

## What can one person do? 30 action steps



People often ask where they can start and what they can do to be advocates for change in Alabama. Here are some practical ideas from Alabama Arise:

**1. Understand: Advocacy has an important place alongside charity.** Writing a \$50 check to a local program or an international relief effort can benefit people in need. Writing a letter to an elected official can help leverage millions of dollars to help people in need. We can be good stewards of our gifts of money – and also good stewards of our gift of citizenship. As an example: One church’s mission committee gave members grocery sacks, with an envelope, paper and information on a hunger issue paper-clipped to them. They asked people to take two actions: Bring back the grocery sack filled with cans, and write a letter to a lawmaker to support good public policy.

**2. To influence a legislator, phone calls and letters are the most effective form of communication.** The rule of thumb is this: Lawmakers assume that the amount of time you spend indicates how much you care about the issue. Taking a few minutes to write a note or personalize an email shows more interest than taking 10 seconds to sign a form letter. (Note: There may be other reasons to run petition campaigns, so don’t write them off entirely!)

**3. If possible, ask for a specific action on specific legislation.** It’s not usually effective to say, “Please do something to help homeless families.” Legislators may talk a good line about their concern for people in need, but it’s harder to dodge a specific request, such as, “Please vote for House Bill 212 when it comes before the Commerce Committee.”

**4. Join an organized group.** Advocacy groups decide on issue targets and then organize people to achieve a win. When their newsletter or website educates you about an issue, you can get more out of news coverage of that issue – and advocate more effectively for change.

**5. Letters to the editor are an effective tool.** Not only can you help to educate the public on an issue, you also may catch the attention of your lawmakers – especially if you name them in the letter.

Also, when you read an especially good op-ed (or letter to the editor or article), email it or clip it and send it to your legislator. This shows there’s a constituency for that point of view.

**6. Invite a speaker.** Groups like Arise have organizers whose job is to help get people started in advocacy. Arrange for a speaker for your organization, your committee or your Sunday School class – or set up a special online session. We’re happy to help!

**7. Attend a legislative day.** Some advocacy groups have annual legislative days when scores of constituents gather at the State House to visit their legislators. The Arise Legislative Day includes an issue briefing so participants can make their case to legislators persuasively and concisely. There is often time to sit in the gallery and observe the legislative process, which can be illuminating. (Hearing the arguments that some lawmakers make, you may realize you know

an issue better than they do!) It may be possible for more people to attend legislative days now since the pandemic has caused us to use both in-person and virtual formats.

**8. Greet your lawmaker in the street.** It's not always necessary to greet your legislator with an issue in your mind. Effective lobbyists know it's all about relationships.

**9. Engage in advocacy on social media.** You can keep up with issues by liking Arise and other advocacy groups on Facebook and following us on Twitter and Instagram. Many legislators also engage with constituents on various social media outlets.

**10. Find natural allies.** Good organizing starts with your strengths, so it's OK to "preach to the choir" – that is, to start with people who already sympathize and build from there. Share information about the issue and the advocacy organization. We need to spread the word about Alabama's advocacy groups and the best sources of information.

**11. Share issue information with your minister/priest/rabbi,** especially if they are not familiar with the organization. They may be looking for examples of root causes of poverty.

**12. Set up an email list** so you can share urgent action alerts. Your email program probably has a way to define a group so you can get the alerts out quickly. Listservs are another option.

**13. Invite your legislator to meet with a group.** This makes sense if you have a number of people who care about an issue and have done their homework.

**14. Make telephone calls about your event along with written invitations.** A mailing or email doesn't produce the same turnout unless the group is highly committed. A person who is willing to phone people is a prize organizer.

**15. An Arise listening session is a good way to involve new people.** Invite an Arise organizer to a meeting of existing and prospective Arise members, either in person or virtually. The opportunity to share thoughts and concerns can be an appealing way to get people fired up and active.

**16. Help people determine who their state representative and senator are.** A single congregation in a city can have members from a dozen districts. You can find a person's district using Arise's look-up tool at [alarise.salsalabs.org/contactelectedofficials](http://alarise.salsalabs.org/contactelectedofficials).

**17. Brainstorm who else should be involved.** Come up with a list of local groups and congregations you know. Introduce them to Arise or other advocacy groups.

**18. Rehearse for your meeting with a legislator.** Decide who will make which points, and make them concisely. Try to anticipate your legislator's concerns and how to respond to them.

**19. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."** You have the right and responsibility to participate in our democracy. You don't have to be an expert ... but you should do your homework. And don't be intimidated: You're likely to know more about some issues than your legislators!

**20. Tell your story and help find others to tell theirs.** Stories help people connect. Personalize the issue – don't just quote numbers! And help find real-world stories of people affected by the issue. Advocacy groups need people who are willing to tell their stories to reporters and legislators.

**21. Help spread the word about coming events.** Be the person who knows about good opportunities and lets other people know. Better yet, each member of your group can volunteer to track an issue so you can cover even more territory.

**22. Bring the food for an event.** Relationship-building is an important part of organizing, and cookie bakers are highly valued!

**23. Remember: Furniture matters.** A group that is too informal may get down to business if they meet around a table. A task-oriented group that needs to build relationships may need to sit on sofas and chairs in someone's den. Make sure the room setup is conducive to what you're trying to do.

**24. Join an email list.** Several Alabama advocacy groups can keep you informed by email. Sign up for Arise's action alerts and Daily News Digest list at [alarise.org](http://alarise.org).

**25. Recruit an advocacy accountability buddy.** Many of us intend to make that phone call or send that email, but we put it off. The idea of the action accountability buddy is that after an action alert comes, you check with each other to confirm that you both have called or written promptly.

**26. Find out if your statewide faith community is in partnership with advocacy groups.** Sometimes a local congregation isn't aware that the bishop is involved, or that the diocese has joined an advocacy effort. Several state leaders are getting their faith communities more involved. Urge yours to get more involved, too!

**27. Launch an effort to get your congregation or group to join Arise** and other advocacy groups. Some congregations welcome coffee-hour letter-writing; others will schedule a special program. Ask our staff for advice.

**28. Donate money to advocacy work.** Think of it as an investment in a better quality of life for people in Alabama. Your financial support of advocacy work can help leverage multimillion-dollar changes in public policy. Please include Arise and other advocacy groups in your giving mix.

**29. VOTE!** Voting is a very important way to make your voice heard. It is your opportunity to choose your elected officials. Find out where candidates stand on the issues that matter to you, and vote your conscience.

**30. Encourage others to vote.** Be sure your eligible friends and family are registered and vote as well. This will help them make their voices heard in the policymaking process.

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