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YOUR FIGHT. YOUR VOICE.

# CHANGEMAKER TOOLKIT:

RESOURCES FOR  
LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY



**ACLU**  
South Dakota



# We can all change South Dakota for the better.

Impact local politics by honing your communication skills and learning best practices for lobbying elected officials. A simple conversation can go a long way in the fight for our rights.

## So, let's get talking.

Together, we will ensure our lawmakers protect our freedoms and defend our constitutional rights.



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.** We’re here to help get you started.

## Actions you can take today



### ✕ **Get to know your lawmakers**

Research their voting history if they’ve previously served in the legislature or local government. Take time to find out what they care about.

### ✕ **Connect with your lawmakers**

Calling, writing, and setting up in-person meetings with your lawmakers can make a huge impact. Consider attending in-person events like rallies or legislative coffees and cracker barrels. By securing face time with policymakers, you make the connection more personal and memorable.

### **Get your peers involved**

Start talking about the importance of activism in all levels of government. If we want to change the political climate in South Dakota, it’s going to take all of us working together.



# RESEARCH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Establishing relationships with your elected officials is a vital part of creating long-lasting change.

In order to do so, it's important to do some initial research. The South Dakota legislature's website is a great resource for information on statewide elected officials.

## TIPS FOR RESEARCHING

- Find your legislator's contact information
- Find your legislator's voting history
- Find out what committee(s) your legislators serve on
- Listen to floor sessions and committee hearings via live stream
- Attend legislative coffees or cracker barrels



Scan this QR code or visit **sdlegislature.gov** to find more information about your legislators.



SCAN THIS QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION



SAVE THE S.D. LEGISLATURE'S PHONE NUMBER: 605-773-3251

# CALL YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

There are times when it's necessary to call your elected official to make a last-minute appeal on an impending vote or community concern.

In that case, you'll oftentimes be calling an office line which won't directly connect you with who you're trying to reach. That's why it's important to prepare what you're going to say ahead of time.

As with any other meeting or communication with your elected official, tact is key.

**Remember to include the following things in your message:** \_\_\_\_\_



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**Who you're calling:** You'll need to know which district or city you live in and the name of the legislator or elected official you're trying to contact.

**What you're calling about:** State the bill number or community issue you're calling about to and what action you'd like your lawmaker to take (*For example: "Please vote NO on HB 1234!" or "Please stop attempts to ban books in my school."*).

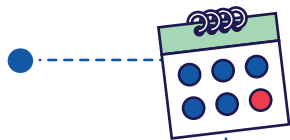
**Say thank you to the person you speak with and leave your phone number or email for follow up.** Let them know you will follow up within a week if you don't get a response.



# × MEET YOUR × ELECTED × OFFICIALS

Meeting your elected official in person is an effective way to talk to them about what matters to you.

In South Dakota, it is very likely that you have a personal connection to one of your elected officials. However, it's still perfectly normal to feel nervous about setting up a meeting with them or attending an in-person event.



## TIPS FOR SETTING UP YOUR MEETING

**1. Schedule your meeting:** Email, write, or call your elected official to request a meeting. When you do this, be sure to tell them what you want to talk about. If you're their constituent, tell them that. If you're bringing another constituent or someone else to the meeting, let them know that too.

**2. Be flexible, but firm:** Give your elected official about seven days to respond to your request for a meeting. Depending on the time of year, they can be busy, but it is still their job to reply to you.

**3. Be prepared:** Before you get to the scheduled meeting, outline your conversation to the best of your ability. Come with three main points you want to hit and some "bonus" ones to get to if you have time and if the conversation is going well.



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# ✕ WRITE YOUR ✕ ELECTED ✕ OFFICIALS

Letters and emails are a tried and true advocacy tactic.

With the exception of those in leadership roles, most elected officials in South Dakota have no staff or admin team. That means the majority of time, they're the ones who are answering when constituents write in.

The amount of mail an elected official gets on a certain issue can help determine its importance in their eyes.

As with any other meeting or communication with your elected official, timing, tact, and delivery is key.



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## LETTER WRITING TIPS

- **Keep it simple:** Make your point quickly and directly.
- **Share your story and make it personal:** Tell your elected official how their decisions affect you, your family, and your friends.
- **Problem, solution, action:** In the letter or email, be sure to include the problem, the solution, and the action you want taken (*For example: "Trans kids are under attack and it is your duty to defend the people you were elected to represent. Vote NO on HB 1234."*).
- **Tell them you'll be back:** If you don't hear from your elected official in a timely manner, follow up with a phone call.







# SHARE YOUR STORY



There are a number of ways that anyone in South Dakota can act to influence decision-makers and elected officials.

One great way to make your voice heard is to share your story through a letter to the editor (LTE) to your local newspaper.

## THE ANATOMY OF AN LTE

- **Make it short and sweet:** Letters to the editor should be very short and to the point. Depending on the newspaper, there is usually a 200-to-300-word limit.
- **Tell a story:** The more personal your letter is, the more people you will reach. Ask yourself how the proposed legislation will affect you, your family, or friends
- **Problem, Solution, Action:** In each letter, you should to include the problem, the solution, and the action that you want taken.



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# × × × CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Building a solid foundation for progress in any community is critical to long-term success. When we come together, great things happen. Make it a point to familiarize yourself with the nonprofit groups, organizations, and local leaders making a difference in South Dakota right now.



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## GET TO KNOW THESE ORGANIZATIONS

- **The Justice through Empowerment Network** (JEN) helps South Dakota patients with funding for their abortion and costs associated with transportation, childcare, lodging, interpreters, medications, food, birth control, and the morning-after pill.
- **NDN Collective** is an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to building Indigenous power.
- **The Transformation Project** supports and empowers transgender individuals and their families while educating communities in South Dakota and the surrounding region about gender identity and expression.
- **South Dakota Voices for Justice** empowers South Dakotans with accurate information to fight Islamophobia, anti-immigrant, and anti-refugee bigotry.

Have ideas for more great organizations to connect with? Share them with us by emailing [southdakota@aclu.org](mailto:southdakota@aclu.org) or hype them up on social media!





**SCAN THIS QR CODE TO GET ALERTED  
AND REMAIN INFORMED.**

# KEEP UP THE FIGHT AND MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD.

You have the power to change your community. Connecting with South Dakota's elected officials can make a huge difference.

**ACLU**

## **WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW THE LEGISLATURE WORKS?**

View our infographic at  
**[aclusd.org/legislative-infographic](https://aclusd.org/legislative-infographic)** or  
scan the QR code below for an  
illustration of this important process.

