

# ACLU ACTIVIST TOOLKIT

A GUIDE TO LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY IN  
THE HOOSIER STATE





**WHAT?**

**WHY?**

**GET  
STARTED!**

## **Welcome ACLU Activist!**

The ACLU of Indiana is proud to present our Activist Toolkit. As the last few years have shown, we need to stand together and make our voices heard if we are going to stop the continuous assault on our rights. Keep this toolkit handy throughout the year as you engage in the legislative process. The ACLU of Indiana will be your watchdog at the Statehouse, working every day to protect and expand civil liberties for all Hoosiers. You too can impact civil rights policy in Indiana by learning the best ways to communicate and share your story with elected officials.

It's our job to elect our Representatives and Senators, which means it's also our job to hold them accountable to the issues that matter the most to us. Like protecting our gay and transgender neighbors, defending the rights of women to make their own healthcare choices, ensuring that every Hoosier can practice their right to vote - plus so many other critical civil liberties issues.

Our advocacy toolkit provides you with all the tools you need to take action. We've included resources for you to utilize as you participate or organize action yourself. And you are always welcome to email us at [volunteer@aclu-in.org](mailto:volunteer@aclu-in.org) with any questions you might have. Together we will ensure our lawmakers protect our freedoms and defend our constitutional rights.

# INDIANA GENERAL ASSEMBLY 101

The legislature consists of a Senate and House of Representatives. Each bill that becomes law must be approved by both chambers. Indiana has a part-time citizen legislature with members from various backgrounds and communities. All 150 members serve year-round as legislators, representing constituents, helping them solve problems, and studying new ideas.

## MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- Provides checks and balances between the Executive, Judicial and Legislative branches
- **Design, draft** and **vote** on bills to govern Indiana
- Bills are assigned to committees before being voted on by the entire Assembly
- In committee, bills can be changed, amended or killed
- Committees are devoted to various issue areas

## COMMITTEES

While there are dozens of committees in the Indiana General Assembly, this list of committees often handles issues most relevant to the work of the ACLU of Indiana.

## SENATE

- Corrections and Criminal Law
- Elections
- Education
- Health + Provider services
- Judiciary
- Public Policy

## HOUSE

- Courts and Criminal Code
- Elections + Apportionment
- Education
- Public Health
- Judiciary
- Public Policy
- Ways + Means



SENATE: 50 MEMBERS | FOUR-YEAR TERMS  
HOUSE: 100 MEMBERS | TWO-YEAR TERMS



# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

## INTRODUCTION

A bill often starts with an idea presented by community members or a local organization. The bill may be introduced by a legislator, a group of legislators or a standing committee in the House or Senate.

## FIRST READING

The bill receives a bill number and is referred to a standing committee.

## COMMITTEE HEARING

Committees hold public hearings where they may approve, make additions to (amend) or reject the bill. During the public hearing information will be presented to committee members to help them determine what action to take on a certain bill. Public hearings are open to anyone interested in attending and members of the community can often provide testimony. After discussion, members vote. If approved, the bill moves on to the Second Reading.

## SECOND READING

The bill is now considered by the full Senate or House for more amendments. At this point, any member can offer amendments. Approved amendments are incorporated into the bill and it moves on to the third reading.

## THIRD READING

Each member has an opportunity to speak on the bill before voting. At this stage of the process, legislators may debate the bill's merits. A majority vote sends the bill to the opposite chamber where the process is repeated.

## OPPOSITE CHAMBER

- The bill is assigned to a committee in the opposite chamber and then repeats the same process as in the originating chamber (first reading, second reading, third reading).
- If the bill is approved by both chambers, then it advances to final consideration.
- If the bill is amended by the opposite chamber, then it goes to originating chamber for approval.

## CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

If no agreement can be made between both chambers, then the bill is sent to a conference committee to resolve the differences. This committee includes members from the House and Senate.

## GOVERNOR'S SIGNATURE

After the bill has passed both chambers, it becomes an enrolled act. Each enrolled act is presented to the Governor who is required either:

- to sign the act into law
- to allow it to become law without signature after seven days
- to veto (If vetoed, the House and Senate can override the veto by a constitutional majority vote in both chambers. The bill then becomes a law without the governor's signature.)

## USEFUL TERMS TO KNOW

**CONSTITUENT:** A citizen residing within the district of a legislator

**BILL:** A written proposal for addition, modification, or repeal of statute law

**AMENDMENT:** Any alteration made (or proposed to be made) to a bill or clause thereof, by adding, deleting, substituting, or omitting

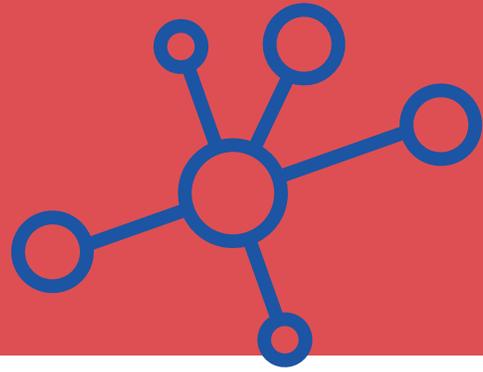
**GENERAL ASSEMBLY:** the legislature of the state of Indiana that is comprised of the House of Representatives and Senate

**STANDING COMMITTEE:** A committee appointed with continuing responsibility in a general issue area or field of legislative activity

**HEARING:** Public discussion and appearance on a proposal or bill; usually scheduled by a committee

**SESSION:** Period during which the legislature meets; or the daily meeting of the House or Senate

# THE POWER OF COMMUNITY



## CONTACTING YOUR LAWMAKERS

Your elected officials - from U.S. senators and representatives, to state senators and representatives, to county and city mayors, and council members - 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.

## GENERAL TIPS FOR WRITING AND EMAILING

When writing a letter to a legislator, remember:

- Be courteous and informative
- State the purpose of the letter
- Focus on the message
- Restate your request
- Refrain from over-exaggeration
- Avoid insults
- Omit jargon and acronyms

## SAMPLE LETTER

Your Address  
Your Phone Number and Email

Legislator's Name and Address

Dear Honorable (Full Name),

State the reason for your letter in the first sentence and the bill number you would like them to support or oppose accompanied by a brief description. Mention you are a voter in their district and why you feel it is necessary that they understand why this issue is important to you.

State reasons they should support your position. Use facts and references when appropriate to strengthen your argument. Use citations when necessary to enhance the letter's credibility. Most importantly, if you have been impacted by an issue and feel comfortable sharing your story, please share your own personal experience.

Be brief, specific, and concise. It is strongly encouraged to only write about one bill at a time and limit your letter to one page. Ensure that the tone of the letter is respectful. Thank them for their consideration of your request. Lastly tell them you look forward to their response to this issue.

Sincerely,  
[Sign your name]

# MORE WAYS TO CONTACT LAWMAKERS

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

Elected officials hold public meetings to hear from members of their community. Attending an event like this gives you an opportunity to ask questions of your lawmakers about the critical issues facing our community.

### WHY ATTEND A THIRD HOUSE MEETING:

- It's an opportunity to speak directly to elected officials about your issues.
- You can recruit or join forces with others interested in your advocacy efforts.
- Find an upcoming town hall event to attend at [www.aclu-in.org/en/third-house-meetings](http://www.aclu-in.org/en/third-house-meetings)

## PHONE CALLS

Phone calls can be an extremely effective way for you to communicate your views on any given issue, especially if in-person meetings make you anxious.

You can leave a message for your elected officials, entire committees, House and Senate leadership, and the governor. Be ready to provide your name, address, and the issue about which you are calling. It is helpful to include the name and/or number of the bill.

### Indiana General Assembly Phone Numbers

- HOUSE: (317) 232-3600
- SENATE: (317) 232-9400
- GOVERNOR: (317) 232-4567

Note: Be concise to get your message across. You do not need to communicate more than the following: "I want Representative [X] to vote for/against [Y] bill because of [Z]."

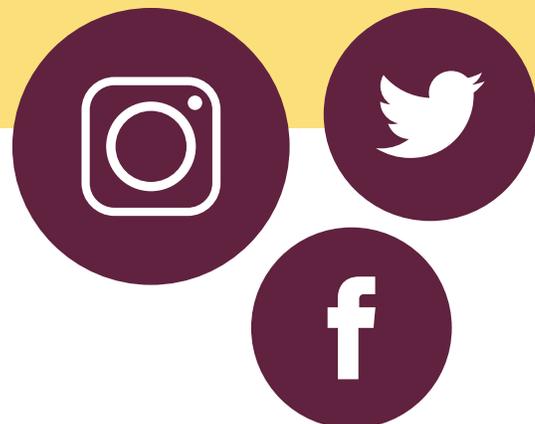
## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an effective way to generate attention for a particular cause. Here are some tips to help you use social media more effectively:

**BE VISUAL:** Share a photo or infographic in order to increase likelihood of post visibility.

**USE HASHTAGS:** Make sure to tweet to existing conversations or campaigns.

**RETWEET & COMMENT:** Don't just send out personal posts; retweet posts from your legislator's office and comment thoughtfully.



# TAKING ACTION



## ACLU PEOPLE POWER

People Power is an online tool for volunteers and supporters to organize in their local communities, state, and across the nation. People Power allows you to host and attend events while building a network of ACLU supporters in your community. Get involved at [www.peoplepower.org](http://www.peoplepower.org)

## LETTER WRITING PARTIES

Letter writing parties are a great way to provide information, motivate activists, and organize collective action. Interested in hosting? Make your party a success with our guides for planning your event, suggested formats and sample outlines at [aclu-in.org](http://aclu-in.org) or visit <https://goo.gl/2WSVqn>

## HEARING WATCH PARTIES

All public hearings for the Indiana General Assembly are posted to [www.iga.in.gov](http://www.iga.in.gov). On the homepage, you can find the calendar for each day of session. You can also view Senate and House activity through various live streams. These links are also on the homepage. Recruit people to watch digitally or attend in person to hear from elected officials. Then follow up with your thoughts on where legislators stand on critical civil liberties issues.

## ADDITIONAL TIPS

### DOS:

- Stay engaged locally on issue areas
- Center voices of directly impacted leaders in the fight
- Share your personal story when contacting legislators
- Always use legislator's correct title when addressing them (Senator [X] or Representative [X])

### DON'TS:

- Avoid overwhelming legislators—try sticking to one or two issues per phone call or letter
- Never say you officially represent the ACLU of Indiana
- Get overwhelmed or burnt out—activism is a marathon, not a sprint!



# WHAT'S NEXT?

## RESOURCES



You made it through our Activiist Toolkit and are ready to take action in the legislative process!

### HERE ARE A FEW WAYS YOU CAN GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY DEFENDING CIVIL LIBERTIES IN INDIANA:

- Sign up to receive ACLU e-alerts where you can learn about opportunities to provide public testimony, attend a rally, or make phone calls to lawmakers [www.aclu-in.org/act](http://www.aclu-in.org/act)
- Volunteer to support our legislative priorities [www.aclu-in.org/volunteer](http://www.aclu-in.org/volunteer)
- Learn about the legislation we are tracking at [www.aclu-in.org/legislative](http://www.aclu-in.org/legislative)
- Look up your lawmakers at [www.iga.in.gov](http://www.iga.in.gov)
- Access the Statehouse: 200 W. Washington St, Indianapolis, IN 46204
- Follow the ACLU of Indiana on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram [@ACLUIndiana](https://www.instagram.com/ACLUIndiana)



**ACLU OF INDIANA**  
1031 E WASHINGTON ST. INDIANAPOLIS, IN  
[WWW.ACLU-IN.ORG](http://WWW.ACLU-IN.ORG) | 317-759-6425