

# ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

**A guide to legislative activism**

**ACLU**

# INTRO.

Welcome, we're glad you're here!

**Have you ever found yourself thinking, “Wow, that’s terrible. I should really do something,” after hearing about proposed legislation in Pierre or seeing the latest headlines about local politics?**

*Well, you definitely can do something! We're here to help.*

You can affect civil rights policy in South Dakota by learning the best ways to communicate and share your story with elected officials. Keep this toolkit handy throughout South Dakota’s legislative session as you engage in the legislative process. We’ve included resources for you to use as you participate or organize action yourself. Please email us at [southdakota@aclu.org](mailto:southdakota@aclu.org) with any questions you might have. Together, we will ensure our lawmakers protect our freedoms and defend our constitutional rights.



# Legislative Session

Let's talk about what happens at the capitol and how you can get involved.

**#SDLeg or the South Dakota Legislature is comprised of two chambers which are the Senate and House of Representatives. These lawmakers are elected bi-annually.**

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**Members of both chambers, often referred to as legislators, are tasked with proposing bills that will create new laws and opportunities for South Dakotans.**

- The Senate has 35 members
- The House has 70 members

Each bill that is proposed to become law must be approved by both chambers. South Dakota currently has a part-time citizen legislature with members from various backgrounds and communities. All 105 members serve year-round representing constituents in their districts to help them solve problems, and studying new ideas.

Members of each chamber are also divided into several committees that serve to address specific community needs. To find out which committee(s) your legislators are on, visit **[sdlegislature.gov](https://sdlegislature.gov)**.

## CORE RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEGISLATORS

**CHECKS & BALANCE:** Legislators provide a sense of checks and balances between the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government.

**PROBLEM SOLVE AND CREATE OPPORTUNITY:** Simply put, they create and vote on bills to govern South Dakota.

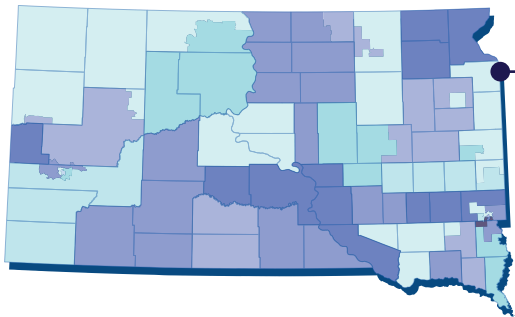
**EQUAL AND FAIR REPRESENTATION:** Legislators must have an ear to their constituents at all times. When they don't we need to rise up and hold them to account. If your legislators aren't representing you how you think they should be you can hold them accountable. In South Dakota, we have a citizen legislature so that means your representatives and senator are your neighbors.

You can find their information at **[sdlegislature.gov](https://sdlegislature.gov)** or by using your smartphone to scan the QR code at the bottom of this page.



# How does the legislature work?


It's important to know how your state legislature operates in order to hold your elected officials accountable in an effective manner. In the following pages we will go over how the state legislature operates, how bills become laws, and more.



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LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

District boundaries change with the U.S. Census.



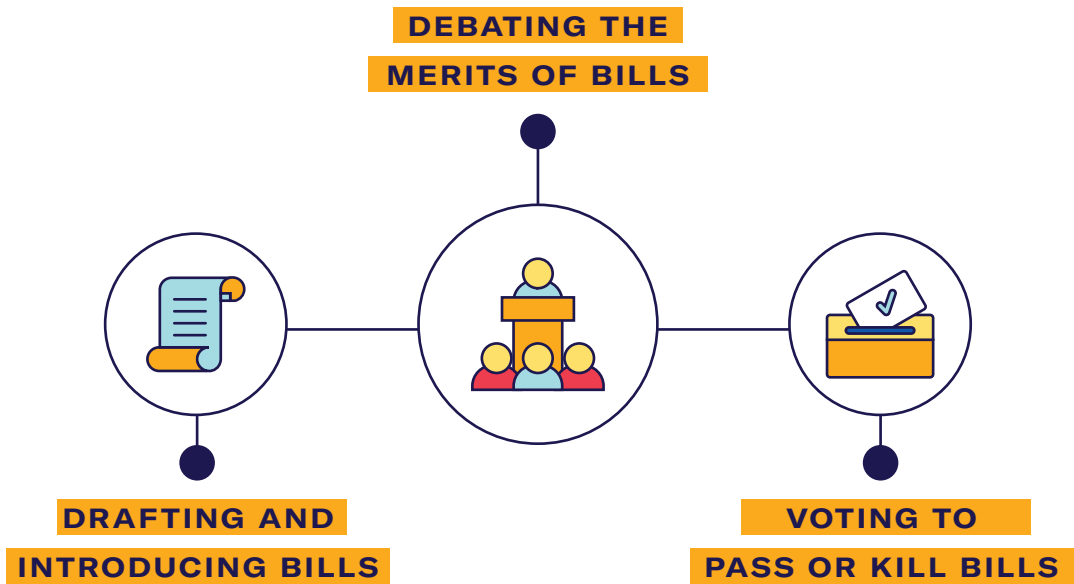
EACH STATE

LEGISLATOR MUST:

- ✓ be at least twenty-one years of age,
- ✓ a United States citizen,
- ✓ a resident of the state for the two years just prior to election,
- ✓ and a qualified elector\* in the legislative district from which elected

**\*A QUALIFIED ELECTOR...**  
means any person who has resided in their district for at least thirty (30) days preceding the election at which he or she desires to vote, and who is registered as required by law.

## LEGISLATORS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR



 ALL LEGISLATORS SERVE 2 YR TERMS



SOUTH DAKOTA ELECTS **35** AND **70**  
SENATORS REPRESENTATIVES



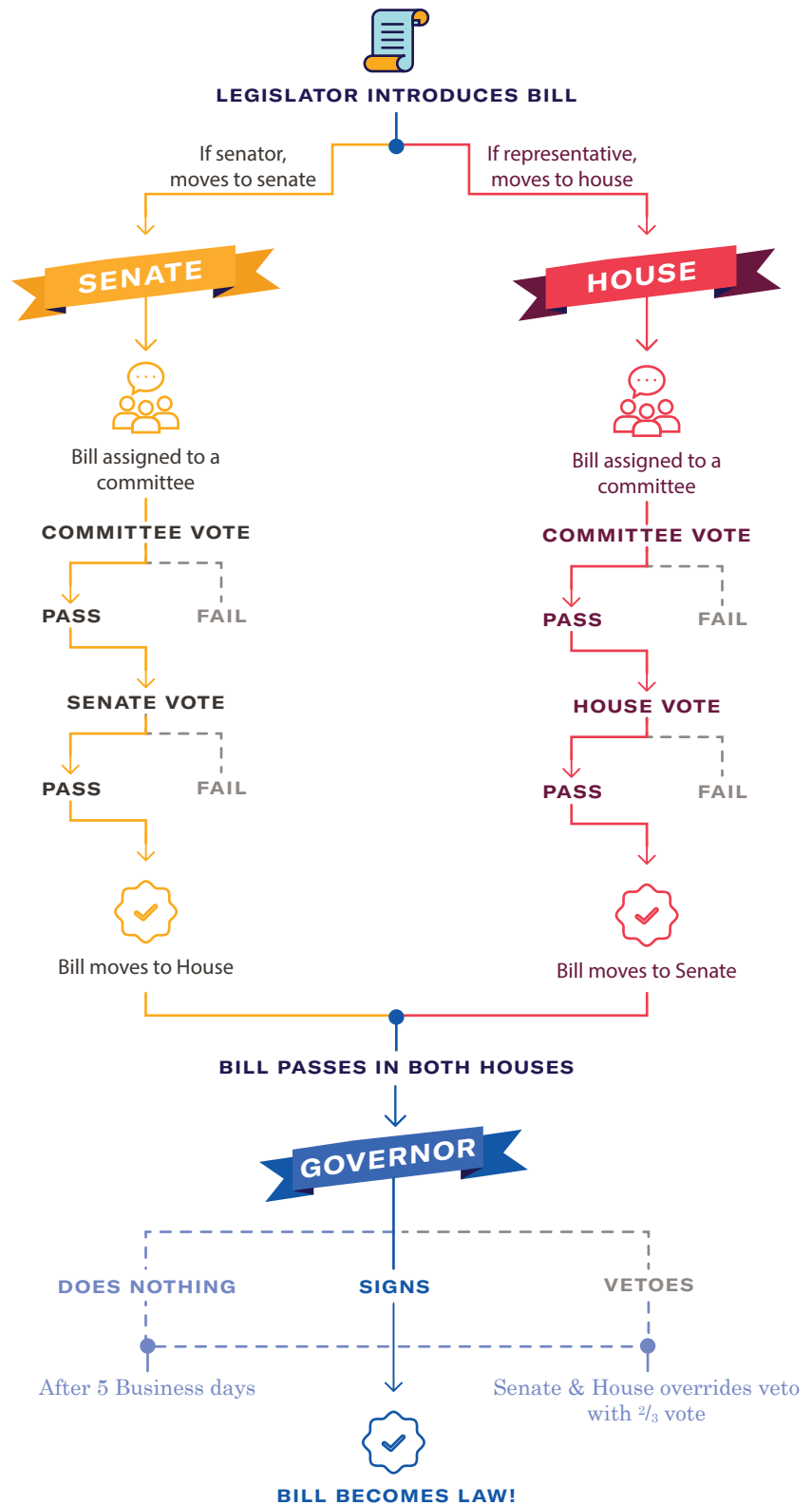
# How does a bill become a law?

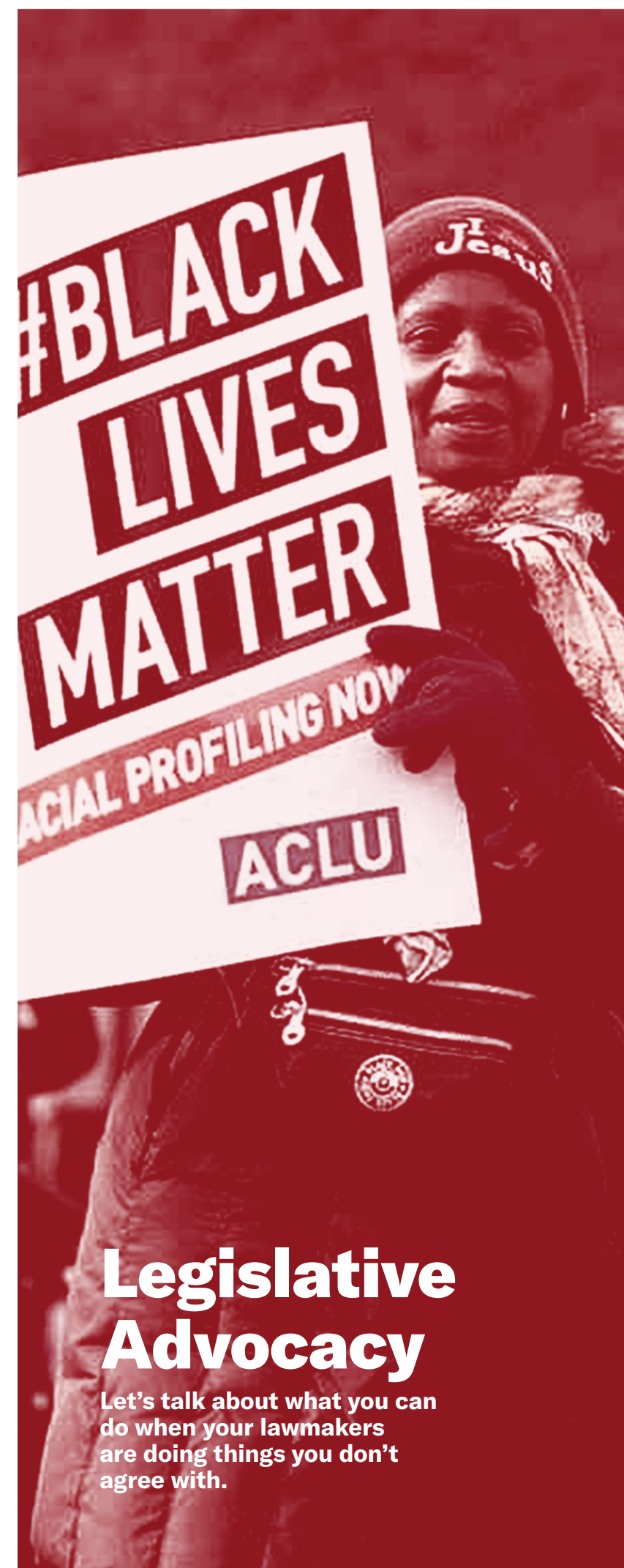
It might just be a bill and only a bill, but this drafted piece of legislation could become law and affect your life in various ways. On this page, we illustrate how a bill becomes law in South Dakota. For more information, visit [sdlegislature.gov](http://sdlegislature.gov).

For bills we are tracking, check out [aclusd.org/bills](http://aclusd.org/bills).

**KEEP THIS IN MIND:** While bills continue to move, get introduced, voted on, and etc. you'll likely run into some unfamiliar legislative lingo.

Check out [aclusd.org/lingo](http://aclusd.org/lingo) for a brief list of common verbiage.





# Legislative Advocacy

Let's talk about what you can  
do when your lawmakers  
are doing things you don't  
agree with.

**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!**

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With the exception of those in leadership roles, most elected officials in South Dakota have no staff or admin team. That mean your senator or 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](https://sdlegislature.gov)** or use your smartphone to scan the QR code below.



# So, what can you do?



CONNECT WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS  
**EARLY AND OFTEN**

You don't have to travel to Pierre to stay in the loop when it comes to what's happening at the South Dakota Legislature. There are a multitude of tools at your disposal right now if you have access to the Internet or a telephone. On this page, we will go over a few tried and true tactics for legislative accountability.



## ELECTED OFFICIALS

## CONSTITUENTS

Keep this in mind. If legislators don't hear from you, they assume you approve of their actions.

**Before you take the follow steps, make sure to research your legislator. Look up their voting history, contact information, and more so you can make your case and meet them where they're at. To find this information visit, [sdlegislature.gov](http://sdlegislature.gov) or use the QR code.**



### WAYS TO CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATOR



## CALL THEM OR WRITE THEM



#### ✓ TIP 1

Know your district and name of your legislator

#### ✓ TIP 2

Plan out what you will say

#### ✓ TIP 3

Remember to mention the bill number (if there is one) and why you are calling or writing

#### ✓ TIP 4

Make it short and sweet and get to your point quickly

#### ✓ TIP 5

Tell a personal story they can connect to

#### ✓ TIP 6

Problem, solution, action (ie. "Vote yes on HB xxxx!")



## MEET THEM IN PERSON OR VIRTUALLY



#### STEP ONE

Schedule your meeting



#### STEP TWO

Be flexible and patient



#### STEP THREE

Prepare and educate yourself and establish a clear goal



#### STEP FOUR

Follow up and say thank you!

**Now, take your advocacy a bit further.**

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## WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### SPREAD THE WORD

Talk with friends and family on social media or in person. Don't be afraid to talk politics, it's important.



## WRITE AN OP-ED



## JOIN A CAUSE OR ORGANIZATION

### ATTEND LEGISLATIVE COFFEES ☕ OR CRACKER BARRELS LIVE OR FROM HOME



## ATTEND A VIRTUAL OR IN PERSON MARCH OR PROTEST

### MORE INFO

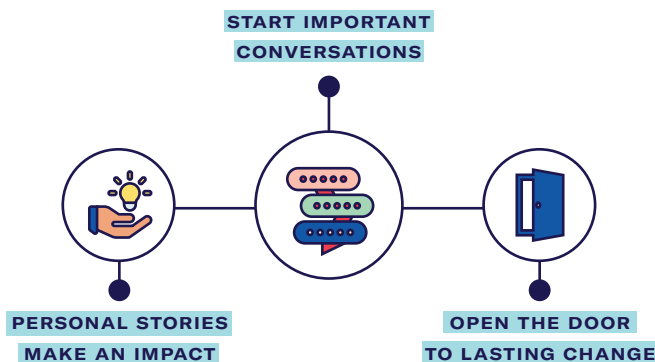
- Sign up to receive ACLU of South Dakota's e-mails for breaking news and legislative action alerts at [aclusd.org/alerts](https://aclusd.org/alerts)
- Learn about the legislation we're tracking at [aclusd.org/bills](https://aclusd.org/bills)
- Look up your lawmakers at [sdlegislature.gov](https://sdlegislature.gov)
- Volunteer to support our legislative priorities at [aclusd.org/alerts](https://aclusd.org/alerts)
- **Follow the ACLU of South Dakota on social media and tag us when you post about your advocacy efforts!**

## If you're planning to share your story, here are some tips.

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, are often monitored by public officials, can bring up information not addressed in a news article, and can help create the impression of widespread support for or opposition to an issue. Plus, they're fun to read.

The "Letter to the Editor" section is often one of the most widely read sections of the newspaper! Keep your letter to the editor short – most papers usually have a 200- to 300-word limit – and share your opinion on a bill or issue. Then sign it and send it to one of the South Dakota newspapers listed here: [aclusd.org/editor](https://aclusd.org/editor).

### WHY IS SHARING YOUR STORY IMPORTANT?



### SAMPLE LETTER TO GET YOU STARTED

*"Senate Bill (SB) 1234 undermines the ability of individuals and families to make personal and private medical decisions. They also dictate the relationship between health care providers and their patients, putting patients' health at risk.*

*It's important to respect reproductive autonomy and reserve personal decisions regarding health care and family planning to an individual and their chosen support team. Please do not allow politicians with little to no medical knowledge dictate how South Dakotans are supposed to access reproductive health care.*

*Don't allow far-reaching bills to go further. You can put private and personal health decisions back where they belong, in the hands of every South Dakotan, their family and their doctor. Please VOTE NO on SB 1234."*

*Thank you,*





# Here are even more ways to get in touch with legislators and make your voice heard during session.

## FOLLOW ALONG AT HOME

You don't have to travel to Pierre to stay in the loop when it comes to what's happening at the South Dakota Legislature. 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, and then keep up with what South Dakota legislators are posting by following our Twitter list at **aclusd.org/sdleg-twitter**. Then follow up with your thoughts on where legislators stand on critical civil liberties issues.

## PICK UP THE PHONE

Phone calls can be an extremely effective way for you to communicate your views on any given issue, especially if in-person meetings aren't for you.

If you don't get an answer right away, be sure to leave a message and note why you're calling, your name, and how they can best reach you. Take it a step further and tell them that you will follow up with another phone call in a week if you don't hear back.

## South Dakota Legislative Session Phone Number:

- Main phone line during session: 605-773-3251

## USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a great way to directly engage with your legislators who have pages as well as fellow activists. Use your platform to raise community awareness of an issue you care about in a visual way. Be sure to use relevant hashtags like **#SDLeg** or **#HiFromSD** 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.

## GET YOUR FRIENDS INVOLVED, TOO

Letter writing parties are a great way to provide information, motivate activists, and organize collective action. But getting social doesn't have to mean getting together in person. Plan a virtual gathering with friends and neighbors to talk about the issues while writing your legislators. Or simply share these resources and encourage them to take action, too.

## ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW:

- Sign up for ACLU People Power at [peoplepower.org](https://peoplepower.org)
- Follow the ACLU on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook
- Share the sign up URL for this kit with your peers [aclusd.org/advo-kit](https://aclusd.org/advo-kit) or use the QR code below.



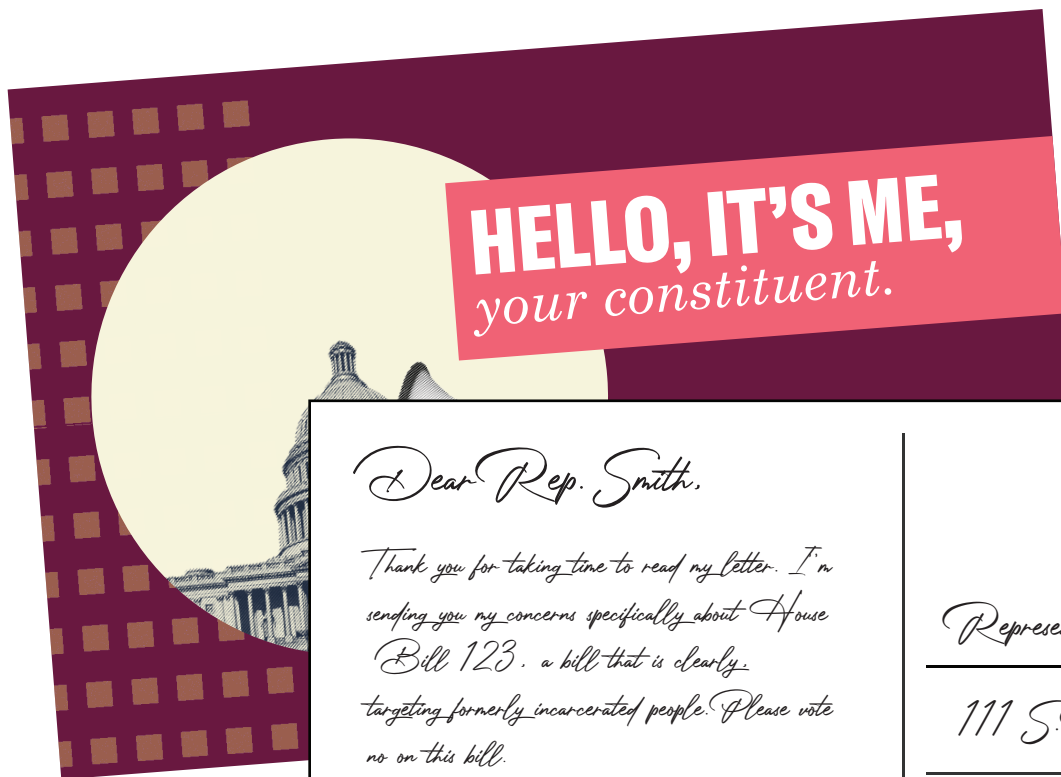
## Postcard instructions and content ideas

With your toolkit, we've included three stamped postcards for you to send to your legislators. While the topic you choose to discuss is entirely up to you, we thought to include a couple ideas to help get you started. Keep in mind, that while passion and intent is important, cursing or using all caps might not get your message across in the best way.

Think to yourself, "How would I want to be approached about this issue?" or "Where does my legislator currently stand on this topic and how can I express my concerns in an approachable and informative way?"

If you're wondering who to send your message to, consider writing your representatives and your senator. Alternatively, you could write the governor, attorney general, or secretary of state depending on what issue you'd like to address. You can find your lawmakers address at **sdlegislature.gov**.

If you get stuck, visit [aclusd.org](http://aclusd.org) or use your smartphone to scan the QR code on this page. You can also email [southdakota@aclu.org](mailto:southdakota@aclu.org) anytime.



*Dear Rep. Smith.*

*Thank you for taking time to read my letter. I'm sending you my concerns specifically about House Bill 123. a bill that is clearly targeting formerly incarcerated people. Please vote no on this bill.*

*Thank you for your time.  
Me*

*Want to chat more? Call me at: 605-123-4567  
Or send further correspondence to: [tme@gmail.com](mailto:tme@gmail.com)*

*Representative Smith*

*111 S. Place*

*Pierre, SD 57501*



# THANK YOU

## FOR SHOWING UP

CUZ  
ONLY  
VERY  
FRAGILE  
EGOS  
FEAR  
EQUALITY

PROTECT  
TRANS  
KIDS

VISIT [ACLUSD.ORG](https://aclusd.org) FOR MORE INFORMATION  
OR EMAIL [SOUTHDAKOTA@ACLU.ORG](mailto:SOUTHDAKOTA@ACLU.ORG).

**ACLU**