



USING YOUR VOICE

A Guide to Citizen Engagement

Pinellas County, FL

Social Justice Group

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

HydeParkUMC.org

Version 7.0

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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 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

From the Boston Tea Party to the March on Washington, citizen engagement has always shaped the United States. 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 witness. 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 practice — not a finished product.

Founders on Engagement



“They who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.”
— Thomas Paine, 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 asked what kind of government had been created, Benjamin Franklin famously replied, “A Republic, if you can keep it.” It wasn’t a quip — it was a warning. Democracies endure only when people stay informed, involved, and willing to hold power accountable.

Your Voice, Your Power

You don’t 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 isn’t always loud — it’s 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 isn’t just a right; it’s 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.”

This guide is here to help you be that change — to equip you with tools, confidence, and inspiration to raise your voice, engage with your community, and help shape a more just, inclusive future for all.

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 I (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

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

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

District 5: Naya Young


 (813) 274-8189

 Naya.Young@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 I)

 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>

Hillsborough County Constitutional and Judicial Officers

Property Appraiser – Bob Henriquez


 (813) 272-6100


 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., 15th Floor, Tampa, FL 33602

 info@hcpafl.org

 <https://hcpafl.org/>


Sheriff – Chad Chronister

 (813) 247-8000

 2008 E. 8th Ave., Tampa, FL 33605

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

Supervisor of Elections – Craig Latimer


 (813) 744-5900


 2514 N. Falkenburg Rd., Tampa, FL 33619

 voter@votehillsborough.gov

 <https://www.votehillsborough.gov/>


Clerk of Court & Comptroller – Cindy Stuart


 (813) 276-8100

 419 Pierce St., Tampa, FL 33602

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


Tax Collector – Nancy C. Millan


 (813) 635-5200

 601 E. Kennedy Blvd., 14th Floor, Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.hillstaxfl.gov/>


State Attorney, 13th Judicial Circuit – Suzy Lopez

 (813) 272-5400

 419 N. Pierce St., Tampa, FL 33602

 <https://www.sao13th.com/>

Public Defender, 13th Judicial Circuit – Julianne Holt




 (813) 272-5980

 419 N. Pierce St., Tampa, FL 33602




 <https://www.pd13.state.fl.us/>

Florida Senate – Hillsborough County Delegation

District 14 – Brian Nathan

-  Tallahassee: (850) 487-5014
-  224 Senate Building, 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399
-  <https://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/s19>

District 16 – 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 (R)

-  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

 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: 205 Cannon 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/>

District 15 – Rep. Laurel Lee (R)

 Washington, D.C. Office: 1713 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515

 (202) 225-5626

 Brandon Office: 1104 N Parsons Ave., Brandon, FL 33510






 (813) 501-0565

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







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

District 16 – Rep. Vern Buchanan (R)

 Washington, D.C. Office: 2409 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515






 (202) 225-5015
 Valrico Office: 10461 Heritage Green Ave., Suite 101, Tampa, FL 33647
 (813) 657-1013
 <https://buchanan.house.gov/contact/>
 <https://buchanan.house.gov/>

District 18 – Rep. Scott Franklin (R)






 Washington, D.C. Office: 2426 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515
 (202) 225-1252
 Lakeland Office: 124 S Florida Ave., Suite 304, Lakeland, FL 33801
 (863) 644-8215
 <https://franklin.house.gov/contact/>
 <https://franklin.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 McElpatrick

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 – Naya Young

-  (813) 274-8189
-  Naya.Young@tampagov.net
-  315 E. Kennedy Blvd., City Hall, 3rd Floor, Tampa, FL 33602
-  <https://www.tampa.gov/city-council>




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) – Charles Boles

-  (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: Tracking Legislation in the Florida Legislature

Navigating the Florida House and Senate websites is essential for staying informed about the bills that shape our state. While these platforms can feel complex, they offer robust tools for tracking specific legislation, committees, and members.

Understanding "Companion" Bills

In Florida, a bill is rarely filed in isolation. Most significant legislation utilizes **companion bills**—identical or substantially similar bills introduced in both the House and Senate at the same time.

- **Why they exist:** This allows the policy to move through the committee process in both chambers simultaneously, increasing its chances of passing before the session ends.
 - **How they work:** If a House bill (HB) and a Senate bill (SB) are companions, they may eventually be swapped. For example, if the Senate passes its version first, it sends it to the House, which may "lay on the table" its own bill to take up the Senate version.
-

How to Track Bills in the Florida Senate (flsenate.gov)

The Senate uses a tool called **Senate Tracker** to provide real-time updates.

- **Registration:** Go to flsenate.gov and click "**Tracker**" in the top navigation bar. Select "**Create Account**" to register your email and set your notification frequency.
 - **Adding a Bill:** * Search for a bill using the "**Jump to Bill**" box or the "**Session**" menu.
 - Once on the bill's page, look for the **yellow sun icon**. Click it to turn it **red**, indicating the bill is now being tracked on your dashboard.
 - **Reports:** You can view the "**Companion Bill Report**" under the "**Session**" > "**Reports**" menu to see a list of all bills and their linked, identical, or similar counterparts.
-

How to Track Bills in the Florida House (myfloridahouse.gov)

The House uses the **Legislative Tracking System** for similar oversight.

- **Registration:** Visit myfloridahouse.gov and select "**Tracking**" from the top menu. Click "**New User?**" to create an account.
 - **Adding a Bill:** * After logging in, go to the "**Tracking**" tab.
 - Enter the specific bill number and click "**Add**" to place it on your dashboard.
 - You can also track specific **committees** or **members** to receive alerts whenever they take action or schedule meetings.
-

Pro-Tips for Citizens

- **Public Record Warning:** Under Florida law, any email address used to sign up for these tracking services may be subject to public records requests.
- **Check "Last Action":** The bill page for both chambers will always show the "**Last Action and Location**," telling you exactly which committee currently holds the bill.
- **Watch for Amendments:** Bills change constantly. Use the "**Amendments**" section on a bill's page to see proposed changes that may alter the original intent of the legislation.

Section 6: 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 7: Using Social Media to Advocate Effectively

Why Social Media Matters

Social media is one of the most powerful tools available to modern advocates. With a few taps, you can share your story, raise awareness, organize events, pressure decision-makers, and connect with others who care. It allows your voice to reach neighbors, media, and elected officials in real time.

“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 Platform

Each platform serves a different purpose. Use what feels natural and what best reaches your intended audience:

- **Facebook:** Long-form posts, community groups, and event organizing.
- **X:** Real-time engagement, tagging officials, and joining trending conversations.
- **Instagram:** Visual storytelling through photos and short videos.
- **TikTok:** Short-form video advocacy with high engagement potential.
- **LinkedIn:** Professional commentary and policy discussion.
- **Bluesky:** A growing alternative to X with a more community-oriented feel.

You do not need to be everywhere. It is better to use one or two platforms consistently than five inconsistently.

Bluesky Overview

Bluesky functions similarly to X, allowing short public posts, replies, and media sharing. It is smaller but growing quickly.

In my experience, Bluesky has a more constructive tone and makes community organizing easier. No platform is perfect, but many advocates appreciate the culture there.

Creating an account is straightforward:

- Download the app or visit the website.
- Register with an email address.
- Choose a username that protects your privacy.
- Select interests and follow suggested accounts.

Starter Packs make it easier to build a meaningful feed. These curated bundles allow you to follow groups of accounts focused on specific topics such as Florida politics or education.

Posts are limited to 300 characters and can include images or video. Use “@” to tag others. Remember: posts are public.

X Overview

X, formerly Twitter, remains a large and influential platform. It allows short text-based posts, replies, and media sharing.

Since its purchase in 2022, changes to its algorithm and policies have shifted the platform’s tone. It is still useful for contacting public officials and journalists directly, but users should exercise caution.

To create an account:

- Register through the app or website.
- Use an email instead of a phone number when possible.
- Choose a username that protects your identity.
- Follow accounts aligned with your interests.

Posts are limited to 280 characters unless you subscribe to X Premium. A paid subscription is not necessary for effective advocacy.

Be aware:

- The algorithm often amplifies paying users.
- Some viewpoints receive preferential visibility.
- Protect your personal information.

Use X strategically, not emotionally.

How to Advocate Effectively

Strong advocacy posts share four traits:

- **Clarity:** What is the issue?
- **Relevance:** Why does it matter?
- **Personal connection:** Stories resonate more than statistics.
- **Call to action:** Tell people what to do next.

Examples:

Facebook

I’ve lived in East Tampa for 22 years and flooding has never been this severe. We need stronger stormwater infrastructure. I’m urging the City Council to prioritize this in the next budget. Join me Tuesday.

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

Instagram

[Photo of broken sidewalk] This is where my daughter walks to school. It's unsafe. I'm speaking at the County meeting 6/10. Join me.

Bluesky

Our school cafeteria roof leaks. Officials say there is no funding. Public meeting Thursday. Let's show up.

Rules of the Road: Post Wisely, Post Safely

- Do not post in anger.
- Stick to the issue, not the person.
- Fact-check everything.
- Protect your privacy.
- Moderate comments when needed.
- Take breaks. Burnout is real.

Speaking with Grace and Conviction

As people of conscience and faith, we are called to be bold and compassionate. Speak truth. Remain grounded. Do not 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.” — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Conclusion

Social media can amplify your voice and your cause. It can also magnify mistakes. Use it intentionally. Lift others up. Speak with conviction. Be willing to listen, learn, and grow in public.

Section 8: 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 9: 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 10: 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.aclufll.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>



Common Cause

Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. We work to create open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest; promote equal rights, opportunity, and representation for all; and empower all people to make their voices heard in the political process.

Website: <https://www.commoncause.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 I I: 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.

Download this guide as a PDF, including versions for surrounding counties as they are available, and find other social justice resources:



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VOICES OF JUSTICE
USING 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