



FINDING YOUR VOICE

A Guide to Citizen Activism

Social Justice Group

HYDE PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH 500 West Platt Street, Tampa, FL

HydeParkUMC.org

Finding Your Voice

A Guide to Citizen Activism

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Open Our Minds and Hearts

I pray that we may at all times keep our minds open to new ideas and shun dogma; that we may grow in our understanding of the nature of all living beings and our connectedness with the natural world; that we may become ever more filled with generosity of spirit and true compassion and love for all life...

I pray that we may learn the peace that comes with forgiving and the strength we gain in loving; that we may learn to take nothing for granted in this life; that we may learn to see and understand with our hearts; that we may learn to join in our being.

- Jane Goodall

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Section I: Introduction – Why Citizen Activism Matters

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.”

— Often attributed to Edmund Burke

Throughout history, change has rarely come from the top down. Instead, it has come from everyday people — parents, students, workers, veterans, retirees — organizing, speaking out, and standing up for what is right. The American experiment itself was born of activism, protest, and resistance. Our founders understood that a government of the people required participation from the people.

A Core American Tradition

From the Boston Tea Party to the March on Washington, the United States has always been shaped by citizen activism. Consider:

- The American Revolution was driven by pamphleteers, boycotts, and colonial assemblies challenging taxation without representation.
- The Abolitionist Movement brought together freed slaves, religious leaders, and writers like Frederick Douglass, who wrote, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”
- The Women’s Suffrage Movement took over 70 years of marches, speeches, and civil disobedience before women won the right to vote in 1920.
- The Civil Rights Movement showed the power of peaceful protest, strategic litigation, and moral leadership. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
- The Environmental and LGBTQ+ Rights Movements, as well as recent youth-led climate strikes and racial justice protests, continue this legacy - proving that the work of democracy is never done.



Founders on Engagement

“They who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.”

— Thomas Paine, *The Crisis*, 1776

“A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy.”

— James Madison

When Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government the Constitutional Convention had created, he famously replied, “A Republic, if you can keep it.” This was not just a clever remark — it was a challenge. A republic cannot endure unless its people remain informed, engaged, and willing to hold their leaders accountable.

Your Voice, Your Power

The call to justice is not just civic — it is also spiritual. As people of faith, particularly within the Methodist tradition, we are reminded that belief is not a passive act. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, urged his followers to “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” For Wesley, true discipleship meant active engagement with the suffering, the poor, the oppressed, and the vulnerable.

Jesus himself declared in Luke 4:18 that he was sent “to proclaim good news to the poor... to set the oppressed free.” That same call echoes through our churches today, urging us not only to worship in sanctuaries but also to witness in the streets, in our communities, and through our actions, including our votes. Advocacy, when rooted in compassion, becomes a form of ministry.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us, “Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.” Christian activism is not about partisanship — it is about love in action, and about bearing witness to the justice God envisions for all people.

Activism isn’t just marching in the streets — it’s also making phone calls, writing a letter, showing up to a school board meeting, or organizing a neighborhood discussion. When citizens act with purpose, they shift the public conversation and put pressure on decision-makers.

As President Barack Obama once said, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

This guide is here to help you become that change — to equip you with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to raise your voice, organize with others, and shape the future of your community and country.

Section 2: Understanding the Levels of Government

“All politics is local.”

— Tip O’Neill, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

To be an effective citizen advocate, it helps to understand who makes decisions at each level of government. Many of the issues that most directly affect our lives — such as education, public safety, roads, parks, housing, and utilities — are handled locally, rather than in Washington, D.C.

Here's a quick guide to the three primary levels of government that shape our daily lives.

Local Government (City and County) Local governments are closest to the people and often the most responsive. In Hillsborough County, this includes:

- Hillsborough County Commission – Elected officials who set county policy, pass local ordinances, approve budgets, and oversee primary services like transportation, land use, and public health.
- Tampa City Council – Governs the City of Tampa, creating laws and policies for city services like policing, water, waste, zoning, and development.
- City Councils in Other Cities – Other municipalities in Hillsborough County, like Plant City and Temple Terrace, have their own city councils and local leadership.
- School Boards – In Florida, school districts are independent from city and county governments. The Hillsborough County School Board oversees local public education policy, curriculum decisions, and school funding.

If you're passionate about issues like education, affordable housing, or policing, these are the officials to contact first.

State Government (Florida) The Florida Legislature — made up of the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate — passes laws that apply across the state. They decide on education standards, environmental policy, voting rules, healthcare access, and much more. The Governor of Florida oversees the executive branch, enforces laws, and manages state agencies. Advocacy at the state level is critical, especially when it comes to issues like:

Medicaid expansion

- Gun safety
- Education funding
- Environmental protection
- Voting rights and redistricting

Federal Government (United States) The federal government in Washington, D.C. enacts national laws through Congress (U.S. House of Representatives and Senate). Your U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators vote on laws related to civil rights, immigration, healthcare, national

defense, and taxes. The President and executive agencies carry out those laws and oversee federal programs.

Did You Know?


Florida's constitution gives counties the authority to adopt their own local charters, making charter counties like Hillsborough more autonomous. That means local government plays an especially significant role in shaping your quality of life.


Knowing which level of government handles your issue helps you speak to the right people, demand the right actions, and make your advocacy count.

Section 3: Contact Directory – Your Elected Representatives

Tampa City Council

District 1 (At-Large): Alan Clendenin


 (813) 274-7072

 alan.clendenin@tampagov.net

 315 E. Kennedy Blvd., City Hall, 3rd Floor, Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.tampa.gov/city-council>

District 2 (At-Large): Guido Maniscalco


 (813) 274-7075

 guido.maniscalco@tampagov.net

 315 E. Kennedy Blvd., City Hall, 3rd Floor, Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.tampa.gov/city-council>

District 3 (At-Large): Lynn Hurtak


 (813) 274-8130

 lynn.hurtak@tampagov.net

 315 E. Kennedy Blvd., City Hall, 3rd Floor, Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.tampa.gov/city-council>



District 4: Bill Carlson

 (813) 274-8134


 bill.carlson@tampagov.net


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 315 E. Kennedy Blvd., City Hall, 3rd Floor, Tampa, FL 33602
 <https://www.tampa.gov/city-council>


District 5: Gwendolyn Henderson

 (813) 274-8189



 gwendolyn.henderson@tampagov.net

 315 E. Kennedy Blvd., City Hall, 3rd Floor, Tampa, FL 33602
 <https://www.tampa.gov/city-council>


District 6: Charlie Miranda

 (813) 274-7074



 charlie.miranda@tampagov.net

 315 E. Kennedy Blvd., City Hall, 3rd Floor, Tampa, FL 33602
 <https://www.tampa.gov/city-council>

District 7: Luis Viera

 (813) 274-7073



 luis.viera@tampagov.net

 315 E. Kennedy Blvd., City Hall, 3rd Floor, Tampa, FL 33602
 <https://www.tampa.gov/city-council>

Plant City Commission



Mayor Nathan A. Kilton (Group 1)

 nkilton@plantcitygov.com

 302 W Reynolds St, Plant City, FL 33563
 <https://www.plantcitygov.com/...>



Vice-Mayor Jason M. Jones (Group 2)

 jjones@plantcitygov.com

 302 W Reynolds St, Plant City, FL 33563
 <https://www.plantcitygov.com/...>

Commissioner William D. Dodson (Group 3)

 bdodson@plantcitygov.com

 302 W Reynolds St, Plant City, FL 33563
 <https://www.plantcitygov.com/...>

Commissioner Michael S. Sparkman (Group 4)

 msparkman@plantcitygov.com


 302 W Reynolds St, Plant City, FL 33563

 <https://www.plantcitygov.com/...>

Commissioner Mary Y. Thomas-Mathis (Group 5)


 mtmathis@plantcitygov.com


 302 W Reynolds St, Plant City, FL 33563


 <https://www.plantcitygov.com/...>

Temple Terrace City Council


Mayor Andy Ross


 (813) 506-6440


 11250 North 56th Street, Temple Terrace, FL 33617

 <https://www.templeterrace.gov/108/City-Council-Mayor>


Council Member James Chambers


 (813) 506-6440


 11250 North 56th Street, Temple Terrace, FL 33617

 <https://www.templeterrace.gov/108/City-Council-Mayor>


Council Member Alison Fernandez


 (813) 506-6440


 11250 North 56th Street, Temple Terrace, FL 33617

 <https://www.templeterrace.gov/108/City-Council-Mayor>


Council Member Gil Schisler


 (813) 506-6440


 11250 North 56th Street, Temple Terrace, FL 33617

 <https://www.templeterrace.gov/108/City-Council-Mayor>

Council Member Erik Kravets


 (813) 506-6440

 11250 North 56th Street, Temple Terrace, FL 33617

 <https://www.templeterrace.gov/108/City-Council-Mayor>

Florida Senate – Hillsborough County Delegation


District 14 – Jay Collins (R)

 Tallahassee: (850) 487-5014


 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399

 <https://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/s14>

District 19 – Darryl Rouson (D)


 Tallahassee: (850) 487-5019

 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399

 <https://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/s19>

Florida House of Representatives – Hillsborough County Delegation


District 61 – Linda Chaney (R)

 Local: (727) 471-4672

 Linda.Chaney@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4767>


District 62 – Michele Rayner (D)

 Local: (727) 471-4706

 Michele.Rayner@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4768>


District 63 – Dianne Hart (D)

 Local: (813) 224-1956

 Dianne.Hart@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4769>


District 64 – Susan Valdés (D)

 Local: (813) 673-4673

 Susan.Valdes@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4770>


District 65 – Karen Gonzalez-Pittman (R)

 Local: (813) 202-3345

 Karen.Pittman@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4771>


District 66 – Traci Koster (R)

 Local: (813) 202-3345

 Traci.Koster@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4772>


District 67 – Fentrice Driskell (D)

 Local: (813) 936-0854


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 Fentrice.Driskell@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4773>


District 68 – Lawrence McClure (R)

 Local: (813) 757-9110


 LawrenceMcClure@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4774>


District 69 – Danny Alvarez (R)

 Local: (813) 657-1118

 Danny.Alvarez@myfloridahouse.gov

 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4775>

District 70 – Michael Owen (R)

 Local: (656) 333-9530


 Michael.Owen@myfloridahouse.gov


 <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/details.aspx?MemberId=4776>


U.S. House of Representatives

District 14 – Rep. Kathy Castor (D)


 Washington, D.C. Office: 2188 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515

 (202) 225-3376

 Tampa Office: 4144 N Armenia Ave., Suite 300, Tampa, FL 33607

 (813) 871-2817

 <https://castor.house.gov/contact/>


 <https://castor.house.gov/>

U.S. Senate

Senator Rick Scott (R)

 Washington, D.C.: (202) 224-5274

 Tampa Office: 801 N. Florida Ave., Suite 421, Tampa, FL 33602


 (813) (813) 225-7040


 <https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/contact/contact>

 <https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/>

Senator Ashley Moody (R)

 Washington, D.C.: 202-224-3041

 Orlando: 201 S Orange Ave., Suite 350, Orlando, FL 32801-3499


 (407) 254-2573

 <https://www.moody.senate.gov/contact/>


 <https://www.moody.senate.gov/>

Hillsborough County School Board Members


District 1 – Nadia Combs

 (813) 272-4045


 901 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/boardmembers>


District 2 – Stacy Hahn

 (813) 272-4045


 901 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/boardmembers>


District 3 – Jessica Vaughn (Board Chair)

 (813) 272-4045


 901 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/boardmembers>


District 4 – Patricia "Patti" Rendon

 (813) 272-4045

 901 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/boardmembers>


District 5 – Henry "Shake" Washington

 (813) 272-4045

 901 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/boardmembers>


District 6 (At-Large) – Karen Perez

 (813) 272-4045

 901 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/boardmembers>

District 7 (At-Large) – Lynn Gray

 (813) 272-4045

 901 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/boardmembers>

Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART) Board of Directors

Board Officers:

- Chairperson: Councilman Luis Viera (City of Tampa)
- Vice Chairperson: Commissioner Joshua Wostal (Hillsborough County)
- Secretary: Melanie Williams (City of Tampa)

Additional Board Members:


- Commissioners Gwen Myers, Christine Miller, Donna Cameron-Cepeda
- Gary Hartfield, John King, Marvin Knight, Adam Nebrich
- Councilwoman Gwendolyn Henderson, David Mechanik
- Councilman Gil Schisler (Temple Terrace)
- State Appointees: Thomas Hobbs, Brian McElfratrick

Board Counsel: Jan McLean

Executive Leadership:

- CEO: Scott Drainville
- CFO: Loretta Kirk
- COO: Sean McCarthy
- CAO: Jacqueline Halldow
- Chief of Safety: Richard Campbell


 1201 East 7th Avenue, Tampa, FL 33605

 (813) 384-6301

 <https://www.gohart.org>

Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners


District 1 – Harry Cohen

 (813) 272-5470

 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://hcfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners>


District 2 – Ken Hagan

 (813) 272-5452

 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://hcfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners>


District 3 – Gwen Myers

 (813) 272-5720

 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://hcfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners>


District 4 – Michael Owen

 (813) 272-5740

 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://hcfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners>


District 5 (At-Large) – Donna Cameron-Cepeda

 (813) 272-5735

 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://hcfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners>


District 6 (At-Large) – Pat Kemp

 (813) 272-5730

 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://hcfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners>

District 7 (At-Large) – Joshua Wostal

 (813) 272-5745

 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://hcfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners>

Section 4: Telling Your Story & Engaging Your Representatives

Why Your Story Matters

Your voice matters. Your story can bring abstract policy to life, especially for someone who may not see the impact of legislation on everyday people. Stories humanize issues. They're persuasive in a way data often isn't.

As the ACLU of Iowa puts it: “Storytelling is the art of translating values and experience into action.” Sharing your story can change hearts, shift opinions, and inspire courage.

Crafting Your Personal Advocacy Story

Use this structure to develop a concise and compelling script — one that you can use in emails, meetings, testimony, or public comments.

Step-by-Step Template

1. Introduction

- Your name, neighborhood or city.
- How long you've lived there and your connection to the community.
- One sentence about who you are (parent, nurse, student, retiree, small business owner).

2. The Issue

- Name the issue you're concerned about (e.g., affordable housing, public education, healthcare access).
- Why does this issue matter — in your own words?

3. Personal Impact

- Share a specific example: how this issue has affected you, your family, your neighbors, or your church.
- Avoid generalizations — details make it real and memorable.


4. What You Want


- Be clear: Are you asking your representative to support or oppose something? Propose a new solution?
- Keep it realistic and grounded in something they can act on.


5. Wrap-Up


- Thank them for listening and express your willingness to follow up.
- Offer to be a resource or connect them with others.


Best Practices for Contacting Your Representatives

 **Phone Calls:** Quick and effective. Have your script ready — keep it under 2 minutes. Leave your name, ZIP code, and a brief message.

 **Email or Written Letters:** Use your personal story and be concise — 3 short paragraphs. Clear subject lines help.

 **In-Person Visits:** Make an appointment or attend open hours. Bring a one-pager summarizing your issue.

 **Attend Town Halls or Forums:** Great for public engagement. Bring others if possible. Always thank them afterward.

 Social Media: Good for public tagging. Keep it civil and focused. Use platforms and hashtags they follow.

When to Reach Out

- Early in the legislative process (e.g., while bills are in committee).
- Before key votes.
- During recess periods.
- When an issue is timely and local.

Helpful Tips

- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Mention if you're part of a group.
- Be brief but ready to go deeper.
- If unsure, say "I'll find out and follow up." Always follow up — thank-you notes matter.

Faith in Action

John Wesley taught that we are not merely called to believe but to serve — to be a people “zealous of good works.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. echoed this when he said:

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

As people of faith, we are compelled not just to pray for justice, but to work for it. Speaking up is a holy act. Your story is not just personal — it's part of the broader story of love, compassion, and justice in the world.

Section 5: Participating in Public Hearings, Town Halls, and Local Meetings

Why Show Up?

Public meetings—such as city council sessions, school board hearings, and town halls—are vital platforms where decisions affecting our communities are made. Your presence and voice in these forums can influence policies and bring attention to issues that matter to you. Engaging in these meetings demonstrates to elected officials that constituents are informed, concerned, and active participants in the democratic process.

Preparing to Participate

1) Find Out When and Where

- Check official city or county websites, like the City of Tampa's Public Meetings Calendar: <https://www.tampa.gov/calendar-group/public-meetings>
- Subscribe to newsletters or alerts from local government bodies to stay informed.
- Follow social media accounts of local officials and organizations for announcements.

2. Understand the Agenda

- Review the meeting agenda in advance, usually available online 72 hours before the meeting.
- Identify if and when public comment is allowed and the procedures for participating.

3. Prepare Your Statement

- Craft a concise statement (2-3 minutes) focusing on:
 - Who you are and your connection to the community.
 - The issue at hand and its impact on you or your community.
 - A clear request or action you want the officials to take.
- Practice delivering your statement to stay within time limits and convey your message effectively.

Effective Participation Tips

1. Arrive Early

- Sign up to speak if required and familiarize yourself with the meeting room setup.

2. Bring Supporting Materials

- Provide copies of your statement or relevant documents to officials and staff.

3. Be Respectful and Professional

- Address officials courteously, even if you disagree with their positions.

4. Collaborate with Others

- Attend meetings with fellow advocates to show collective support for an issue.

5. Follow Up

- Send thank-you notes or emails reiterating your points and offering further assistance or information.

Virtual Participation

Many meetings offer virtual attendance options:

- Ensure you have the necessary technology and internet access.

- Test your equipment beforehand to avoid technical issues.
- Follow the same preparation and participation guidelines as in-person meetings.

Inspirational Voices

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can.”
— John Wesley

“The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children.” — Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“We must be the moral defibrillators of our time, shocking the heart of this nation back to life.” —
Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II

Conclusion

Active participation in public meetings is a powerful way to advocate for change and hold officials accountable. Your voice, grounded in personal experience and moral conviction, can shape decisions and inspire others to take action. Remember, democracy thrives when citizens are informed, involved, and vocal.

Section 6: Using Social Media to Advocate Effectively

Why Social Media Matters

Social media is one of the most powerful tools in the modern activist’s toolkit. With a few taps on your phone, you can share your story, raise awareness, organize events, pressure decision-makers, and connect with others who care. It allows you to be seen and heard — by neighbors, media, and elected officials.

“Social media is the modern-day public square. If we’re not speaking up there, we’re letting others shape the conversation without us.”
— Rev. Dr. William Barber II

Choosing the Right Platforms

Each platform has strengths. Use what feels natural to you — or what reaches your intended audience:

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- Facebook: Great for long-form posts, community groups, and event organizing.
- Twitter/X: Real-time engagement, tagging officials, and using trending hashtags.
- Instagram: Visually driven; powerful for storytelling through images and video.
- TikTok: Short videos with music, voiceover, or direct-to-camera — excellent for advocacy storytelling.
- LinkedIn: Professional tone; ideal for civic professionals or policy commentary.
- Bluesky: A decentralized, alternative to Twitter with a growing activist presence. Great for longer thoughtful posts, still emerging in reach.

Using Bluesky

What is Bluesky?

Bluesky is a social media platform developed by ex-employees of Twitter. The platform functions almost identically to X, users post text messages of up to 300 characters that can be shared with others. Although Bluesky is a smaller platform than X, it's growing rapidly.

I'm going to put my cards on the table here: I listed Bluesky first because it's my preferred platform. I think there are a lot of features on it that are lacking from other

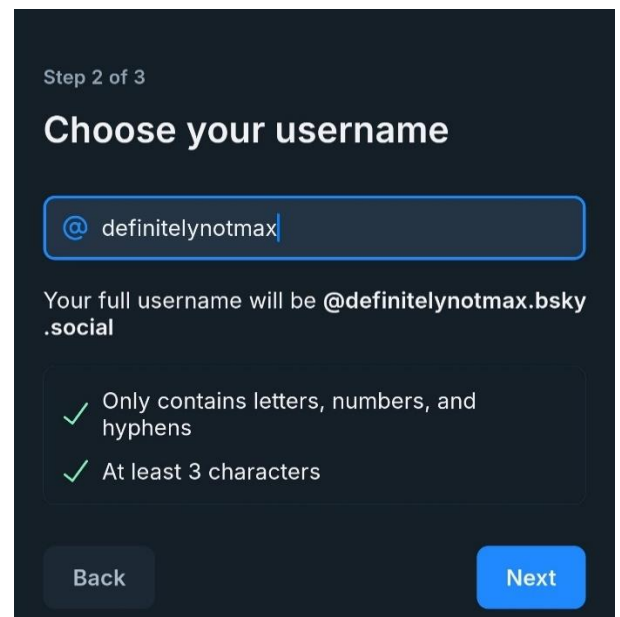
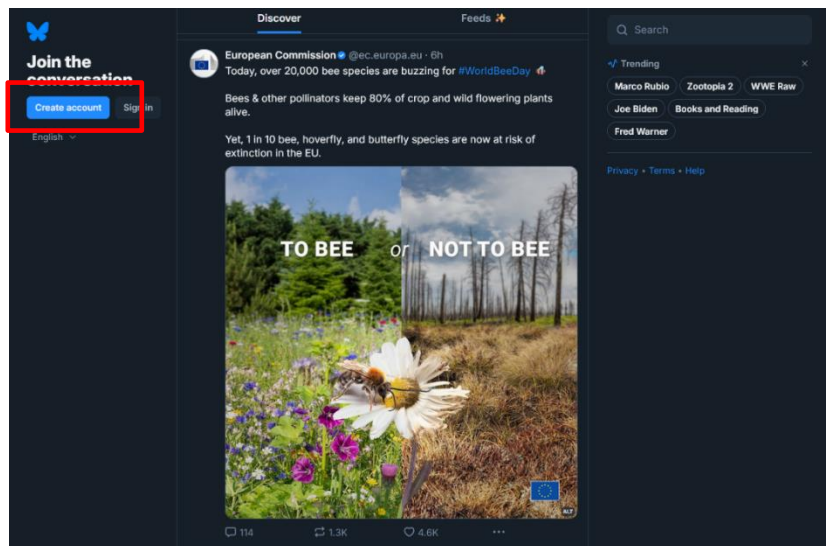
sites that make community organizing much easier, and in general the people using Bluesky are friendlier. No social media is perfect, but I can say that my experience with Bluesky has been overwhelmingly positive.

Creating a Bluesky Account

You can create a Bluesky account either from your phone or your computer.

- If you have an iPhone, [use this link](#) to download the app.
- If you have an Android, [use this link instead](#).
- If you'd prefer to use a computer, [you can follow this link](#).

Click the blue **Create account** button. On your phone, this will be near the bottom of the first screen you see. On your computer, you'll see it in the top left corner.



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On the next screen, enter your email address, choose a password, and enter your birthday. Click **Next**.

On the next screen, choose a username for yourself. This will be a public facing name used to identify you to other people using Bluesky. As a general rule of thumb, it's best not to incorporate your full actual name here. Protect your identity and choose something that allows you to remain anonymous – you can always change this later.

Once you've chosen a username, click **Next**.

You'll be asked to complete a captcha challenge to prove that you aren't a robot. Click **Continue** when finished.

You'll be asked to upload a photo to your profile, but this is optional. You can select the pencil icon to choose a photo from your device, or just click **Continue** to move forward without one.

You'll then be asked to select some interests from a list of topics. This is also optional – selecting any of the listed topics will just adjust the people that Bluesky will suggest you follow initially. Again, you may click **Continue** without selecting any topics if you choose.

Click **Finalize** to officially create your account.

Finding People to Follow

To start populating your news feed, click the blue **Find people to follow** button. This will bring up a list of suggested accounts to follow in order to get you started on the platform. You can select public figures or use the search bar to find people you know. Try to select at least ten accounts here so that Bluesky will stop bugging you when you log in. Once you've finished, you'll see posts from your chosen accounts have started to populate your homepage.

Posting on Bluesky

You can tap the pencil icon to create a post. The first time you do this, you'll be prompted to verify the email address you provided when you set up the account. Click the blue **Send Email** button, then check your inbox for an email from Bluesky. Click the link in that email and you'll be set to start posting the next time you click the pencil icon.

Posts can be up to 300 characters and can include photos, images, or videos. If you want to direct your post to someone directly, enter an '@' symbol followed by their username. That person will get a notification that someone has mentioned them in a post. Keep in mind that these posts are still public.

Starter Packs

When you first start out on Bluesky, it can take some time and effort to find enough accounts that provide content that you find meaningful. Starter Packs make this process much easier. Starter Packs are curated bundles of accounts that are dedicated to the same basic idea. For example, [here is a](#)

[starter pack](#) for accounts that cover politics in Florida. By clicking the blue **Follow All** button at the top of the page, you'll instantly follow all the accounts listed below.

If you're interested in finding starter packs for other topics, [here is a searchable directory of them](#).

Using X

What is X?

X is the new name of the social media platform that was known formerly as Twitter. Twitter was a social media platform that distinguished itself by emphasizing short, text-based posts called 'Tweets'.

In 2022, Twitter was purchased by Elon Musk, who renamed the platform 'X' for reasons that aren't really worth getting into to be perfectly honest. Since then, X has changed as a platform pretty substantially and not for the better. While it's still very popular, changes to its algorithm, policies, and monetization have made it a much less friendly place than it was a few years ago. I'll go into a little more detail about those changes in a bit.

Creating an X Account

You can create an X account either from your phone or your computer.

- If you have an iPhone, [use this link](#) to download the app.
- If you have an Android, [use this link instead](#).
- If you'd prefer to use a computer, [you can follow this link](#).

You'll see two other buttons to sign up with Google or with Apple, but I would strongly encourage you to avoid these. Instead, click the blue **Create account** button.

You'll be prompted to give your name, your phone, and your date of birth. I would recommend entering as little personal information as possible and would strongly recommend that you do not enter your phone number. Instead, click the button underneath the phone number field that says **Use Email Instead**. If you have a secondary email account that you don't use all that often, now would be the time to use it.

I understand that these instructions might seem slightly paranoid. I would say that it is extremely important to consider the kind of person who might have access to your personal data. X, at least for the moment, is not a friendly platform for those who defend civil rights. It can still be a valuable communication tool, but you also need to protect yourself.

Once you've finished, click Next.

You'll be asked to complete a captcha challenge to prove that you aren't a robot. Click **Next** when finished.

On the next screen, choose a username for yourself. This will be a public facing name used to identify you to other people using X. As a general rule of thumb, it's best not to incorporate your full actual

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name here. Protect your identity and choose something that allows you to remain anonymous – you can always change this later.

Once you've chosen a username, click **Next**.

You'll be asked to upload a photo to your profile, but this is optional. You can select the pencil icon to choose a photo from your device, or just click **Next** to move forward without one.

You'll then be asked to select some interests from a list of topics. You'll need to pick at least one of these to continue. Make your choice, then click **Next**.

X will recommend some accounts to follow based on the category or categories that you chose. Choose at least one to follow, then click **Next** to finalize your account.

Finding People to Follow

You can find accounts to follow by using the search bar at the top of your home page. Alternatively, you can use lists. Lists can be found from the left side menu of your home page, about halfway down.

Lists are curated bundles of accounts that are dedicated to the same basic idea. For example, [here is a starter pack](#) for accounts that cover news in Florida. You can click Follow to add the List as a tab on your home page.

Posting on X

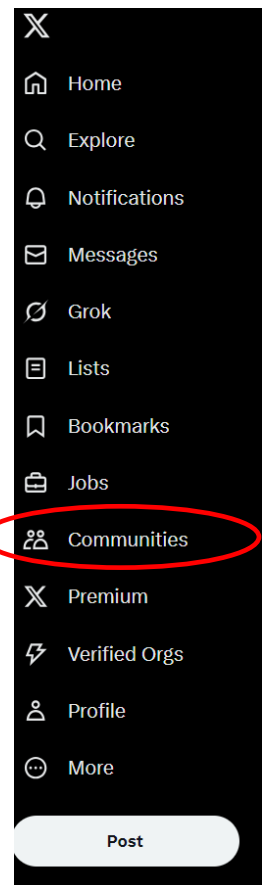
You can click the white **Post** button to create a post. Posts can be up to 280 characters and can include photos, images, or videos. If you want to direct your post to someone directly, enter an '@' symbol followed by their username. That person will get a notification that someone has mentioned them in a post. Keep in mind that these posts are still public.

Do I need an X Premium Subscription?

Absolutely not. The X Premium Subscription gives users access to some additional features such as the ability to post text over 280 characters, but the site is still perfectly usable without paying for it.

Cautions About X

As I've alluded to earlier, X is not currently the friendliest platform to discuss social justice issues. Since taking over, Elon has changed the algorithm to preferences right wing voices, and you will absolutely notice that in the accounts that get recommended to you. X also gives preference to X Premium users – people who pay a monthly fee automatically have their posts and responses boosted to the top of the proverbial pile. X is still a valuable way to contact notable people directly, but don't



be discouraged if it feels like most of the discourse you see tends to favor a conservative viewpoint, the site is designed to appear that way.

How to Advocate Effectively

Tips for Impactful Posts:

- Use a clear message: What's the issue? Why does it matter? What can others do?
- Keep it personal: A story is more memorable than statistics.
- Add a call to action: "Call your commissioner..." or "Join us at..."
- Use a compelling image or graphic.

Sample Posts


Facebook:

I've lived in East Tampa for 22 years, and I've never seen flooding this bad. We need better stormwater management. I'm urging the City Council to prioritize this in the next budget. Please join me at the meeting on Tuesday. #TampaFlooding

Twitter/X:

50,000 Floridians rely on Medicaid expansion to survive. @MyRepName — will you support expanding access to care? #FLHealthJustice

Instagram:

 [Photo of broken sidewalk] This is where I walk my daughter. It's unsafe and unlit. Speaking about it at the County meeting 6/10. Join me? #SafeStreets

Bluesky:

Our school cafeteria roof leaks. When it rains, the food line moves around trash bins. Elected officials say there's no money — but we must speak up. Public meeting this Thursday. bsky.app/post/you

Rules of the Road: Post Wisely, Post Safely

- Never post in anger. Write it out if you must, but don't send it.
- Stick to the issue. Avoid personal attacks.
- Fact-check everything. Credibility is power.
- Use privacy settings. Don't share your home address or exact schedule.
- Moderate comments. Delete hate or harassment. Block when needed.
- Log off sometimes. Burnout is real. Protect your mental health.

Speaking with Grace and Conviction

As followers of Christ and people of conscience, we're called to be both bold and compassionate — even online. Speak the truth. Be kind. Don't shrink from the work.

“Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?” — John Wesley

“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral... returning evil for evil multiplies evil.” — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Conclusion

Social media can amplify your voice, your story, and your cause. But it also carries weight and risk. Use it purposefully. Lift others up. Speak from truth and conviction — and be prepared to listen, learn, and grow in public.

Section 7: Sample Scripts, Letters, and Talking Points

Phone Script: Calling a Local Elected Official (Public Transportation)

Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I live in [Neighborhood], in your district. I'm calling because I depend on public transportation to get to work, and lately the delays and route cuts have made it almost impossible for me to keep my job.

I know transit isn't glamorous, but it's essential — for working people, seniors, students, and folks with disabilities. I hope you'll support increased funding for HART in this year's budget. This isn't just about buses — it's about dignity and access.

Thank you for your service, and for taking my call.

Email or Letter to a State Legislator (Environmental Protection)

Subject: Please Support Clean Water Protections in Florida

Dear Representative [Last Name],

I've lived in Florida for nearly 30 years, and every year it gets harder to swim, fish, or even enjoy the water without worrying about pollution. The red tides, the algae blooms — they're not just gross, they're dangerous.

I'm writing today to urge you to support stronger clean water protections and to oppose any

rollbacks of environmental safeguards. I believe we have a responsibility — both moral and practical — to be good stewards of the natural world.

As a person of faith, I also believe creation care is sacred work. I hope you do too.

Thank you for your time,

[Your Full Name]

[Your City and Zip Code]

Public Comment at a Local Meeting (Housing Affordability)

Good evening. My name is [Your Name], and I live in [City or ZIP].

I'm here tonight to talk about the housing crisis in our community. I'm a single parent. I work full time. And I still can't afford rent on a two-bedroom apartment.

I've seen friends forced to leave Tampa because of rising costs. I've seen teachers, nurses, and city workers priced out of the very neighborhoods they serve.

We need policies that support affordable housing and protections for renters. This isn't a red issue or a blue issue — it's a human issue.

Please, do what you can to help regular people stay in their homes. Thank you.

Social Media Post (Instagram/Facebook – LGBTQ+ Rights)

My name is Sarah and I'm a youth group volunteer here in Tampa. One of our kids — a 15-year-old — told me she's afraid to be out at school. Afraid her identity will get her bullied... or worse.

I'm asking our city leaders to protect LGBTQ+ youth and ensure schools are places of dignity and inclusion. Please support the new nondiscrimination policy up for a vote next week.

#LGBTQYouth #ProtectAllKids #FaithInAction #TampaCityCouncil

Talking Points: Voting Rights

- I believe voting should be easy, not harder — and that every eligible citizen should have a voice.
- Restricting vote-by-mail or limiting polling access doesn't protect democracy — it weakens it.
- As a person of faith, I believe in justice and fairness, and that includes our elections.
- I'm urging our leaders to protect voting rights and expand access for all.

Letter to a Local School Board (Teacher Pay)

Dear Members of the School Board,

My name is Carlos, and I'm the parent of two students in Hillsborough County Public Schools. I'm writing because I'm concerned about the teacher shortage and the impact it's having on learning.

My child's math class has had three different teachers this semester. That kind of instability isn't good for anyone. I know the root issue is that we're not paying teachers enough — or giving them the respect and support they deserve.

I hope you will prioritize fair wages and better working conditions in the next budget and stand up for the people who shape our kids' future.

With gratitude,

Carlos Martinez
[Neighborhood or ZIP]

One-on-One Conversation Script (Voting Rights)

“Hey, I know you don't usually get involved in politics — neither did I until a couple years ago. But things got too serious to sit out. I realized if we don't speak up, other people make the decisions for us.

There's a town hall next week about some new voting changes. Would you come with me? It's not fancy — just regular folks talking to local leaders. And maybe afterwards we can grab a bite. I think it matters.”

Public Rally / Protest Chant Sheet (Housing Justice)

What do we want?

****Affordable housing!****

When do we want it?

****Now!****

Who's got a voice?

****We've got a voice!****

This is what democracy looks like!

****THIS is what democracy looks like!****

Talking Points: Environmental Protection

- Our kids deserve to swim in clean water and breathe clean air.
- We can create jobs *and* protect the environment — it's not either/or.
- Climate change is here. It's flooding our streets, raising our insurance, and threatening our health. We must act now.
- As people of faith and conscience, we are stewards of creation. Silence is not an option.

Section 8: Joining and Supporting Advocacy Groups

Why Join a Group?

Being part of an advocacy group connects you to others who share your values and care about the same issues. Whether it's a grassroots coalition, a statewide campaign, or a neighborhood justice team, groups give you strength in numbers — and a way to organize your energy. You'll learn new skills, find mutual support, and contribute to strategic actions that can lead to real change.

Individual efforts matter, but collective action sustains momentum and expands impact.

How to Find the Right Group

Start by identifying what issues matter most to you — education, housing, voting rights, environmental justice, public health, immigration, LGBTQ+ equality, or economic justice. Then look for:

- Local neighborhood coalitions or civic clubs
- Faith-based justice teams like Tampa HOPE
- Statewide groups with local chapters (e.g., Florida Rising, League of Women Voters of Florida)
- National networks that offer local events or actions (e.g., NAACP, Moms Demand Action)

Ask friends or fellow church members what groups they're part of. Social media and library or church bulletin boards are also great places to start.

Ways to Get Involved

- Attend a group's public meeting or community event
- Join their email list or Slack group
- Help with flyers, graphics, tabling, or phone/text banking
- Become a dues-paying member or monthly donor
- Lend your professional skills — writing, graphic design, legal advice, logistics

Even showing up regularly builds trust and community. Don't underestimate the power of consistent presence.

What to Look for in a Group

- Shared values and purpose
- Welcoming environment and respect for diverse identities
- Leadership development opportunities
- Clear mission and track record of action
- Transparency about goals, finances, and decision-making

A healthy group will value your voice — and help you grow as a leader.

Faith and Collective Witness

Advocacy isn't just political — it's spiritual. Scripture and history are filled with examples of people banding together for justice. From Moses standing with the Israelites, to the early church sharing resources in Acts, to modern movements led by clergy and laypeople alike.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said:

“Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.”

And Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminded us:

“The church is only the church when it exists for others.”

When we join together with others in shared purpose, we live out our faith in action.

Conclusion

You don't have to lead the march or start a new organization. You just have to show up. Joining a group is one of the most powerful, encouraging steps you can take as a citizen activist. You'll learn, grow, and help shape a better world — together.

Section 9: Directory of Resources and Contact Information

5 Calls

Quickly contact your elected officials with issue-based scripts and phone numbers. This tool simplifies civic engagement by providing timely information on current legislation, talking points for effective communication, and direct contact information for representatives at the local, state, and federal levels.

Website: <https://5calls.org/>



ACLU of Florida

State chapter of the ACLU defending civil rights and liberties through advocacy and litigation. They take on cases involving free speech, racial justice, privacy rights, reproductive freedom, and other constitutional issues, while also engaging in public education and legislative advocacy to protect civil liberties.

Website: <https://www.aclufl.org/>



Center for Popular Democracy (CPD)

Network of progressive community organizations building power in marginalized communities. Focuses on economic justice, immigrant rights, housing, and democratic reform.

Website: <https://www.populardemocracy.org>



Democracy Now!

Independent media platform providing in-depth reporting on social justice movements, often serving as a critical voice amplifying grassroots resistance. Supports activist awareness through journalism.

Website: <https://www.democracynow.org>



Equality Florida

Florida's largest civil rights organization advocates for LGBTQ+ equality and protections. Through education, advocacy, and political action, they work to end discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity through policy reform, legal challenges, and cultural change initiatives.

Website: <https://www.eqfl.org/>



Hillsborough County Democratic Party

Local chapter of the Democratic Party promoting civic engagement and progressive policies. They work to elect Democratic candidates at all levels of government, organize voter registration drives, conduct community outreach, and facilitate issue-based advocacy aligned with Democratic Party values.

Website: <https://hillsboroughcountymocrats.org/>



Hillsborough County Republican Party

County Republican Executive Committee advocating conservative principles and civic participation. They support Republican candidates through volunteer recruitment, fundraising, voter outreach, and policy advocacy while promoting limited government, fiscal responsibility, and traditional values within the community.

Website: <https://www.hillsborough.gop/>



Hillsborough House of Hope

Support system for women transitioning out of correctional institutions seeking rehabilitation and restoration. They provide safe housing, life skills development, employment assistance, and emotional support to help formerly incarcerated women successfully reintegrate into society.

Website: <https://www.hhhopefl.org/>



HOPE - Hillsborough Organization for Progress and Equality

A multi-issue, grassroots, interfaith organization promoting justice and fairness in Hillsborough County. Their coalition brings together faith communities, nonprofit organizations, and concerned citizens to address systemic issues through community organizing and a direct-action campaign

Website: <https://www.hillsboroughhope.org/>



Housing Leadership Council of Tampa Bay

Collaboratively addressing strategies for affordable height and workforce housing in the Tampa Bay region. The council brings developers, government officials, nonprofits, and community members together to develop policy recommendations and implement innovative solutions to the housing affordability crisis.

Website: <https://hlctb.org/>



Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

The nation's largest LGBTQ+ civil rights organization, advocating for equality and dignity. HRC combines research, education, lobbying, and grassroots mobilization to advance equality in workplaces, healthcare settings, schools, and communities across America while working to influence corporate and governmental policies.
Website: <https://www.hrc.org/v>



Indivisible

A national grassroots movement building local progressive power and civic engagement, the Movement provides training, resources, and coordination for citizens to effectively influence their elected officials through strategic advocacy campaigns and electoral participation. With thousands of local groups across the country, the Movement provides citizens with the tools to effectively influence their elected officials through strategic advocacy campaigns and electoral participation.
Website: <https://indivisible.org/>



Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA)

Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) is an intersectional social justice nonprofit that mobilizes Justice-Seeking People of Faith to take action on issues of peace, poverty, and people's rights within the church and the world. Founded in 1907, they work across Methodist denominations to organize faith communities for progressive causes, including climate justice, economic equality, racial reconciliation, and LGBTQ+ inclusion.
Website: <https://www.mfsaweb.org/>



MoveOn

Progressive public policy advocacy group mobilizing millions of members to support social justice, combat authoritarianism, and protect democratic institutions. Known for rapid-response campaigns and online grassroots activism.
Website: <https://front.moveon.org>



PFLAG

Supports and advocates for LGBTQ+ people, their families, and allies across the U.S. Founded in 1973, PFLAG operates through local chapters offering peer support, education programs, and advocacy initiatives to create inclusive communities and foster understanding between LGBTQ+ individuals and their loved ones.

Website: <https://pflag.org/>



Poor People's Campaign

National movement uniting people to challenge racism, poverty, the war economy, and ecological devastation. Founded on the principles of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 campaign, they organize state-based coalitions to advocate for economic justice and mobilize low-income communities to become leaders in social change.

Website: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/>



Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN)

Reconciling Ministries Network is committed to intersectional justice across and beyond the United Methodist connection, working for the full participation of all LGBTQ+ people throughout the life and leadership of the Church.

<https://rmnetwork.org/>



Red Wine and Blue

A national network of suburban women organizing to defeat extremism and promote democracy. They utilize digital organizing, house parties, and leadership development to engage suburban women in political action around education, reproductive rights, and voting access.

Website: <https://redwine.blue/>



Sunrise Movement

Youth-led organization advocating for bold climate action through the Green New Deal. Organizes direct actions, political pressure campaigns, and youth-led mobilizations for environmental justice.

Website: <https://www.sunrisemovement.org>



United We Dream

Immigrant youth-led organization advocating for DACA, immigration reform, and protection from deportations. Empowers undocumented people and allies through organizing, storytelling, and civic engagement.

Website: <https://unitedwedream.org>



Women's March

Feminist organization born from the 2017 protest marches, continuing to fight for reproductive justice, gender equity, racial justice, and human rights through mass mobilization and advocacy.

Website: <https://www.womensmarch.com>



Section 10: Protecting Your Rights as an Activist

Your Constitutional Rights

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to:

- Speak freely about public issues, including criticism of the government
- Assemble peacefully in public spaces such as sidewalks, parks, and town squares
- Petition the government to address grievances

These rights apply to all people within the United States — regardless of citizenship status. However, they are not unlimited. Authorities may place reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner of expression. For example, requiring a permit for large gatherings, regulating noise levels, or setting curfews for safety reasons are considered legally permissible if applied fairly.

Still, no government official can silence you based on your viewpoint alone. If you are in a public space and not breaking any laws, you have the right to speak and assemble.

What to Know Before You Protest

- Always check if your protest requires a permit (especially if it's large, involves amplified sound, or blocks traffic).
- Know your route, location, and start/end times.
- Bring ID, water, and a charged phone.
- Write down legal support numbers in case your phone is confiscated or dead.

If You Are Stopped or Detained

- Stay calm. Keep your hands visible.
- You can ask, “Am I being detained?” or “Am I free to go?”
- If you are not under arrest, you are allowed to walk away.
- You do not have to answer questions beyond identifying yourself if requested in some states — but you can say, “I choose to remain silent.”
- Do not argue, resist, or obstruct law enforcement — even if you believe your rights are being violated. Remain polite, and take notes or record if it is safe to do so.
- If arrested:
 - Do not resist.
 - Clearly state: “I am exercising my right to remain silent. I want a lawyer.”
 - Do not sign anything or answer questions without legal counsel.

Filming Police and Documenting Events

- You have the right to film public officials, including police, in public spaces.
- Do not physically interfere with police activity.
- Keep a safe distance and clearly state you are exercising your right to record.
- Back up your footage to the cloud if possible.

Staying Safe Online

- Use strong passwords and two-factor authentication.
- Avoid posting sensitive personal details (e.g., home address, real-time location).
- Know that public posts may be monitored by law enforcement.
- Consider using encrypted apps (like Signal) for organizing or coordination.

Additional Risks for Marginalized Communities

People of color, immigrants (especially undocumented individuals), and LGBTQ+ activists often face disproportionate scrutiny, surveillance, and legal risk. It is unjust — but it is real.

If this applies to you:

- Make a safety plan before attending an action.
- Inform someone you trust where you are and when you’ll return.
- Consider joining protests with established groups that provide legal observers or rapid response support.

Organizations That Can Help

- ****ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)**** – www.aclu.org
 - Offers legal advocacy, education, and litigation across a broad range of civil rights issues.
 - Provides “Know Your Rights” resources and rapid legal response in protest-related cases.

- **ACLU of Florida** – www.aclufl.org
 - State affiliate handling Florida-specific cases and campaigns.
 - Monitors protest policing and helps challenge unconstitutional ordinances.

- **National Lawyers Guild (NLG)** – www.nlg.org
 - Provides legal observers at protests and free legal support.
 - Has a long-standing commitment to defending activists and movement organizers.

- **Florida Justice Center** – www.floridajc.org
 - Offers post-arrest support, legal aid, and reentry advocacy.
 - Supports legal empowerment for underserved communities.

- **Tampa Bay Community Action Committee (TBCAC)** – facebook.com/TampaBayCAC
 - Organizes for racial and social justice in the Tampa Bay area.
 - Promotes protest safety and grassroots coalition-building.

- **Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC)** – www.floridaimmigrant.org
 - Works to defend immigrant rights across the state.
 - Provides rapid response hotlines, legal support, and deportation defense resources.

Civil Disobedience: When People Choose to Break the Law

Some people, as a matter of conscience, choose to engage in civil disobedience — the nonviolent, intentional breaking of laws to protest injustice. This tactic has a long and powerful history.

- Rosa Parks' refusal to move to the back of the bus.
- The lunch counter sit-ins in Tampa and across the South in the 1960s.
- Dr. King's leadership in marches that defied local curfews and unjust ordinances.

Civil disobedience carries legal risks, including arrest and fines. It should be done knowingly, with preparation, legal support, and reflection on its purpose and meaning.

As Bonhoeffer wrote in resisting Nazism: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil."

Know Your Rights – Quick Reference Card

- ✓ I have the right to peacefully protest in public spaces.
 - ✓ I do not have to answer questions from police without a lawyer present.
 - ✓ I can record police in public.
 - ✓ I do not have to consent to searches of my phone or belongings.
 - ✓ I have the right to remain silent. Say: “I wish to remain silent.”
 - ✓ I can ask: “Am I free to go?” — If yes, walk away calmly.
 - ✓ If arrested, I should ask for a lawyer immediately.
 - ✓ I should keep emergency legal numbers written down.
-
- ✗ Do not resist arrest, even if you believe it is unjust.
 - ✗ Do not lie or provide false documents.
 - ✗ Do not delete videos or photos if requested by police.

Disclaimer

This section is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. If you have specific questions about your rights or legal risks, consult an attorney or a legal rights organization such as the ACLU.

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VOICES OF JUSTICE

FINDING YOUR VOICE

A Guide to Citizen Activism

*“I can’t do all the good the world needs,
but the world needs all the good I can do.”*

-Jana Stanfield