

FINDING VOICE

A GUIDE TO CITIZEN ACTIVISM

FINDING YOUR VOICE

A Guide to Citizen Engagement

Montgomery County, MD

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Max Zaenglein

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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 1: Introduction — Why Citizen Engagement Matters

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

— Often attributed to Edmund Burke

Throughout history, meaningful change has rarely started with elected leaders. It has come from parents, students, workers, veterans, and retirees organizing, speaking out, and pushing for justice. The American Revolution began with citizen action, and that spirit has continued in every era since. A government "of the people" only works when the people engage.

A Core American Tradition

Citizen activism has always shaped the United States from the Boston Tea Party to the March on Washington. Consider:

The American Revolution was driven by pamphlets, protests, and community organizing against unjust taxation.



- ✓ The Abolitionist Movement galvanized people to confront the moral crisis of slavery, with voices like Frederick Douglass declaring, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress."
- ✓ The Women's Suffrage Movement spanned decades of marches, petitions, and civil disobedience before women secured the right to vote in 1920.
- ✓ The Civil Rights Movement showed the power of peaceful protest, strategic legal action, and bold public witnesses. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."
- ✓ More recently, environmental justice campaigns, LGBTQ+ equality efforts, and youth-led climate movements have proven that democracy is a living thing and not a finished product.

The American labor movement is another powerful example. Workers' strikes and organizing efforts led to safer working conditions, the establishment of the 40-hour workweek, and protections against child labor. The Americans with Disabilities Act was the result of years of persistent advocacy by people with disabilities and their allies. Military veterans have also mobilized—not only to protect their benefits but

also to support refugee resettlement, voting rights, and mental health services. Across all these movements, the common thread is people stepping forward to demand dignity, fairness, and accountability.

"It is not the function of our government to keep the citizen from falling into error. It is the function of the citizen to keep the government from falling into error."

— Justice Robert H. Jackson

These moments were not inevitable. They were the result of people choosing to act. They were farmers, factory workers, teachers, students, and engineers. People who choose to organize, raise their voices, and make their concerns public. Their persistence shaped laws, reshaped systems, and improved lives far beyond their own.

Civic activism can take many forms. It could be writing a letter to the editor, attending city council meetings, or organizing a local petition. It might include joining an advocacy group, volunteering for a campaign, or helping neighbors understand what is at stake in an upcoming election. These actions, taken together, are the lifeblood of democracy. They remind leaders that their power comes from the people. They remind us that silence is a choice and that participation is a form of power.

We often think of activism as something that happens on a large scale — marches, protests, rallies — and those are important. But change is just as often built in small, consistent actions. It happens when someone asks a tough question at a public meeting, or a student organizes a voter registration drive at their school. It happens when people challenge harmful social media policies or show up at a zoning hearing to support affordable housing. Democracy depends on people who are willing to stay involved even when the news cycle moves on.

Activism is not just an American story. Around the world, people have fought for justice, fairness, and representation. South African citizens resisted apartheid through years of community action and international advocacy. Youth movements in places like Hong Kong, Chile, and Ukraine have demonstrated the power of sustained civic engagement, even under immense pressure. Indigenous communities worldwide continue to organize to protect their lands, cultures, and legal rights. The desire to be heard and to shape the future is a universal one.

Founders on Engagement

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

— Thomas Paine, 1776

When asked what kind of government had been created, Benjamin Franklin famously replied, "A Republic, if you can keep it." This was not just a clever remark; it was a warning. Democracies endure only when people stay informed, involved, and willing to hold power accountable.

The framers of the Constitution had different ideas about the structure of government. However, they generally agreed on one thing: it would not survive without the active participation of its citizens. Alexander Hamilton warned in the Federalist Papers that *"the people must cede to it some of their natural rights to vest it with requisite powers."* That only works, he wrote, if the people remain vigilant

over those powers. Thomas Jefferson believed that civic responsibility included both education and direct engagement. *“Whenever the people are well-informed,”* he wrote, *“they can be trusted with their own government.”*

This idea of engagement was not limited to voting. The founders debated openly in print, formed societies and committees, and expected their fellow citizens to do the same. Abigail Adams, writing to her husband, John Adams, in 1776, insisted that women, too, had a stake in the political process. *“Remember the ladies,”* she warned, *“and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors.”* Her words remind us that engagement includes the fight to expand participation and not just preserve it.

The founders did not leave us a finished democracy. They left us a framework that demands attention and care. They didn't agree on all the details, but they deeply believed that the public should be involved, informed, and ready to challenge injustice. That responsibility belongs to all of us.

The founders knew they bequeathed to us “unfinished” work. Work that nearly every generation has been called on to perfect further. That work is not done, and it falls to this generation to continue the work started over 250 years ago.

Your Voice, Your Power

You do not need to be an expert to be an activist. You just need to care enough to act. That might mean calling your city council member, attending a town hall, writing an op-ed, or joining a neighborhood group. Activism is not always loud, but it is often persistent.

Rev. Dr. William Barber, a modern civil rights leader, calls activism *“the moral defibrillator of our time, shocking the heart of this nation back to life.” Civic participation is not just a right. It is a responsibility.*

And as President Barack Obama 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.”*

Being active in civic life can be tiring. It requires courage, clarity, and patience. But it also connects us to something larger than ourselves. It brings us to the shared work of building a community, a state, or a nation that reflects our values. The more people who participate, the more likely it is that policies will reflect real needs and lived experiences. No voice is too small when it joins with others.

About This Guide

This guide was created to help everyday people take action. It is for people who know something needs to change but are unsure where to start. It is designed to meet you wherever you are on your journey. Whether you have been actively involved in your community for years or are just getting started, this guide offers ideas, tools, and resources to help you participate more effectively.


It is not a textbook or a policy manual. It is a practical, easy-to-use reference. Each section focuses on a specific aspect of citizen engagement, including how to find and contact your representatives, attend or speak at public meetings, utilize social media effectively, and safeguard your rights as an activist. You will also find sample letters, scripts, and a directory of organizations and contacts to support your efforts.

This guide is not about a single issue or a single point of view. It is about reclaiming your voice in the democratic process. It is a call to be informed, involved, and persistent. Our communities, our rights, and our future depend on it.


Section 3: Contact Directory -- Your Elected Representatives

Montgomery County Council

Council President: Evan Glass (At-Large)


 (240) 777-7959


 evan.glass@montgomerycountymd.gov


 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850


 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/>

Council Vice President: Andrew Friedson (District 1)


 (240) 777-7828

 andrew.friedson@montgomerycountymd.gov


 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/>

Council Member: Marilyn Balcombe (District 2)


 (240) 777-7955

 marilyn.balcombe@montgomerycountymd.gov


 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/>

Council Member: Sidney Katz (District 3)


 (240) 777-7906

 sidney.katz@montgomerycountymd.gov


 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850


 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/>

Council Member: Kate Stewart (District 4)


 (240) 777-7968




 kate.stewart@montgomerycountymd.gov

 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850





 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/stewart/>

Council Member: Kristin Mink (District 5)





 (240) 777-7989

 kristin.mink@montgomerycountymd.gov
 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850
 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Mink/>





Council Member: Natali Fani-González (District 6)

 (240) 777-7964
 natali.fani-gonzalez@montgomerycountymd.gov
 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850
 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Fani-Gonzalez/>





Council Member: Dawn Luedtke (District 7)

 (240) 777-7964
 dawn.luedtke@montgomerycountymd.gov
 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850
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Council Member: Gabe Albornoz (At-Large)

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 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850
 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/>

Council Member: Will Jawando (At-Large)





 (240) 777-7966
 will.jawando@montgomerycountymd.gov
 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850
 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/>

Council Member: Laurie-Anne Sayles (At-Large)

 (240) 777-7966
 laurie-anne.sayles@montgomerycountymd.gov
 100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850
 <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/sayles/>

Montgomery County Executive

County Executive: Marc B. Elrich (D)


 (240) 777-2550
 marc.elrich@montgomerycountymd.gov
 101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor, Rockville, MD 20850
 <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/>

U.S. House of Representatives

District 6: April McClain Delaney (D)

Represents portions of Montgomery County including Gaithersburg, Germantown, Montgomery Village (part), Poolesville, Clarksburg, Damascus (part), Darnestown (part)

 Washington, D.C.: (202) 225-2721

 Contact form available on website


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

District 8: Jamie Raskin (D)


Represents portions of Montgomery County including Rockville, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Wheaton

 Washington, D.C.: (202) 225-5341

 Montgomery County Office: (301) 354-1000

 Contact form available on website


 Montgomery County Office: 51 Monroe St., Suite 503, Rockville, MD 20850


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


U.S. Senate

Senator Chris Van Hollen (D)

 Washington, D.C.: (202) 224-4654

 Montgomery County Office: (301) 545-1500

 Contact form available on website

 Montgomery County Office: 111 Rockville Pike Suite 960, Rockville, MD 20850


 Washington D.C.: 110 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510


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


Senator Angela Alsobrooks (D)

Maryland's junior senator, sworn in January 2025

 Washington, D.C.: (202) 224-4654


 Contact form available on website


 Washington D.C.: 133 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510


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

Maryland State Senate -- Montgomery County Delegation

District 14: Katie Fry Hester (D)





 (301) 858-3671

 katiefry.hester@senate.state.md.us





 James Senate Office Building, 11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

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District 15: Susan C. Lee (D)

 Annapolis: (410) 841-3124
 susan.lee@senate.state.md.us
 James Senate Office Building, 11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401
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District 16: Ariana B. Kelly (D)

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District 17: Cheryl C. Kagan (D)

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District 18: Jeffrey D. Waldstreicher (D)

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 jeff.waldstreicher@senate.state.md.us
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District 19: Benjamin F. Kramer (D)

 Annapolis: (410) 841-3651
 ben.kramer@senate.state.md.us
 James Senate Office Building, 11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401
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District 20: Will Smith (D)


 Annapolis: (410) 841-3578
 will.smith@senate.state.md.us
 James Senate Office Building, 11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401
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District 39: Nancy J. King (D)

 Annapolis: (410) 841-3686
 nancy.king@senate.state.md.us
 James Senate Office Building, 11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401
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Maryland House of Delegates -- Montgomery County Delegation

District 14: Anne Kaiser (D), Julie Palakovich Carr (D), Pamela E. Queen (D)


 Annapolis: (410) 841-3036


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 House Office Building, 6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

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District 15: David Fraser-Hidalgo (D), Kathleen M. Dumais (D), Linda Foley (D)


 Annapolis: (410) 841-3052


 david.fraser-hidalgo@house.state.md.us, kathleen.dumais@house.state.md.us, linda.foley@house.state.md.us

 House Office Building, 6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

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District 16: Ariana B. Kelly (D), Marc Korman (D), Sara N. Love (D)


 Annapolis: (410) 841-3145

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 House Office Building, 6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

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District 17: Jim Gilchrist (D), Kumar P. Barve (D), Kirill Reznik (D)


 Annapolis: (410) 841-3021


 jim.gilchrist@house.state.md.us, kumar.barve@house.state.md.us, kirill.reznik@house.state.md.us

 House Office Building, 6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

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District 18: Emily Shetty (D), Jared Solomon (D), Al Carr (D)


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 emily.shetty@house.state.md.us, jared.solomon@house.state.md.us, al.carr@house.state.md.us

 House Office Building, 6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

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District 19: Bonnie Cullison (D), Charlotte Crutchfield (D), Vaughn Stewart (D)


 Annapolis: (410) 841-3280




 bonnie.cullison@house.state.md.us, charlotte.crutchfield@house.state.md.us, vaughn.stewart@house.state.md.us





 House Office Building, 6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

 <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/>





District 20: Lorig Charkoudian (D), David Moon (D), Jheanelle Wilkins (D)





 Annapolis: (410) 841-3326





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jheanelle.wilkins@house.state.md.us
 House Office Building, 6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401
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District 39: Lesley J. Lopez (D), Nancy J. King (D), Clint Sobratti (D)
 Annapolis: (410) 841-3637
 lesley.lopez@house.state.md.us, clint.sobratti@house.state.md.us
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Montgomery County Board of Education

President: Julie Yang (District 3)
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 boe@mcpsmd.org
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 <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/boe/>


Vice President: Karla Silvestre (At-Large)
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Member: Natalie Zimmerman (District 2)
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Member: Laura Stewart (District 4)
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Member: Brenda Wolff (District 5)


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Member: Rita Montoya (At-Large)


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 15 W Gude Drive, Rockville, MD 20850

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 (240) 740-3030

 boe@mcpsmd.org

 15 W Gude Drive, Rockville, MD 20850

 <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/boe/>

General Information:

- Montgomery County Council Main Line: (240) 777-7900
- Maryland Relay (for hearing impaired): Dial 711 or 1-800-201-7165
- Public Hearings Sign Up: (240) 777-7803
- Legislative Information Services: (240) 777-7910

Section 4: Telling Your Story & Engaging Your Representatives

Why Your Story Matters

Your voice matters. Your story can bring abstract policies 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 says, "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 for emails, meetings, testimony, or public comments.

Step-by-Step Template

1. Introduction

- Your name, neighborhood, or city.
- How long have you lived there, and what is 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, neighbors, or your church.
- Avoid generalizations; details make it authentic 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.

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 for decisions affecting our communities. 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 local officials and organizations' social media accounts 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.

"A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy." — James Madison

"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

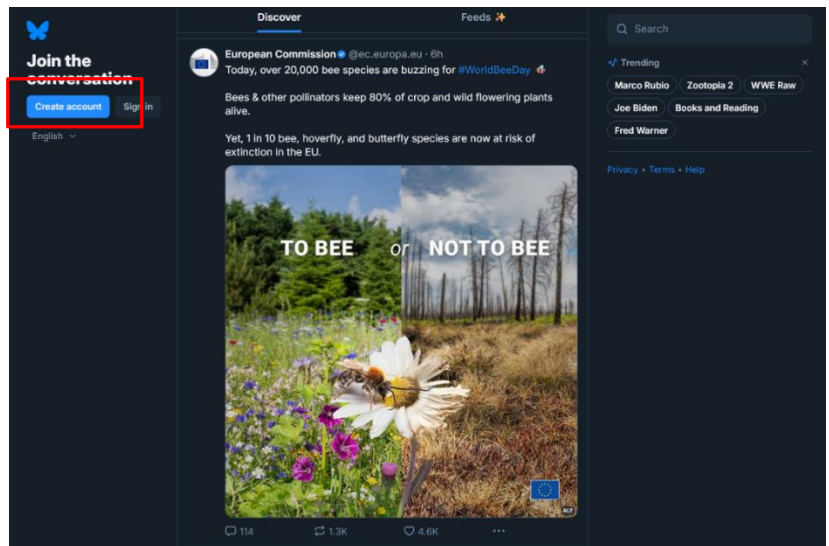
Each platform has strengths. Use what feels natural to you, or what reaches your intended audience:

- Facebook: Great for long-form posts, community groups, and event organizing.
- Twitter/X /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-Twitter employees. 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 will put my cards on the table here: I listed Bluesky first because it's become the preferred platform for more liberal viewpoints. It has many features 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 on 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 prefer to use a computer, follow this link-
<https://bsky.app/>.

Click the blue **Create account** button. It will be near the bottom of the first screen you see on your phone, and on your computer, it will be in the top left corner.

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. Generally, it's best not to incorporate your full 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 you aren't a robot. Click **Continue** when finished.

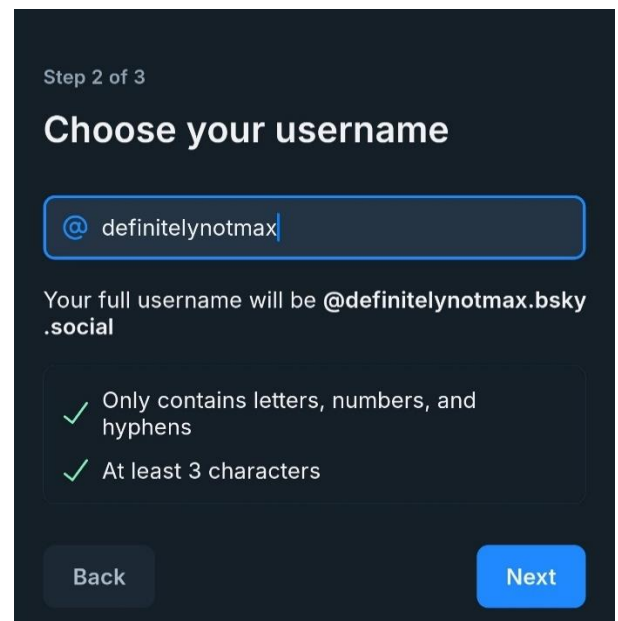
You'll be asked to upload a photo to your profile, which is optional. You can select the pencil icon to choose a photo from your device or click **Continue** to move forward without one.

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 adjust the people Bluesky suggests 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 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 be notified that someone has mentioned them in a post. Keep in mind that these posts are still public.

Starter Packs

When you first start 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 dedicated to the same basic idea. For example, [here is a starter pack](#) for accounts covering Florida politics. You'll instantly follow all accounts listed below by clicking the blue Follow All button at the top of the page.

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 formerly known as Twitter. Twitter 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 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, its algorithm, policies, and monetization changes have made it a much less friendly place than a few years ago. I'll go into a bit more detail about those changes.

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 prefer to use a computer, follow this link.

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

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

Finding Your Voice

A Guide to Citizen Engagement

I understand that these instructions might seem slightly paranoid. However, it is extremely important to consider who might have access to your personal data. Although the internet can still be a valuable communication tool, you must also protect yourself.

Once you've finished, click **Next**.

You'll be asked to complete a CAPTCHA challenge to prove 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 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, which is optional. You can select the pencil icon to choose a photo from your device, or 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 your chosen category or categories. Choose at least one to follow, then click **Next** to finalize your account.

Finding People to Follow

You can find accounts to follow 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 dedicated to the same basic idea. For example, here is a starter pack for accounts covering news in Florida. 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 include photos, images, or videos. If you want to direct your post to someone, enter an '@' symbol followed by their username. That person will be notified 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 additional features such as the ability to post text over 280 characters, but the site is still perfectly usable without paying.

Cautions About X

As I've alluded to, X is not currently the friendliest platform to discuss social justice issues. Since taking over, the owner has changed the algorithm to favor right-wing voices, and you will 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

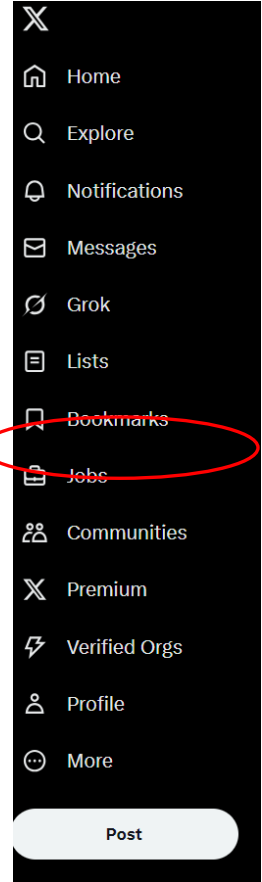
Tips for Impactful Posts:

- 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 with my daughter. It's unsafe and unlit. Speaking about it at the County meeting 6/10. Join me? #SafeStreets

Bluesky:

Our school cafeteria's 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 people 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 and the algae blooms are not just gross, they're dangerous.

I'm writing today to urge you to support stronger clean water protections and oppose any rollbacks of environmental safeguards. I believe we have a responsibility, both moral and practical, to be good stewards of the natural world.

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 to rent 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 15-year-old kids 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, which will be up for a vote next week.

#LGBTQYouth #ProtectAllKids #FaithInAction #TampaCityCouncil

Talking Points: Voting Rights

- I believe voting should be easy, not harder, and 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, including 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 Hillsborough County Public Schools students. I'm writing because I'm concerned about the teacher shortage and its impact 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 of years ago. But things got too serious to ignore. I realized that 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 like to 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.

Conclusion

You don't have to lead the march or start a new organization. You must show up. Joining a group is one of the most powerful, encouraging steps to 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 Maryland

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.aclu-md.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>



Maryland Democratic Party

Maryland 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://www.mddems.org>



Maryland Republican Party

Maryland 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://mdgop.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.

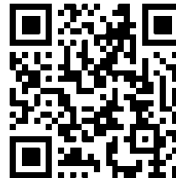
Website: <https://redwine.blue/>



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 reasonably restrict 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. You have the right to speak and assemble if you are in a public space and do not break any laws.

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.aclufi.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.

NOTES

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NOTES



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