care for transgender youth is individualized and based on the needs of each particular person. House Bill 1234 would take away private health care choices around the provision of medical care consistent with prevailing medical and scientific standards. Vote no on HB 1234.**
- **Health care decisions should be made between doctors and patients, not politicians. South Dakota shouldn’t criminalize medical care for transgender youth.**
- **Nobody wins when politicians start meddling in people’s lives like this. Nobody wins when we codify discrimination like this. Inclusive teams that support all athletes and encourage participation should be the standard for all school sports. Vote no on House Bill 1234.**
- **Trans people belong everywhere in South Dakota – including sports. Vote no on House Bill 1234.**
- **Inclusive teams that support all athletes and encourage participation should be the standard for all school sports. Discriminatory legislation like House Bill 1234 has no place in our state.**

### WHERE TO FIND THE ACLU

The ACLU of South Dakota regularly posts content on social media and our website. You can find the ACLU of South Dakota on the following platforms and by visiting [aclusd.org/social](https://aclusd.org/social).

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- LinkedIn



**ACLU**  
South Dakota



**Extend your advocacy beyond the  
Legislative Session by following the  
ACLU on social media, getting email  
alerts, and more.**

**Real change starts with you and every one of us can help make a difference.** ACLU of South Dakota activists help turn our state's most cherished principles into reality.

The ACLU of South Dakota is the foremost civil rights and liberties organization - and we are a movement of people fighting together for justice, freedom, fairness, and equality for all.

- **Follow the ACLU on social media:** [aclusd.org/social](https://aclusd.org/social)
- **Get alerted and informed:** [aclusd.org/alerts](https://aclusd.org/alerts)
- **Find more resources to deepen your knowledge as an advocate in South Dakota:** [aclusd.org/sdleg-resources](https://aclusd.org/sdleg-resources)