

Advocacy Guide






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WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

At its heart, advocacy is the act of championing a cause—standing up for what you or others believe in. It is not just a belief, but an action. Advocacy involves building support for an issue, policy, or proposal, and it can take many forms across a range of fields and communities. While it can be complex, there are a few key elements that shape effective advocacy.



IDENTIFYING THE CAUSE

Every advocacy effort begins with a cause or issue. What are you standing for—or against? Advocacy can be both proactive, working to advance a cause before challenges arise, or reactive, responding to harmful policies or narratives after they've taken root. A vital part of this work is education. By fostering relationships with stakeholders early, you may be able to prevent damaging legislation or rhetoric from ever gaining traction. That said, not all advocacy happens on the front end—sometimes, it must occur after decisions have already been made, requiring a different approach and strategy.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE



Once you've defined your issue, it's important to identify the key players: Who holds influence? Who are your opponents, and who might be open to change?

Much advocacy work centers on state governments, but city councils, school boards, and other local or institutional bodies also shape policy. Understanding which individuals or groups are involved—and who is most receptive—can greatly strengthen your efforts.



FINDING ALLIES

You are rarely alone in your mission. Seek out others who share your concerns, whether in your immediate community or in broader networks. Building coalitions not only amplifies your voice but also brings diverse strengths, perspectives, and resources to your cause. Advocacy is always more powerful when it's collective.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?



DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

With your issue defined, your stakeholders identified, and your allies assembled, it's time to craft a plan.

Advocacy without strategy often loses momentum. It requires persistence, preparation, and follow-through. Your initial meeting with a legislator or decision-maker might not even touch on your core issue—instead, focus on building trust. Establish a rapport, set a timeline for follow-up, and assign roles within your team based on strengths and relationships. Strategic, sustained engagement is the foundation of meaningful change.



WHY SHOULD I CARE?



DEMOCRACY CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT YOUR VOICE

Now more than ever, it is vital for every citizen to be heard. When voices go unspoken, needs go unmet. If our elected leaders are unaware of the experiences and realities of Oklahoma's Muslim community, they are far more likely to pass policies that harm rather than help. In recent years, we've witnessed a troubling rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes and a wave of legislation at every level that threatens the rights of American Muslims. This moment demands action. Your voice matters—because silence allows injustice to grow unchecked.

IF YOU DON'T USE YOUR VOICE, YOU RISK LOSING IT



There is a growing tide of legislation that undermines the very foundations of our civil liberties: our right to free speech, to worship freely, and to vote without barriers. Many of these efforts violate the Constitution and threaten the core values of democracy.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?



IF YOU DON'T USE YOUR VOICE, YOU RISK LOSING IT

Justice is not passive—it requires people to speak out, organize, and challenge injustice wherever it appears. When you stand up for what matters, you are not only defending your own rights but contributing to a more just and compassionate society for all: the elderly, the poor, children, people of color, and every marginalized community that calls Oklahoma home.

FAITH COMMANDS US TO SEEK JUSTICE



The Qur'an reminds us: "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah and be just witnesses, and let not the hatred of others prevent you from being just..." (Al-Ma'idah 5:8).

Justice is a core pillar of our faith. Even when it is difficult, even when it is frightening, we are called to be active participants in our communities.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?



WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER

The Muslim community in Oklahoma is nearly 40,000 strong. In many local elections, races have been decided by just a handful of votes—sometimes fewer than 25. Imagine the power of a unified Muslim voting bloc committed to showing up, speaking out, and participating fully in civic life. Our strength lies not only in our numbers but in our solidarity. When we work together—across mosques, cities, and cultures—we become an undeniable force for change.

REPRESENTATION SHAPES THE FUTURE



Our elected leadership should reflect the true diversity of Oklahoma—but too often, it does not. The Muslim community is among the most diverse in the state, encompassing people of many nations, races, and even Native American tribes. And yet, this richness is rarely seen in the halls of power.

HOW CAN I ADVOCATE?



IDENTIFY

Begin by learning who represents you. Knowing your state and local elected officials is the foundation of effective advocacy.

YOU CAN FIND YOUR DISTRICT INFO & MORE HERE

Legislators are far more likely to prioritize meetings with their own constituents. It's also important to research which legislative committees your officials serve on—many issues are decided in committee long before they reach a floor vote. If your legislator doesn't sit on a relevant committee, consider reaching out to one who does.

Review their voting history and public statements. An official may be personable in meetings, but their record tells the real story. Are they present at committee hearings? Do they vote in alignment with your concerns? Accountability starts with awareness—so do your homework before initiating contact.

HOW CAN I ADVOCATE?

DEFINE



Before reaching out, get clear on your goal. What are you asking for? Are you requesting a vote? Support for a bill? A meeting to open dialogue? Define your objective early, and be prepared to communicate it succinctly—elected officials often have very limited time.

Personal stories are powerful. Legislators hear from experts all the time, but what sticks with them are the human experiences behind the policies. If you don't have a personal story to share, prepare a brief list of clear, compelling reasons you care about the issue.

If you're attending as a group, plan in advance who will speak and what points each person will cover to avoid overlap or confusion.

If you're advocating for a specific bill, review the most current version via the Oklahoma Legislature's Bill Search at oklegislature.gov under the "Legislation" tab, and prepare talking points. Keep them short, accurate, and direct.

HOW CAN I ADVOCATE?



PREPARE

For yourself: Bring materials for reference—this might include statistics, the legislator’s voting record, or copies of the bill in question.

To leave behind: Create a one-pager—a concise, well-organized handout summarizing your key points, relevant facts, and contact information. Lawmakers and their staff are more likely to read one thoughtful page than a thick packet. Include your name and how to reach you, and send a follow-up after your meeting.

PLAN



The assistant or scheduler in an elected official’s office is your most important contact—they manage the calendar.

If you don’t hear back after emailing, follow up with a phone call. Be flexible: your meeting may last 30 minutes or just a few minutes in passing. Make every second count.

HOW CAN I ADVOCATE?



PLAN

Prioritize connection over content. Legislators won't remember every statistic, but they will remember a shared interest, a moment of humor, or the sincerity of your story. Advocacy is as much about relationship-building as it is about persuasion.

CONDUCT



If asked a question you can't answer, say so honestly and commit to following up. Never guess or provide incorrect information—credibility is everything. If a legislator responds, "I support this, but not enough people care," help mobilize support. Rally friends to write letters, make calls, or visit. If they say, "It's too expensive," ask for their ideas on alternative solutions—keep the dialogue open.



HOW CAN I ADVOCATE?



CONDUCT

Advocacy isn't arguing. It's about clarity, compassion, and persistence. Be firm, but respectful. If a legislator says they can't help, ask who else you should contact. Take notes on the meeting, including names of staffers, commitments made, and next steps.

FOLLOW UP



Regardless of how the meeting goes, send a thank-you card. Include the staffers who supported your visit—they matter more than you might realize. Follow up on any promises you made—send that article, data point, or additional information. Keep track of the issue's progress and re-engage when needed. Strong advocacy is built on relationships. Invite legislators and their staff to visit your mosque, attend a community event, or meet with your group again. These bridges of understanding are what turn one-time meetings into long-term partnerships.

HOW (AND WHY) TO TRACK A BILL

The legislative process can often feel overwhelming—full of complex procedures, evolving language, and countless steps. Fortunately, advocacy organizations like CAIR-OK are here to help you understand, follow, and take action on the legislation that matters most to you.

If there's an issue you're passionate about—whether it's education, civil rights, public health, or beyond—seek out a nonprofit, advocacy organization, or lobbying group already working in that space. These groups are invaluable resources. They can guide you on where your voice is most needed and how to get involved effectively.



HOW (AND WHY) TO TRACK A BILL



UNDERSTANDING THE BILL PROCESS

When a bill is introduced, it is assigned a bill number—this number becomes your primary tool for tracking its journey through the legislature. Each bill has at least one author (or sponsor) who drafts and submits it for consideration. From there, the bill may pass through multiple committees, face amendments, and undergo votes in both chambers (the House and Senate).

You can search for specific bills on the Oklahoma Legislature's Bill Search page at oklegislature.gov under the “Legislation” tab. You can search by:

- Bill number
- Author
- Subject
- Committee

As a bill progresses, it changes form:

- Introduced: The original version submitted.
- Engrossed: The version that has passed one chamber.
- Enrolled: The final version, approved by both chambers.

HOW (AND WHY) TO TRACK A BILL

UNDERSTANDING THE BILL PROCESS



Staying current is essential. Bills often go through significant edits and amendments during debate. Always check the most recent version before meeting with a legislator, so your advocacy is based on accurate, up-to-date information.



STEP 1: IDENTIFY

Start with research. Locate the bill text and identify its central issues—what rights or communities might be protected or harmed? Then, determine which committee will hear the bill and whether it will advance to the floor for a broader vote. Committees play a major role in shaping legislation—sometimes even halting it entirely. Reach out to the bill’s author, and consider contacting members of the relevant committee. The chair and vice-chair of a committee are especially influential.

HOW (AND WHY) TO TRACK A BILL

STEP 2: DEFINE



Once you know whom to contact, clarify what you hope to accomplish. Dig into the details—what, specifically, are you asking?

- Do you want a vote for or against the bill?
- Are you asking them to speak out or co-sponsor legislation?
- Is your meeting intended to inform them and lay the groundwork for future collaboration?

Whenever possible, include personal stories or community testimonies. Real-life examples highlight the human impact of policy far more effectively than abstract talking points. The more clearly you define your concerns and your ask, the more powerful your advocacy becomes.



HOW (AND WHY) TO TRACK A BILL



PLAN & CONDUCT

Once your meeting is scheduled, arrive early—especially if it’s at the Capitol—to allow time for security checks and navigating the building. When you arrive, locate the legislator’s office and introduce yourself to the assistant or scheduler.

These staffers are integral to the legislative process, and it’s always a good idea to offer them a copy of your informational materials as well.

During the meeting, stay calm and focused. Take notes, listen actively, and remain respectful—even if there are points of disagreement. Emphasize personal stories or lived experiences that help illustrate why the issue matters.

If you know individuals in the community who are directly impacted, offer to help the legislator’s office connect with them. Humanizing the issue can be far more persuasive than facts alone.

HOW (AND WHY) TO TRACK A BILL

FOLLOW UP



If your meeting felt rushed or incomplete, don't worry—what matters is that you started the conversation. Follow up with a thank-you note to the legislator and their staff, and let them know you plan to stay engaged.

Schedule a follow-up meeting if needed, and consider bringing an ally to help reinforce your message. Advocacy takes time; most first meetings won't yield immediate results, but they lay the groundwork for future progress.

Connect with others working on the same issue. There is strength in numbers—whether showing up to meetings or simply sharing knowledge and support.



LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Advocacy matters at every level, but understanding how your state and local governments function is key to making your voice count.



OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE

Oklahoma's Legislature is made up of two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Legislators are elected by districts, which are redrawn every 10 years after the U.S. Census. Your representative and senator are determined by the address where you're registered to vote.

State legislators are responsible for:

- Drafting, debating, and passing laws
- Approving or rejecting the Governor's cabinet appointments
- Providing oversight to state agencies
- Balancing the state budget

Once laws are passed by the legislature, they go to the Governor—currently Kevin Stitt—who can sign them into law or veto them.

LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

THE HOUSE



The Oklahoma Legislature is bicameral, comprising the House of Representatives and the Senate. Legislators are elected from districts redrawn every 10 years following the U.S. Census.

- Total Members: 101
- Party Composition: 81 Republicans, 20 Democrats
- Term Length: 2 years; all seats are up for election every two years
- Leadership:
 - Speaker: Kyle Hilbert (R-District 29)
 - Speaker Pro Tempore: Anthony Moore (R-District 57)

The House is responsible for introducing legislation, overseeing state agencies, and crafting the state budget.



LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT



THE SENATE

- Total Members: 48
- Party Composition: 40 Republicans, 8 Democrats
- Term Length: 4 years; elections are staggered so that half the seats are contested every two years
- Leadership:
 - President Pro Tempore: Lonnie Paxton (R-District 23)
 - Majority Leader: Julie Daniels (R-District 29)

The Senate collaborates with the House to pass legislation, confirm gubernatorial appointments, and oversee state operations.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION



Oklahoma's regular legislative session begins at noon on the first Monday in February and must end by 5:00 p.m. on the last Friday in May.

During session, legislators are typically at the Capitol Monday through Thursday, returning to their home districts on Fridays.

LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT



LEGISLATIVE SESSION

This is when most lawmaking occurs—bills are introduced, debated, amended, and voted on.

After session ends, legislators continue working: meeting with constituents, researching issues, and preparing for the next session.

The Governor may also call Special Sessions if urgent issues—like the state budget—require further debate.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT



While CAIR Oklahoma serves the entire state, we know not everything happens at the Capitol. Many key decisions that shape our daily lives are made by local elected officials, including:

- School Boards
- City Councils
- County Commissioners
- Police Chiefs
- Mayors
- Judges & District Attorneys
- Zoning Boards
- Professional Licensing Boards

LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

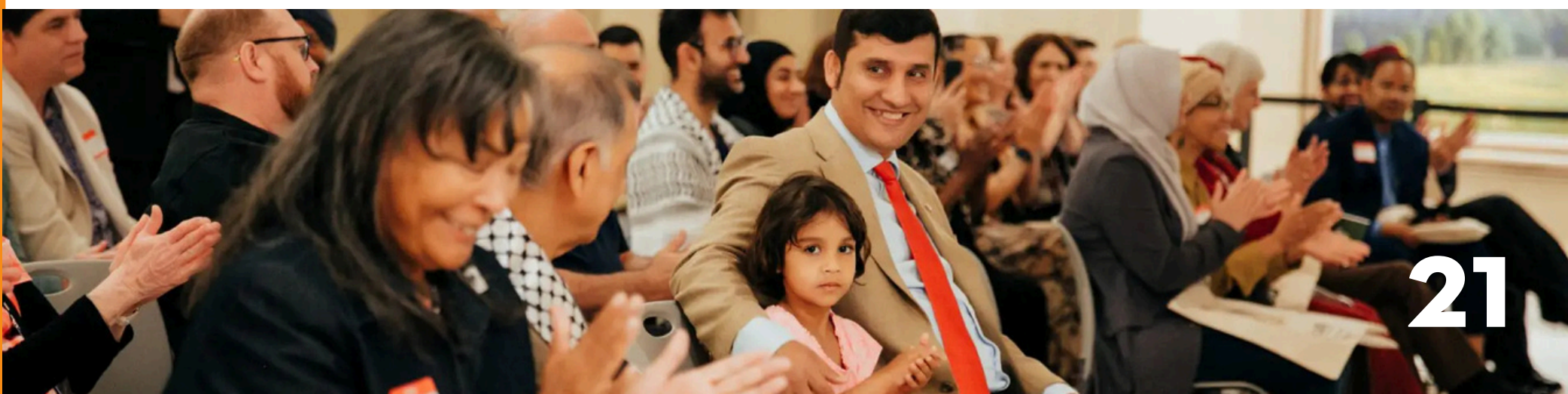


LOCAL GOVERNMENT

These bodies oversee critical issues like public education, road maintenance, libraries, zoning, social services, and local tax policies. Judges and DAs interpret the law; clerks and commissioners manage public resources; professional boards regulate industries like medicine and law.

Even the way federal policies are carried out often depends on state and local governments. Your voice is just as important at this level—and often, these positions are elected with little to no opposition. That means you can influence them not only through advocacy, but by stepping up to serve.

Local officials can be contacted and influenced just like state legislators—through meetings, emails, and public comment. Every level of government needs engaged citizens. Make sure your voice is heard.



LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

VOTING



Voting is a fundamental part of advocacy. You can't demand change without participating in the process that makes change possible. Yet Oklahoma consistently ranks among the lowest in voter turnout—largely due to lack of access to clear, reliable information. Here's what you need to know to vote confidently and safely.



REGISTERING TO VOTE

You must have a Voter Identification card to be able to vote in any election. You must get a form, fill it out, and then mail to the OSEB:

Oklahoma State Election Board

PO Box 52880

Oklahoma City, OK 73152-8800

Forms are available at the Oklahoma State Election Board website (oklahoma.gov/elections) by clicking on Voter Registration. Printed forms can also be found at county election boards, tag agencies, post offices, libraries, and some other locations.

LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

REGISTERING TO VOTE



CAIR OK can also provide voter registration forms for your mosque, Islamic Center, or MSA. The voter registration form requires your name, birthdate, address, and identification number (Driver's License or Social Security).

You must be a citizen of the United States, a resident of Oklahoma, and an adult over the age of 18 in order to register to vote. The forms are pre-addressed and do not require an envelope, only a stamp.

If you complete the form at a county election board or at the CAIR-OK office, you do not need to mail the form. If you complete the form at another local government agency, the agency will stamp and mail the form to the OSEB for you.



LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT



POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION

OSEB forwards the form to your county election board, which mails you a Voter Identification card. Your county election board must receive your form at least 24 days before the next election for you to vote in that election; otherwise, your Voter ID card will be mailed after the next election.

Voter registration forms also require you to designate whether you wish to affiliate with a political party. Party registration determines whether you can vote in presidential primary elections.

For information on the Democratic Party, visit:
www.okdemocrats.org

For information on the Republican Party, visit:
www.okgop.com

For information on the Libertarian Party, visit:
www.oklp.org

LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

WHERE & WHEN



Your local polling station is open from 7AM to 7PM on election days. You can find your local polling station on your Voter ID card and using the Online Voter Tool at OSEB's website. You can also contact any of Oklahoma's political parties or CAIR Oklahoma for assistance. You can vote at the County Election Board office in the county where you are registered to vote from 8AM to 6PM on the Friday and Monday before all elections. For state and federal elections only, you can also vote from 8AM to 1PM on the Saturday before the election.

To find your polling place (where you vote), confirm your voter registration, or view a sample ballot before an election, visit the www.ok.gov/elections website and click on "voter info" or "online voter tool."

ONLINE VOTER TOOL

LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT



HOW

Oklahoma requires that you provide proof of your identity by presenting your Voter ID card or a photo ID with your full legal name that does not expire before the election, and which matches the name as registered in the Precinct Registry.

You may show any document issued by the United States, the State of Oklahoma, or a federally recognized tribal government if it includes your name, a photograph of you, and an expiration date that is later than the election in which you are voting.

At your polling place, if you do not have, or choose not to show, proof of your identity, you may cast a provisional ballot and verify your identity by signing an affidavit.

These ballots are examined after Election Day by the Election Board to verify their information before they are counted.

LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT



HOW

In Oklahoma, the forms of ID acceptable for voting are:

1. Oklahoma Driver License
2. Oklahoma State-Issued Identification Card
3. United States Passport
4. United States Military Identification

The law provides only two exceptions to these requirements:

1. An Oklahoma ID Card issued to a person who is 65 years or older is valid as proof of identity for voting even though it does not have an expiration date.
2. The Voter Identification Card issued by the County Election Board is valid as proof of identity even though it does not include a photograph or an expiration date.



LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

HOW



After verifying your identity, you'll receive your ballot, which lists the candidates and issues for that election, along with instructions for marking your choices. A sample ballot is available on the OSEB website before Election Day—reviewing it in advance helps you vote quickly and confidently.



VOTER INTIMIDATION

Voter intimidation is any attempt to threaten, coerce, or suppress someone's right to vote—often targeting low-income or minority communities.

Examples include:

- Aggressive questioning about citizenship, religion, or background
- Demanding removal of religious clothing (e.g., hijab or kufi)
- Spreading false information about voting requirements
- Any action meant to discourage or block someone from voting

LEGISLATURE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT



VOTER INTIMIDATION

If you experience voter intimidation, contact:

CAIR Oklahoma

Phone: (405) 415-6851

Email: info@ok.cair.com

The American Civil Liberties Union Voting Hotline

Phone: 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683)

Oklahoma State Election Board

Phone: 405-521-2391

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



CAIR OK **POLICY PLATFORM**

- Focus areas for the current legislative session, based off of feedback of staff, board members and the community.

CAIR OK **BILL TRACKER**



- Near comprehensive list of bills we are actively tracking. These most closely align with issue areas in our policy platform, but they are subject to change as language is amended.



THE ACLU **OF OKLAHOMA**

- Nonprofit, non-partisan, privately funded organization devoted exclusively to the defense and promotion of the individual rights secured by the U.S. and Oklahoma constitutions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



MOM'S DEMAND ACTION **FOR GUN SENSE...**

- Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America is a grassroots movement of Americans fighting for public safety measures that can protect people from gun violence.

OKLAHOMA **POLICY INSTITUTE**



- Independent, nonpartisan non-profit that provides factual information and advocates for fair and responsible public policies.



TOGETHER **OKLAHOMA**

- Grassroots education and advocacy group connecting Oklahoma values to state budget priorities

SCHOLARS **STRATEGY NETWORK**



- Encourages collaboration between scholars at universities and state-level policy groups to benefit the public good.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



BALLOTPEDIA

- Hub for state political coverage of elections, policies, and more

LET'S FIX THIS



- Nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to educating our fellow Oklahomans on the laws, policies, and other political issues that affect them the most and creating opportunities for the public to interact with their elected officials in meaningful ways.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

- Nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.