



# ACLU

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION  
of UTAH

## The ACLU of Utah's 2008 Guide on How to be a Citizen Lobbyist for Civil Liberties

The decisions made during the annual session of the Utah State Legislature have a lasting impact on our communities. As new laws are created and others repealed and rewritten, we try to ensure that these changes strengthen rather than compromise our constitutional rights. During each session, the ACLU of Utah addresses a wide range of issues, and our organizing and lobbying efforts are aimed at educating lawmakers and the public about the civil liberties implications of the proposed bills.

### These are the ACLU of Utah's priority issues for the 2008 legislative session:

**Election reform:** increase voter participation by enabling voters to register and vote on Election Day and eliminating the ability of individuals to file baseless challenges to voter eligibility;

**Reproductive rights:** provide pregnant women with information and resources about substance abuse treatment; protect the right of pregnant minors to make choices about substance abuse treatment;

**Privacy/Technology:** oppose the collection of DNA from citizens charged with Class B misdemeanor violations;

**Immigration:** protect the civil liberties and civil rights of all people, including newcomers and longtime legal resident immigrants;

**LGBT rights:** prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace; provide that adoptions be based on the best interest of the child rather than housing or marital status.



Utah State Capitol

### Included in this guide:

#### Understanding the Legislative Process

In Utah, the House holds 75 members, and the Senate holds 29 members. During the 45 day General Session, the legislature operates what is called an open legislative process where all committee action on bills and amendments is conducted in open session.

#### Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials

Letters and faxes are an extremely effective way of communicating with your elected officials. Many legislators believe that a letter represents not only the position of the writer but also many other constituents who did not take the time to write.

#### Tips for Meeting with Your Elected Officials

From your local city council to state legislators to your senators and representatives in Washington, meeting with your elected officials about civil liberties issues is a lot easier than most people think.

#### Tips on Writing Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are great advocacy tools. After you write letters to your members of Congress, sending letters to the editor can achieve other advocacy goals.

## Understanding the Legislative Process

Without a doubt, the most important tactic for monitoring the legislature is to understand how it works. In Utah, the House holds 75 members, and the Senate holds 29 members. The legislature meets for 45 days, this year from January 21 to March 5. During this time the legislature operates what is called an open legislative process where all committee action on bills and amendments is conducted in open session. This gives citizens the opportunity to attend committee meetings and House and Senate floor sessions. The bills are read three times in both the House and Senate.

The introduction of a bill is its first reading. Once a bill has been introduced in the House or Senate, it is referred to a Rules Committee. There a recommendation is made for standing committee assignment, and the presiding officer - President in the Senate, Speaker in the House - assigns the bill to the appropriate standing committee. Standing committees offer citizens the opportunity to listen to and comment on legislative issues. If a citizen is interested in a particular bill, they may contact the chair of a specific standing committee to schedule their testimony. They can also attend committee meetings and testify when the chair asks for comments from the public.

The standing committee chairman determines when a bill is to be scheduled for a hearing. In the House, acceptance of the standing committee report - rather than debate and vote - is considered the second reading of the bill. In the Senate, bills are debated and a vote is taken on the second reading. When a bill passes the second reading in either House or Senate, it is placed at the bottom of the third reading calendar and cannot be considered until the following day except under suspension of rules. The bill is then read a third time and debated before passage by a constitutional majority - 38 votes in the House and 15 votes in the Senate.

The bills are then sent to the Governor for signing or veto.

The best way to develop relationships with your elected officials is to call, write and visit with them. To set up a meeting with your official, you should first call them, explain your issue in simple and real terms, and request an opportunity to meet with them.

## Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials

Letters and faxes are an extremely effective way of communicating with your elected officials. Many legislators believe that a letter represents not only the position of the writer but also many other constituents who did not take the time to write.

These tips will increase the effectiveness of your letter:

**Keep it brief:** Letters should never be longer than one page, and should be limited to one issue. Legislative aides read many letters on many issues in a day, so your letter should be as concise as possible.

**State who you are and what you want up front:** In the first paragraph, tell your legislators that you are a constituent and identify the issue about which you are writing. If your letters pertains to a specific piece of legislation, it helps to identify it by its bill number (e.g. H.R. \_\_\_\_ or S. \_\_\_\_).

**Hit your three most important points:** Choose the three strongest points that will be most effective in persuading legislators to support your position and flesh them out.

**Personalize your letter:** Tell your elected official why this legislation matters in his/her community or state. If you have one, include a personal story that shows how this issue affects you and your family. A constituent's personal story can be very persuasive as your legislator shapes his or her position.

**Personalize your relationship:** Have you ever voted for this elected official? Have you ever contributed time or money to his or her campaign? Are you familiar with her through any business or personal relationship? If so, tell your elected official or his staff person. The closer your legislator feels to you, the more powerful your argument is likely to be.

**You are the expert:** Remember that your legislator's job is to represent you. You should be courteous and to the point, but don't be afraid to take a firm position. Remember that often your elected official may know no more about a given issue than you do.

## Tips for Meeting with Your Elected Officials

From your local city council to state legislators to your senators and representatives in Washington, meeting with your elected officials about civil liberties issues is a lot easier than most people think. Remember, they work for you!

What is a lobby visit? A lobby visit is merely a meeting for you to tell your elected representative what you think about a certain issue or bill, and to try to get him or her to take action on that issue.

### Requesting Your Meeting

- Make your request in writing and follow up with a call to the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler.
- Suggest specific times and dates for your meeting.
- Let them know what issue and legislation (by bill number, if it has one) you wish to discuss.
- Make sure they know that you are a constituent.
- Prepare for your meeting

**Call or email the ACLU for materials.** We might have information to help you decide on your talking points, as well as materials that you can leave with your elected official.

**Decide who will attend the meeting.** Bringing more than four or five people can be hard to manage. Keep it small, but bring people who represent different groups that have an interest in the legislation like doctors, veterans, religious leaders, school board members, etc.

**Agree on talking points.** It's tough to make a strong case for your position when you are disagreeing in the meeting! If a point is causing tension in the group, leave it out.

**Plan your meeting.** People can get nervous in a meeting, and time is limited. Be sure that you plan out the meeting in advance, including who will start the conversation.

**Decide what you want achieve.** What is it you want your elected official to do - vote for or against the bill? Make a commitment to introduce or co-sponsor legislation? Asking your legislator or his or her staff member to do something specific will help you know how successful your visit has been!

### During the Meeting

**Be prompt and patient.** Elected officials run on very tight schedules. Be sure to show up on time for your appointment, and be patient - it is not uncommon for legislators to be late or to have your meeting interrupted by other business.

**Keep it short and focused.** You will have twenty minutes or less with a staff person, and as little as ten minutes if you meet with your elected official. Make the most of that brief time by sticking to your topic.

**Bring up any personal, professional or political connections to the elected official that you may have.** Start the meeting by introducing yourselves and thanking the legislator for any votes he or she has made in support of your issues, and for taking the time to meet with you.

**Stick to your talking points.** Stay on topic, and support them with no more than five pages of materials that you can leave with your elected official.

**Provide personal and local examples of the impact of the legislation.** This is the most important thing you can do in a lobby visit.

**Saying "I don't know" can be a smart political move.** You need not be an expert on the topic you are discussing. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is fine to tell your legislator that you will get that information for him or her. This gives you the chance to put your strongest arguments into their files, and allows you to contact them again about the issue. Never make up an answer to a question - giving wrong or inaccurate information can seriously damage your credibility.

**Set deadlines for a response.** Often, if an elected official hasn't taken a position on legislation, they will not commit to one in the middle of a meeting. If he or she has to think about it, or if you are meeting with a staff member, ask when you should check back to find out what your legislator intends to do about your request.

## After the Meeting

Right after the meeting, compare notes with everyone in your group to compare what the elected official committed to do and what follow up information you committed to send.

Each person who took part in the meeting should promptly send a personal thank you letter to the elected official.

Follow up in a timely fashion with any requested materials and information.

If the elected official or staff member doesn't meet the deadline for action you agreed to during the meeting, ask him or her to set another deadline. Be persistent and flexible!

Let the ACLU of Utah know what you learned during your meeting by sending an e-mail to [aclu@acluutah.org](mailto:aclu@acluutah.org) Knowing what arguments your elected official used, what issues are important to him or her, and what positions he or she took will help us make our lobbying strategy more effective!

Remember that a personal meeting with your elected official is one of the best opportunities to demonstrate that there is a constituency for civil liberties in your district.

### About the ACLU of Utah

Founded in 1920, the American Civil Liberties Union is a nationwide, nonpartisan organization dedicated to working in the courts, legislatures, and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to all people in this country by both the Constitution and the laws of the United States.

The ACLU of Utah was chartered in 1958 to work on constitutional issues that are pertinent to those living in this state. Our priorities include freedom of speech, expression, and association; freedom of religion, including the separation of church and state; the right to privacy; safe prison and jail conditions; and equal protection and due process of the laws.

#### Contact Information

355 North 300 West  
Salt Lake City, UT 84103  
Phone: (801) 521-9862  
Fax: (801) 532-2850  
[aclu@acluutah.org](mailto:aclu@acluutah.org)  
[www.acluutah.org](http://www.acluutah.org)

## Tips on Writing Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are great advocacy tools. After you write letters to your elected official, sending letters to the editor can achieve other advocacy goals because they: reach a large audience; are often monitored by elected officials; can bring up information not addressed in a news article; create an impression of widespread support for or opposition to an issue.

**Keep it short and on one subject.** Many newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters and have limited space to publish them. Keeping your letter brief will help assure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper. Use the "Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials" as a guide.

**Make it legible.** Your letter doesn't have to be fancy, but you should use a typewriter or computer word processor if your handwriting is difficult to read.

**Send letters to weekly community newspapers too.** The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the easier it is to get your letter printed.

**Be sure to include your contact information.** Many newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify his or her identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information, and will usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.

**Make references to the newspaper.** While some papers print general commentary, many will only print letters that refer to a specific article. Here are some examples of easy ways to refer to articles in your opening sentence:

- I was disappointed to see that The Post's May 18 editorial "School Vouchers Are Right On" omitted some of the key facts in the debate.
- I strongly disagree with [author's name] narrow view on women's reproductive rights. ("Name of Op-Ed," date)
- I am deeply saddened to read that Congressman Doe is working to roll back affirmative action. ("Title of Article," date)

**Salt Lake Tribune Public Forum**, PO Box 867, SLC, UT, 84110 Fax (801) 257-8525 [letters@sltrib.com](mailto:letters@sltrib.com).

**Deseret News Readers' Forum**, PO Box 1257, SLC, UT, 84110 Fax (801) 237-2530 [letters@desnews.com](mailto:letters@desnews.com)

**Ogden Standard Examiner**, PO Box 12790, Ogden, UT 84412 Fax (801) 625-4508 [letters@standard.net](mailto:letters@standard.net)