



ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Ohio Environmental Council





For over 50 years, the OEC has been fighting for a clean, beautiful Ohio: a state with beautiful parks to enjoy, healthy air to breathe, and accessible water free of pollution for drinking and recreating. It's tough work. Making change is hard.

We have to be constantly prepared to seize opportunities and to stand up to threats. Leaders in cities across Ohio are ready to tackle climate change and other threats facing our communities. But big polluters and their allies in Congress, the Statehouse, and city halls continue to pose a threat to our communities and our natural world.

That's why it's so important to keep up the push for a better, cleaner future for Ohio. We need to bring more Ohioans into this movement. We need more environmental champions in leadership roles across our state. So I want to share this toolkit with you to help you get involved in this critical effort.

Using these tools, you can help push for the action we need to tackle the biggest challenges facing our state. It doesn't matter what color your skin is, how much money you make, whether you live in a big city or small town: You can get involved in advocating for the changes you want to see.

Voting is a critical part of our political process. But our advocacy work doesn't stop there. We have to continue to be proactive as our elected leaders are making decisions each day. I hope these tools will help you find new ways to get involved.

Thank you for your commitment to creating a healthy environment for all who call Ohio home. The fight to protect the environment has never been easy—but Ohio's future is worth it.

Yours in the fight,



Heather Taylor-Miesle
OEC Executive Director



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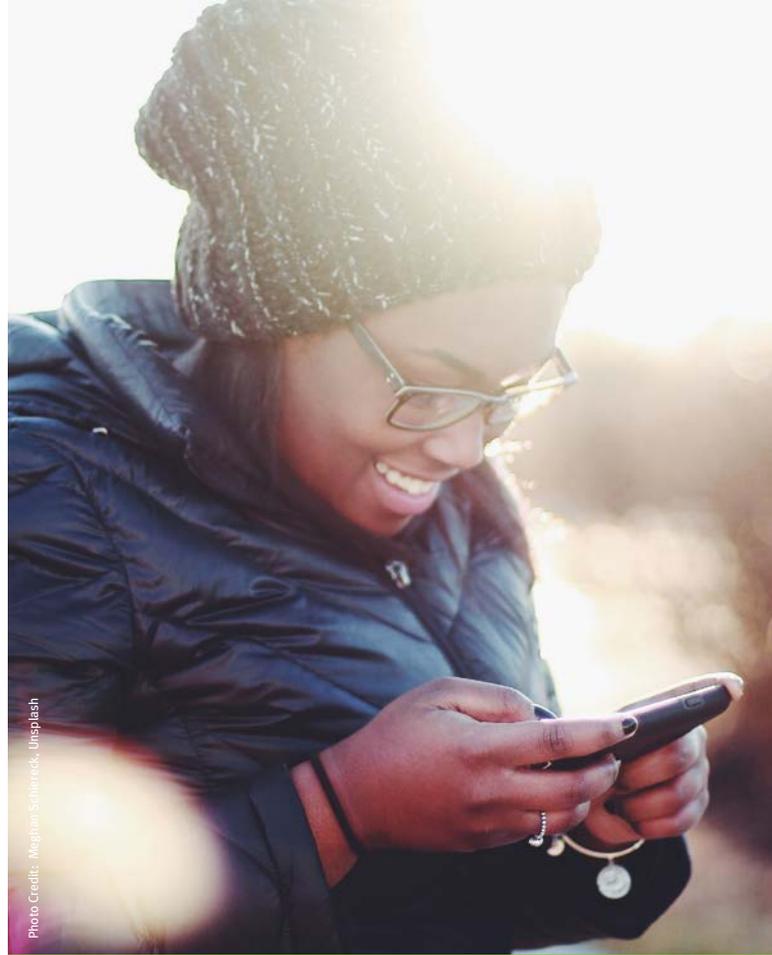
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CONNECTING WITH LAWMAKERS



WRITE TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

Writing to your elected officials can be very effective, especially if the letter is personal and brief. Mailed letters and emails are both great options for connecting with legislators. Also, watch for alerts on bills and issues from organizations like the OEC, or our sibling organization, the OEC Action Fund. On important legislation, we can set up a form to allow our members to quickly and easily send an email to a legislator about a pressing issue.

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR LETTER

Be specific. If you are writing about a bill that has been introduced, include the bill number and name (i.e., SB 199, the Debris Landfill bill) and, if possible, the name(s) of the bill's main sponsor(s).

Keep it brief. Focus on one major point. If you attempt to tackle too many issues in one letter, your main point may be diluted or confusing.

Back it up. If possible, provide a couple of brief, logical arguments as to why your legislator should support your position. If your local newspaper has editorialized in support of your issue, or community members have written letters to the editor supporting your position, clip the articles and include them. If

the OEC, or another trustworthy source, has shared information on the issue, include it.

Make it local. Legislators are most interested in the impacts that bills will have in their districts. The more you demonstrate that the issue will have a local impact, the more compelling your letter will be.

Make it personal. If you can tell a story about how this bill or issue will affect you or your family, be sure to include it. Personal stories are more memorable and show the real impact that legislation can have on constituents. On high-profile legislation, there will be a lot of people sharing statistics and other figures. But a personal story will help connect the policy being considered directly to a real person more than any statistic can.

Ask for a specific action. Do more than state your position on an issue. Ask your elected official to do something that supports your position (i.e., support, oppose, or co-sponsor a bill).

Follow up. Keep track of whether or not your legislator supports your position. If they do, write or call back to say thanks. If not, call or write to ask why not and encourage them to support the issue down the road.



CALL ELECTED OFFICIALS

Calling elected officials is a quick and easy way to communicate your position on a bill or issue. There are several different sources that you can use to find the phone numbers for elected officials.

TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR CALL

Identify your issue area. A staff member, not the lawmakers themselves, will most likely answer the phone. Before you begin to discuss your topic or issue, it is important to verify that you are speaking with the staff member who handles that issue or who can convey your message to the elected official.

Be specific. Once the phone is answered, or when leaving a voicemail, state who you are and why you are calling. If you're calling to support or oppose legislation, it's very helpful (though not absolutely essential) to also state some reasons behind your position.

Remember, you don't have to be an expert. You can express concern or support for an issue and not be an expert. It is okay to say that you don't have all of the details. You can share your story and encourage the official to put people's health and the environment above polluters.



MEET WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Lawmakers are elected to represent you. Having a face-to-face meeting is a very effective way to build a relationship with your elected official. Remember that legislators are elected to represent constituents like you. Most lawmakers welcome the opportunity to meet with the people they represent, and constituent lobbying is a proven way to effectively influence public policy.

CALLING TO SET UP A MEETING

When requesting a meeting, remember that the job of a legislator is to represent constituents like you. Clearly state your concern and ask if your legislator would be willing to meet with you. Be prepared to offer a couple of different times you're available. Also be sure to convey any timeliness to consider when finding time to talk with your lawmaker (i.e., an impending vote on a bill).

Legislators are very busy and are most likely to meet with you if you give them good reasons. One way to do this is to clearly state on the phone why the issue is critical and timely. Another way to accomplish this goal is by organizing a group of constituents who want to meet with the legislator together. Contact your friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers to see who would be willing to join you and when. The more support you can generate around the issue, the more likely your legislator will set aside time to meet with you.

It's important to communicate with the lawmaker who will attend the meeting and who they will be

representing prior to the meeting. Additionally, it's important to keep the meeting size manageable (one to five people, for example).

If your legislator prefers, offer to meet somewhere in their district. If they are willing, ask if you can meet somewhere convenient in town (possibly your home, a coffee house, or a casual restaurant).

PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING

Once you have scheduled a meeting with your legislator, take the time to do some research. You will be more comfortable and come across as credible and persuasive during the meeting. Here are some questions to research before your meeting:

- What is the legislator's background (i.e., birthplace, religion, previous career, education)?
- What issues are most important to the legislator (based on their background and current activities or on recent media stories, their social media followers, and groups they belong to)?
- On what committee(s) does the legislator serve?
- How might the legislator's position on this issue differ from your own and why?

Based on this information, which arguments can you use to best convince the legislator to support your position on the issue about which you are meeting? Have they taken a position on your issue or a similar issue in the past, and if so, can you use it as a way to give your issue deeper context and relevance to their past experience?

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ATTENDING THE MEETING

Be adaptable. Lawmakers, especially if you are meeting with them at their Statehouse office in Columbus, can be pulled in many directions on days when sessions and committees are occurring. Try to be flexible about interruptions and to keep the meeting flowing as best as possible. Also be prepared to summarize your main points in one to five minutes in case you end up meeting with a lawmaker's staff person or if you have less time than originally planned with the legislator.

Connect with the legislator. No matter how aligned you may be with a lawmaker's position on issues or politics, it is always best to connect on a personal level with a lawmaker. Be yourself, and share a piece of information or a story that will help you establish a rapport early on in your meeting. It could be useful to mention a common hobby, interest, or acquaintance. Be respectful throughout the meeting, even if you disagree.

Tell the truth. The best way to build a long-term relationship with your legislator is to establish yourself as a credible source of information about your issue. Be sure to provide accurate information during your meeting, and if you are asked a question and do not know the answer, be honest and promise to get back to them after you have found the answer (and be sure that you do).

Anticipate opposition. Consider what arguments the legislator might have already heard from your opponents, and be prepared to refute the opposition.

Leave something behind. Provide the legislator with written information that supports your arguments (i.e., a fact sheet about the issue or articles from your local newspaper).

Request action. Ask the legislator to take a specific action on your issue (i.e., will you vote for/against or co-sponsor this bill?) and be sure that they reply to your request before the end of the meeting.

MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD



PREPARE AND GIVE TESTIMONY

HOW TESTIMONY WORKS

The Ohio General Assembly makes many of its decisions regarding Ohio's environment based, in part, on testimony from the public. Public testimony becomes part of the official record for an issue and can send a strong message to decision-makers and the media about the public's position on a matter.

The Ohio General Assembly website—www.legislature.ohio.gov—can provide legislative schedules so that you know when a committee is meeting or when a voting session is coming up. Every committee chairperson has an email distribution list that you can request to join so that you receive direct communication from a committee chair's office regarding committee agendas, hearings on key bills you care about, and how to submit testimony. Testimony on bills is organized typically by proponent, opponent, and interested party. It is standard practice to require testimony to be submitted 24 hours in advance of a committee hearing.



WRITING TESTIMONY

Introduce yourself. Begin your testimony by offering your name and your profession (if appropriate). If you are representing an organization, briefly describe your group. Only one member of an organization should officially testify on behalf of the group. If others in the group wish to testify, they should do so as individuals.

Summarize. Before describing your position in detail, briefly describe the points that you will be making to give listeners an idea of what your testimony will cover.

Back it up. Provide brief, logical arguments as to why you are supporting a certain position on an issue. If you can tell a story about how the issue will affect you, your community, or your family, be sure to include that information. Also, try to include a few specific facts from reputable sources to back up your position.

Be courteous. After introducing yourself, thank your audience for the opportunity to submit testimony on the issue. Make sure that your testimony is polite, logical, and articulate throughout, and avoid personal attacks on individual lawmakers or confrontational language. Let the strength of your testimony come from the facts and your personal perspective that you present.

PREPARING TO TESTIFY

Although you can usually just submit written testimony on an issue, if you are able to deliver your testimony in person, it is recommended that you do so and present your statement orally. Oral testimony is far more powerful and persuasive than a written statement. Before you attend a public hearing, prepare by doing the following:

Confirm the details. Verify the date, time, and location of the meeting beforehand. Also find out which portion of the meeting will be dedicated to public comment and what time you must arrive if you want to speak. Ask about the time limit for testimony and practice to be sure that you will not be cut off.

Submit testimony on time with a witness slip. At the Statehouse, it is customary to require testimony be submitted 24 hours in advance, along with a witness form that will ask for your name, address, affiliation (if any), and position on the bill you wish to speak about. However, at local or regulatory hearings, the rules vary, and you may have to wait and sign up at the door or you may be required to sign up in advance. Be sure to investigate the specific rules in advance of the hearing to ensure you are able to share your testimony.

Rehearse your delivery. Practice your testimony out loud until it is smooth and fits within the time allotment. Consider what questions legislators might ask, and be prepared to answer them.

Point out alternatives. If you are opposing a bill or a plan, do not simply say why it is a bad idea. Whenever possible, try to include alternatives to bad proposals. This will help your testimony to be more positive and will show that you understand the issue and are reasonable.

Bring visuals. If you can, bring visual aids such as pictures, maps, etc., to strengthen your testimony.

Gather support. Check with friends, family members, and co-workers to see who can attend the hearing to support you. Make sure that the people you bring can be identified visually as supporting your position (for example, everyone can wear green buttons that say something like “Support SB ___”).

TESTIFYING

Relax and breathe. If you are nervous when you get up to speak, you do not have to start right away. Look at your notes and take a couple deep breaths before beginning.

Speak clearly and pause for emphasis. If you are nervous, you may speak more quickly than normal, which may cause you to stumble or confuse your audience. Make an effort to slow your speech, use short sentences, and pause for emphasis when you make key points.

Make eye contact. As you speak, be sure to look up from your notes as often as possible to make eye contact with whomever you are directing your comments.

Tell the truth. If a legislator asks you a question that you do not know how to answer, DO NOT make something up. Instead, say that you do not know and either offer to follow up or defer to another witness who may be able to answer. If you offer to follow up after the hearing, provide a response to the chairperson’s office for their records after the meeting.

Listen. Before and after you have testified, be sure to pay attention to what people are saying who hold a different position than you, as well as how the sponsor of the legislation describes what the bill will do. This will help you anticipate questions you may receive while testifying. You can look up archived committee hearings through www.ohiochannel.org and also watch live committee hearings in progress.





AMPLIFYING CALLS TO ACTION



WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor of your local newspaper are a great way to build public interest around an issue. Writing about pending legislation is one important way to get the attention of elected officials. Letters to the editor are fairly easy to get published if you follow the tips listed below.

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR LETTER

Find out how to send your letter. Many newspapers prefer to have letters to the editor emailed to them. Because some papers have a separate email account for letters to the editor, call or look on the newspaper’s website to confirm where you should send the letter.

Include contact information. Newspapers follow up with people who submit letters to the editor before printing the letters (to verify the identity of the author). Be sure to include your full name, address, and daytime phone number when submitting your letter.

Keep it brief. Most papers have a policy of only printing letters that are 200-300 words long. Try to focus on one major point in your letter. If you attempt to tackle too many issues in a single letter, your main point may be diluted or confusing.

Make it timely. Newspapers are most likely to print a letter that refers or responds to an issue that has been in the news lately, especially if it has appeared in their paper. If you are not responding to such an issue, try to find a way to relate your letter to a recent news topic to make it appear timely and relevant.

Back it up. Provide brief, logical arguments as to why you are supporting a certain position on an issue. Try to include specific facts and personal anecdotes whenever possible. If you’re including specific facts, be sure to provide links to the research. If you can tell a story about how the issue you are writing about will affect you or your family, be sure to include that information. The more personal your letter, the more likely it is to impact readers.

Make it local. Local newspapers typically focus on news and letters that will affect their readership. The more you can show that your issue will have a local impact, the more likely it is that the paper will print your letter.

Follow up. Email or call the newspaper and inquire about whether they received your letter and if they are considering publishing it. If they say that they are not interested, be sure to ask why and, if possible, make any suggested changes to your letter and re-submit it.

Pass it on. Send a copy of your letter to your state representative and senator and to the OEC. It is very helpful for the OEC to keep track of which letters are being written across the state. Also give copies of your letter to friends and family and ask them to use it as a sample from which to write their own letters.



ENGAGE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be an important tool to get friends and family involved on issues that you care about. You can play a role in motivating others to get involved. But remember, social media is not a replacement for face-to-face engagement. Social media is one of many important tools in the advocacy toolkit.

TIPS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Choose the right platform. Each social media platform has its own strengths. Instagram is great for sharing photos. Twitter is good for sharing short and to-the-point personal thoughts. Choosing the right platform to share your content (or tailoring your message to the strengths of your platform) will help your perspective get in front of more of your followers.

Ask why you are posting. Before posting on social media, consider what the point of your post is. There are many reasons to share your thoughts with your followers: raise awareness, ask for donations, rally supporters, drive outreach to legislators, and more. Knowing what you want to accomplish before you post can help you create better content for your followers.

Share your allies. Sharing posts from your allies in an effort can help their posts gain more views from their other followers. The algorithms on many platforms prioritize content with strong engagement. You can help spread messages more widely by sharing your allies' posts to boost their engagement.

Screenshot your opponents. When sharing content from the opposing side on an issue, think carefully about sharing their messages. If you share their post, it boosts their engagement. It can also cause the algorithm that chooses content to more widely display their post. If you need to share a post from an opponent, consider taking a screenshot of their post and uploading it as an image with your post. This allows you to capture what they are saying without boosting engagement on messages that you disagree with.

Make it personal. Just like elected officials, your friends and family are more likely to connect with your post if you share why an issue is important to you. Let your followers know why you're involved in this effort personally. Your story may inspire them to get involved.



ORGANIZE YOUR COMMUNITY

Bringing together folks in your community to discuss and act on important issues can be a key part of advocacy. Raising your community's concerns and taking action can push elected officials to make changes to laws and policies. Below are some ideas to consider when organizing your community.

Get involved. Being a part of groups throughout your community can help you in organizing on an issue. Your involvement may provide opportunities to raise tangible steps groups can take to make positive changes (like reducing waste at an event or helping an organization cut back on its carbon footprint). Local organizations often provide more frequent volunteer or involvement opportunities. Civic associations and area planning commissions can also be great ways to make change in your community.

Connect with other advocates. Building relationships with other leaders in your community can help you grow your advocacy efforts. Maybe there's someone already

working on this issue you could support. Or maybe a neighbor is concerned about the same problem you are. Strengthening ties in our community helps sustain the tough work of advocacy.

Host a conversation. Bringing together a group of friends or neighbors to discuss a challenge can be a great way to raise awareness. This is an opportunity to share information that others might not know. You could learn something new or hear about a connection a friend has that you didn't know existed. Having a get-together can help you realize just how much energy there is in your community to take action on the issue you're concerned about.

Bring a friend. You can invite friends and family to join you at events related to issues you care about. Your friend might not know the event is taking place. Or they may feel uncomfortable going alone. Reaching out with an invite helps strengthen your relationship and grow the movement.



CONTACT YOUR LAWMAKERS

You can check out these resources to find contact information for your elected officials at the state and federal levels.

STATE

Ohio Governor: www.governor.ohio.gov

Ohio Legislature Switchboard: 1-800-282-0253

Ohio State House: www.ohiohouse.gov

Ohio State Senate: www.ohiosenate.gov

FEDERAL

President of the United States: www.whitehouse.gov

U.S. Capitol Switchboard: 1-202-224-3121

U.S. Representatives: www.house.gov

U.S. Senators: www.senate.gov

The OEC is always happy to provide you with contact information for elected officials. Contact us at 614-487-7506 or OEC@theOEC.org.

SUPPORT THE OEC

You can help grow the efforts to protect our environment now and into the future. Make a donation today to help get more Ohioans involved in these critical advocacy efforts.

Your donation will help support our work at the Statehouse and across Ohio. Organizing communities, fighting bad legislation, and educating lawmakers and voters is hard work. Supporters like you make it happen. Thank you for supporting the OEC and making our advocacy work possible.

<https://theoec.salsalabs.org/AdvocacyToolkit>



NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
P A I D
COLUMBUS, OH
PERMIT NO. 1404

1145 Chesapeake Avenue, Suite I
Columbus, OH 43212

Address service requested

614-487-7506
OEC@theOEC.org
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This publication is printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

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Visit our website for the latest news about our collective efforts to secure healthy air, land, water, and democracy across the Buckeye State. Be sure to check out our events page for the latest advocacy trainings and Statehouse briefings!

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