

ACTION GUIDE: Engaging Your Elected Representatives

Call on your representatives to take a stand for LGBTQ+ students!

Elected officials are accountable to their constituents, and your voice resonates with those elected to serve you at both the federal and state level. Although in-person meetings can be an effective strategy in educating elected officials about the LGBTQ+ community, you do not have to visit Capitol Hill or a state capitol to make your voice heard. This action guide walks through the steps of how you can call or write to your legislators and urge support for LGBTQ+ youth.

Who are my elected officials?

If you live in one of the fifty states, you have three members of Congress who serve your community: two senators and one member of the House of Representatives. You can use the official [Senate website](#) and [House website](#) to research your member of Congress and find their contact information. Each individual member also has their own website, which includes contact information for their district offices in your home state and their office in Washington, DC.

State legislatures have a significant role in setting school policy - ranging from nondiscrimination policies to setting curriculum. Most state legislatures mirror the federal Congress and are comprised of two chambers. The upper house is generally known as the Senate, whereas the lower house can be known as the House of Representatives, House of Delegates, General Assembly, or other names. In Nebraska, there is only one legislative chamber. Each legislature will have a website with contact information for legislators, although aggregator tools like [this website](#) can help you find your state legislators.

When is the best time to engage with my elected representatives?

Elected officials should be responsive to constituents at all times of the year! You should never hesitate to reach out to your elected officials to share your thoughts on specific legislation or general issues. However, engaging your elected officials is most urgent before and during legislative activity. Congress is in session all year long and can schedule debate on individual bills rather quickly. However, some legislative processes are a bit more predictable, with Congress usually considering the annual budget before deadlines in September and the end of the year.

Although every state is different, engaging with state legislators is most urgent before and during the annual legislative session. Over 40 states conduct their legislative session in the first half of the year (January to June). Some states require bills to be pre-filed in advance of the legislative session, which means that advocacy *before* legislative session can ensure legislators are better informed. Unlike federal legislators, some state legislatures allow for legislators to hold jobs outside government. This dynamic may impact the responsiveness of legislators outside of the specific legislative session.

Should I reach out to my legislator's office in the capital or in the district?

All federal elected officials and some state legislators have multiple offices. The capital office is close to where legislative business is conducted, whereas a district office is closer to the official's constituents. To make your voice heard on policy matters, you should reach out to the capital office (in Washington for all federal officials, and in your state capital for state legislators). However, this does not mean that you should ignore district offices! District office staff are deeply connected within the community, including with school leaders, and may be positioned to support with community-facing messaging or navigating particular challenges in implementing school-based protections.

How can I tell if my elected official supports LGBTQ+ issues?

Elected officials serve their constituents, and it is critical that they hear from people in their community. Even if your legislator takes an anti-LGBTQ+ position, you should be able to express your views to their office and be treated with respect. However, you should be aware of a legislator's record on LGBTQ+ issues before approaching their office. You can often get a sense by researching recent news clippings related to the legislator's comments on LGBTQ+ issues. Another strategy is to research critical LGBTQ+-related legislation and assess whether the legislator voted a certain way or co-sponsors a certain bill to signal their support or opposition to LGBTQ+ inclusion. GLSEN does not endorse candidates, but you may also be able to find candidate statements or endorsements from other LGBTQ+ organizations or state equality groups. For federal officials, both chambers have already voted on an anti-transgender bill. You can see how members of Congress voted on that anti-transgender bill at the [House vote](#) and the [Senate vote](#).

What is the best way to reach out to an elected official?

Once you have identified the legislator's contact information, you can choose whether to call their office or send an email. If you call, you will not be able to speak directly with your elected representative. It would be just as impactful to connect with the legislator's staffer who handles education issues. If you are not able to speak to either the legislator *or* their education staffer, do not fret! Legislative offices often take messages and record constituent opinion in an internal system so that your views are taken into account. Leaving a message or speaking with the first person who picks up the phone will still be logged and shared with the legislator in the aggregate.

If you get a staffer on the phone, it is critical to ask for their name and connect with them by email. Building ongoing correspondence with a staffer can be an effective strategy, and you can sometimes be seen as a constituent voice and/or ongoing resource who can keep the legislative office informed of evolving circumstances in the community. As you identify staffers' emails, it is helpful to know that Congressional emails follow a general pattern:

In the House, emails are `firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov`

In the Senate, emails are `firstname_lastname@senatorlastname.senate.gov`

If you are not comfortable calling, legislative offices may have a general inquiry email where you can reach out. Sometimes, legislative offices may have automated forms on their website to collect opinion or input. This information is generally filtered to the relevant staffers, such as the education staffer. As you prepare an email, you should include language that respectfully requests a response.

What should I share with my elected official or their staff?

Your contact with a legislative office should reflect your views. Remember: you are the expert of your own experience. It is appropriate to reach out to a legislative office and make a specific request (e.g., vote for/against a bill, take a specific action, have the legislator make a public statement, etc.) or to more generally share your perspective on a broader theme like LGBTQ+ rights. In both calls and email, you should be targeted with your message - brief, to the point, and explicit about any ask. It helps to establish immediately that you are a constituent or have a specific connection to the legislator's district. The more that you personalize your message, the better. Bringing in specific details of your story - like a school that you attend - will establish your credibility as a member of the community and a constituent. For these reasons, it is helpful to write something out in advance so that you are prepared to share a message when you have the right person on the phone.

What are some messages that I can carry to my elected officials?

Legislative offices are often responsive to the moment, as hearings and debate can be scheduled with little notice. However, there are some evergreen messages that can be shared. The below phone scripts provide a template for reaching out to legislative offices. They can and should be adapted to reflect the context of your outreach, including if there are any upcoming votes or decision points, the exact office that you're reaching out to, and any in-state or in-district context that may be relevant. Although these scripts are written for a phone conversation, they can also be adapted to support an email outreach.

Outreach Script #1: Oppose Anti-LGBTQ+ Policies in Must-Pass Bills

Hello, my name is _____, and I am a constituent from _____. Could I please be connected with your education staffer to discuss LGBTQ+ issues? [NOTE: if the staffer is busy and cannot speak on the phone, ask for the staffer's email so that you can directly follow up]

I'm a constituent, and I'd like to urge your office to oppose any effort to insert divisive policy proposals into must-pass legislation, like the annual appropriations bills. Last year, Speaker Johnson held the annual defense bill hostage by inserting a provision that would deny transgender servicemembers access to gender-affirming care. I think that members of Congress should be able to debate issues on their merits, instead of resorting to parliamentary tricks to enact policies that target marginalized communities and frankly only serve to harm people. You all need to get out of Washington and understand that this is not a game, but we're talking about people's lives here. Young people see what's happening in the news and it's impacting our country's future.

Let's focus on investing in people and communities, instead of tearing each other down. Again, I hope that your office can be a voice of reason and stand opposed to any poison pills that are floated during consideration of must-pass bills.

Outreach Script #2: Support Anti-Bullying Legislation

Hello, my name is _____, and I am a constituent from _____. Could I please be connected with your education staffer to discuss anti-bullying legislation? [NOTE: if the staffer is busy and cannot speak on the phone, ask for the staffer's email so that you can directly follow up]

I'm a constituent, and I'd like to urge your office to address identity-based bullying in K-12 schools, including by joining the Safe Schools Improvement Act as a co-sponsor. Bullying, harassment, and discrimination in schools affects every marginalized community, impacting academic outcomes, students' connection to the community, and youth mental health. Over 10 million youth are bullied each year, with the National Center for Education Statistics identifying that 59% of bullied youth never report what they're experiencing to an adult. Marginalized groups face disproportionately higher rates of bullying, with 83% of LGBTQ+ youth facing victimization in schools. Stronger anti-bullying policies can make a difference by letting students know they'll be protected and holding staff accountable. GLSEN data demonstrates how, when schools have comprehensive anti-bullying policies, LGBTQ+ students are 54% more likely to report assault or harassment to school staff and 39% more likely to report staff's response as effective when compared to schools with generic anti-bullying policies.

Every student deserves to learn in an environment free from violence or discrimination. Please stand up for the youth of today and tomorrow, sign on to the Safe Schools Improvement Act, and prioritize action against bullying in schools.