

Advocacy 101 Toolkit

Purpose/Goal Statement

ED-RED's mission statement directs us to be an advocacy organization representing suburban public school districts in Cook and Lakes counties. Our members include over 80 public school districts, intermediate service centers and special education cooperatives. The foundation of our advocacy efforts relies on ED-RED staff's relationships and regular access to ED-RED local and state legislators. There are times, however, when we need to activate our membership through action alerts to take action to advocate for or against proposed legislative and policy initiatives.

There is power in numbers so when you too reach out to your legislators they listen and weigh their decisions. Keep in mind that action alerts will not happen often, therefore, we ask that everyone act on them when they are sent out. It is essential for legislators to not only hear from ED-RED staff, but also from the district administrators and school board members of ED-RED districts.

Action alerts will include the necessary details for the specific legislative proposals that ED-RED is advocating for or against. Below is an outline of what tools will be provided in future action alerts.

Action Alerts Toolkit Contents

1. Contacting Local Legislators
 - a. Calling my local legislators
 - b. Emailing my local legislators
 - c. Writing a letter to my local legislators
 - d. Meeting with my local legislators
2. Letter to the Editor
3. File a Witness Slip
4. Testify in Committee
5. Using Social Media

Contacting Local Legislators

Objective: Successful outreach to local legislators.

When interacting with legislators there are a couple of things to keep in mind to make sure your encounter is impactful, and your message gets across.

1. Make sure your message is direct, concise, informative, inquiring, factual, constructive, specific, helpful, appreciative.
2. Remember to end all communication courteously.

Below you will find tips and samples for contacting legislators as well as other forms of taking action to ensure our collective voice is heard.

To find your legislators contact information visit our Resource page by logging into your ED-RED account.

- **Calling my local legislators**

Calls to your local legislator should follow the same framework of being clear and concise. Include your name, title, and the district you represent. State your support or opposition for the legislation so that it may be recorded for the legislator.

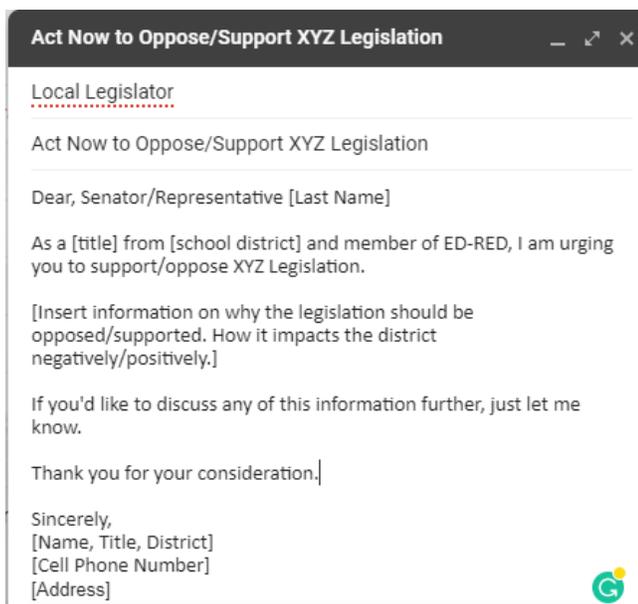
Sample Opening Statement for a Phone Call or Message:

"Hello, my name is Jane Doe. I'm a school board member/district administrator (and parent?) for district xx in the legislator's district. I am concerned about school funding and I strongly urge the [representative/senator] to please vote for funding for our schools. I'd be happy to discuss this issue with you further, if you like. I can be reached at xxx-xxxx. Thank you for all that you do for our schools.

- **Emailing my local legislators**

Emails to legislators should be direct and concise. It should include what action you would like the legislator to take and how this legislation will negatively or positively impact the district. Remember to be clear, stick to the facts and be respectful.

Sample outline of an email:





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- **Writing a letter to my local legislators**

Letters directed to legislators should be formatted more formally and should remain one-page. Letters should include the following:

- Three paragraphs and should remain personal throughout.
 - The first paragraph is where you should establish who you are and your role with the school district in the legislator’s district. You should also concisely state the issue/bill you are reaching out about.
 - The second paragraph should include factual information as justification for why you are in support or opposed the measure.
 - The third and final paragraph should include what you want the legislator to do and how they can reach you to respond. Remember to make the message clear and concise.

Sample outline of a letter to a legislator:

[DATE]

[Name: First Last]

[Title]

[District]

[District Address]

The Honorable [Legislators First & Last Name]

Illinois General Assembly

[Address]

Dear [Senator/Representative {Last Name}]:

Paragraph 1: State your relationship to the legislator (i.e. constituent/superintendent/school board member from their district). Introduce the issue you are reaching out about and your position (support or oppose).

Paragraph 2: Be factual in your support/opposition and give justification.

Paragraph 3: Be specific about what your want from the legislator. Remain personal throughout the letter (i.e. using “I urge”). Lastly, request a response if you need one.

Sincerely,

[First Last Name]

[Title]

- **Meeting with my local legislators**

A great way to strengthen your relationship with local elected officials is by meeting with them in person or virtually (during COVID times) prior to asking them to vote for or against a bill. These informal meetings can be to discuss a specific topic or just a meet and greet so that the legislator can get to know you and your role in the school district. Setting up a meeting can be as simple as asking ED-RED to



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facilitate a meeting or calling their district office. If you would like to set up a meeting please reach out to us at shartwick@ed-red.org or arabed@ed-red.org.

- **Write an Op-ed/letter to the editor**

Another tool that can be used when advocating in support or opposition of legislation is submitting a letter to the editor or Op-ed. This tool allows districts to tell their story and inform not only elected officials but also the community. This strategy is extremely useful in educating and engaging the community on an issue/bill and can be extremely helpful in persuading legislators to act in support or opposition of a bill by applying community pressure.

Keep the following in mind when drafting your letter.

1. Be professional and identify yourself
 - a. Language should be polite, but persuasive. Be sure to include your qualifications for your expertise on the issue. Make sure to sign the letter and include contact information including an address and phone number.
2. Keep it brief and concise
 - a. Try to keep your letter to about 200-250 words. Keep your argument simple and the letter short.
3. Relate it to the readership
 - a. Make sure you relate the issue to the readership of the publication you submit it to. This includes local facts and local references.
4. Call to action
 - a. End the letter by asking the readers to act (i.e. reaching out to their local elected officials).

Sample outline of a letter to the editor/op-ed:

[Date]

[Name of Media Outlet/Publication]
 Attention: [Editor's name]
 [Address of Media Outlet]

Dear [Name of editor]:

State your reason for writing to the media outlet. If you are responding to an article, make sure to reference it.

State your case and make sure to include facts, references, and research to establish credibility. Mention your expertise on the issue. This section can be one to two paragraphs, but be mindful of the length.

Conclude with your call to action for the readership. Include a strong and positive statement in support of your case.

Sincerely,

[Your signature]

[Your Name]
 [Title]
 [Organization]
 [Phone Number]
 [Email]

- **How to file a witness slip**

1. Visit the my.ilga.gov webpage.
2. If you have an account log on, if you do not, register for an account and fill out the profile information.
3. Once you log on, you can view the House or Senate scheduled Committee Hearings on the left tab. Use the tab to find the hearing you would like to file a witness slip for.
4. Under Committee Hearing details there is a “Create a Witness Slip” option, click on that to start the process of filing a slip.
5. A page with your profile information should display. You can edit this information at any time, if needed.
6. Complete the Position and Testimony fields.
7. Once you are finish, click “Create (Slip).”
8. Once your witness slip has been submitted a confirmation screen will display and a confirmation email will be sent.
9. Additionally, you have the ability to manage your submitted witness slips on the side bar under MyILGA → Manage Slips.

Login to access more detailed instructions on how to file a witness slip on our Resources page.

- **Testifying 101**

During session ED-RED is often invited to testify at a Committee Hearing. There are times when members of ED-RED may be invited to testify in front of a committee so that you can share your knowledge and experience with legislators. Testifying is an essential part in the process of advocacy because it allows legislators hear directly from districts and communities impacted by the proposed legislation. Committee hearings are held both during and after session in either Springfield or downtown Chicago.



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- **Social Media Post**

Social media allows us to connect and communicate with the world instantly. It is a simple yet extremely powerful tool that we all have at our fingertips. Therefore, during legislative or veto session to call attention to a bill or further engage our members and/or legislators, we will be utilizing our social media accounts (find us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube). Engagement with our districts includes retweeting, mentioning, using our #hashtag (i.e. #EDREDNOW), and/or engaging on an online conversation. We look forward to launching our tech advocacy this upcoming session.

