



## 2018 LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY GUIDE

**The Virginia General Assembly (GA) is back for the 2018 legislative session! The Action Alliance invites you to join us February 5<sup>th</sup> through February 9<sup>th</sup> to #AmplifySurvivorVoices and advocate for policies that empower survivors and prevent violence statewide!**

Hundreds of bills are introduced to the General Assembly (GA) Session each year, but few of them ever get signed into law. Grassroots legislative advocacy work is an opportunity for everyday people and concerned citizens to raise awareness of issues impacting Virginians – legislators listen!

Traditional legislative advocacy work means going in person to meet with lawmakers and their staff. However, not everyone has the time or means to do so, and that's where virtual legislative advocacy, or virtual lobbying, comes in. Virtual legislative advocacy consists of any engagement with representatives in the GA through use of technology: phone calls, email, social media, and even good-old-fashioned letter writing. This guide is designed to help make engaging your legislators over technology as easy as possible.

Here are the four main sections:

1. **PREPARATION:** find out who your representatives are and what you're going to say.
2. **MAKING CONTACT:** explore all the different ways you can engage with your representatives and decide on the best strategy or set of strategies for engagement.
3. **IN-PERSON VISITS WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS:** if you're planning a visit, this section includes helpful tips, addresses, cheat sheets and more for your legislative visits!
4. **FOLLOWING UP:** Let us know how it went, share feedback, and help us thank supporters.

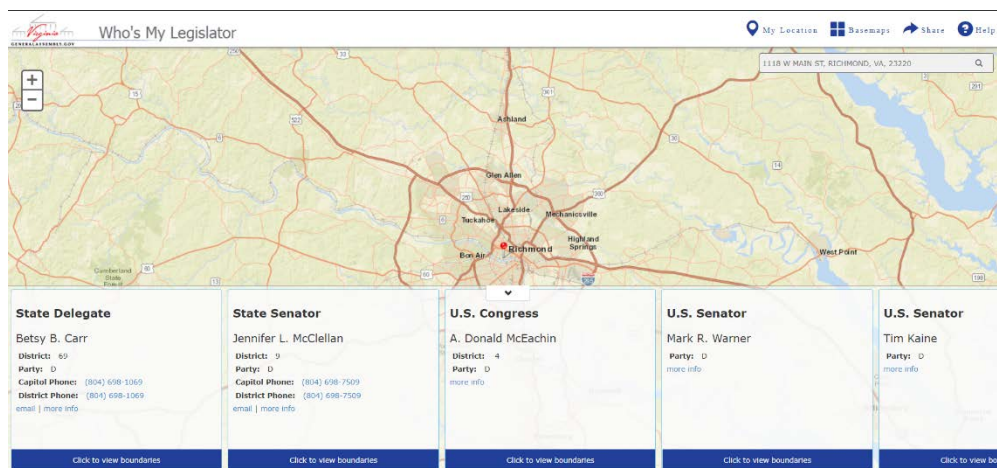
## A QUICK NOTE ON HELPFUL TOOLS:

Along with this guide, the Action Alliance has produced a *Virtual Advocate's Toolkit* (which includes sample scripts, images, social media posts, hashtags, infographics, etc.) and a *2018 Action Alliance Legislative Priorities* document for you to reference. As you read through these pro-tips on legislative advocacy, know that there are similarly helpful tools online. For example, we love the Virginia Public Access Project's (VPAP) [Citizens Guide](#). This resource includes message-crafting, knowing who the gate-keepers are, details on visiting the capitol, and more. Check it out by [clicking this link](#) or visiting here: <https://www.vpap.org/general-assembly/citizens-guide/>

# 1. PREPARATION

## First things first – who are your legislators?

Members of the GA want to hear from their constituents – the people they represent within their respective districts. Similar to the federal Congress, the GA is divided into two chambers: the VA state Senate and the House of Delegates. Every Virginian has two reps: a Senator and a Delegate. You can use [this link](#) (or go to: <http://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov/>) to find out who they are if you aren't sure.



The screenshot shows the 'Who's My Legislator' website interface. At the top, there's a search bar with the address '1118 W MAIN ST, RICHMOND, VA, 23220'. Below the map, there are five columns of information for different levels of government:

State Delegate	State Senator	U.S. Congress	U.S. Senator	U.S. Senator
<b>Betsy B. Carr</b> District: 69 Party: D Capitol Phone: (804) 698-1069 District Phone: (804) 698-1069 email   more info	<b>Jennifer L. McClellan</b> District: 9 Party: D Capitol Phone: (804) 698-7509 District Phone: (804) 698-7509 email   more info	<b>A. Donald McEachin</b> District: 4 Party: D more info	<b>Mark R. Warner</b> Party: D more info	<b>Tim Kaine</b> Party: D more info

## Craft Your Message.

When calling, emailing, or writing a letter, it's important to have a clear message. Why are you contacting your representatives? We can make contact for a variety of reasons, but the main ones for grassroots lobbying is to express your desire for them to support or oppose a bill or set of bills introduced during the current session. Therefore, the things we're asking are based around what topics are currently up for consideration. Consult the [Action Alliance 2018 Legislative Priorities](#) document for information on this if you don't already know! You can also find sample scripts (for emails, phone calls, tweets, and facebook posts) in the *Virtual Advocate's Toolkit*. Right along with you, the Action Alliance is engaged in outreach with representatives for these bills, and offices keep records of how many phone calls, letters, and emails they receive concerning various issues.

This is the time where you can personalize an issue. For example, [HB44](#) is a bill which asks the Department of Education to include in its Family Life Education (FLE) curriculum age-appropriate elements of effective and evidence-based programs on the law and meaning of consent, including instruction that increases student awareness of the fact that consent is required before sexual activity. If you work with survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence or with young people to prevent violence, why would you want your representative to support this bill? How does this help to shape a world that we want, a world without violence?

### **Stay on Message.**

However you engage your representatives, keep it short and stay on message. If you have 30-60 seconds to speak on the phone, what is the **most important thing** you want them to know? If you have a personal story this can be difficult because these stories are so personal and it can be challenging to do them justice **and** keep it short.

Remember that staff are very busy during legislative sessions, and may not be able to read a five-page email or speak on the phone at length. If you're having trouble figuring out which details to focus on, try practicing with a friend and ask them what stands out the most, relative to the bill or issue you are advocating for.

**Most importantly – how can your representative help?** These are tough issues and it's easy to feel overwhelmed by them. There is hope, though – the General Assembly can pass legislation to help survivors and prevent violence. And your legislators REALLY value your input, as community-based advocates, as change-makers, as survivors, and as constituents, in this legislative process. **It's your superpower.**

## **2. MAKING CONTACT**

### **By Phone:**

The same webpage mentioned above (Who's My Legislator) which helps [you identify your representatives](#) also provides their phone numbers. Once you know which representatives are yours, a simple Google search should pull up their personal websites, which should also have office addresses and phone numbers.

- 1) Remember your message prep! For phone calls, it can be helpful to write out some bullet-point notes ahead of time to make sure you know what you want to say. Or use the talking points included in the *2018 Action Alliance Legislative Priorities* document or the sample scripts included in the *Virtual Advocate's Toolkit*. Remember that calls to the front desk are often brief, 2-10 mins, but legislative offices do take note of them.
- 2) When you call your representative's office, the phone will be answered by a staff member (staffer).
  - a. Tell the staffer that you are a constituent, or a local practitioner, and you'd like to speak to a legislative aide on sexual and intimate partner violence issues. This may be the public health legislative aide, as the CDC has classified domestic and intimate partner violence as a public health issue.

- b. When you get an aide or office member on the phone, introduce yourself (“Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m a constituent of Delegate \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_, Virginia.”). Now is where your message comes into play: “I’m calling to voice my support for House/Senate bill \_\_\_\_ and to encourage Delegate \_\_\_\_\_ to join me in supporting this issue and ensuring that all Virginians have access to safe and just communities and that we can prevent violence before it happens”. Follow your script. Talk clearly and at a measured pace and remember that the Legislative Aide and/or gatekeeper that you’re speaking with may not only support your issue but may encourage your representative to take note and commit to action on the bill that you’re speaking to.
- c. Make sure that your ask is clear and direct (“I’m asking for Delegate \_\_\_\_\_ to support House/Senate bill \_\_\_\_.”). Your voice will be heard, but it doesn’t hurt to repeat the ask to ensure that it’s fully captured in office/message notes.
- d. Be prepared to entertain any comments or questions that the Legislative Aide may have – you don’t need to know any answers, but what you can certainly do is direct them to Jonathan Yglesias, Policy Director at the Action Alliance, and let them know that he can serve as a legislative resource to their office on these issues.

## BY LETTER:

That’s right, good-old-fashioned letters through the mail. In the age of email and instant communication, writing real letters may feel antiquated, but they can have much more impact on an office and the attention your message receives. There are **hundreds** of bills introduced each session, and many more individuals, businesses, and nonprofits contacting each member asking them to give attention to various issues. This means that email inboxes fill up quickly. A real letter on paper takes up physical space, and is harder to slip by the wayside. It’s also a lot more personal – emails are quick, letters take more effort. And, if they receive multiple letters on the same issue, it can have a real impact!

If you work for an agency, or have friends and family who know survivors, care about these issues, etc., **consider hosting a letter writing party**. It can be a great way to make sure everyone takes the time to sit down and spend a few minutes crafting a thoughtful letter, and then you can make sure they all get mailed at once. Plus, it’s a great excuse to get together, share food and drinks, and make advocacy into a community endeavor – especially for folks who might not otherwise have the time or interest.

Also, many representatives have contact forms on their websites for constituents to leave feedback or comment on issues. Offices consistently tell us that they pay attention to these messages, even if they don’t have the capacity to respond to every message they receive.

The example here is from Senator Jennifer McClellan’s website.

HOME	ABOUT	ISSUES	NEWSROOM	CONSTITUENT SERVICES	CONTACT
<b>Contact</b>					
<small>If you would like to contact Senator McClellan, please use the contact form below.</small>					
Your name: *					
<input type="text"/>					
Your e-mail address: *					
<input type="text"/>					
Subject: *					
<input type="text"/>					
Category: *					
- Please choose - ▾					
Message: *					
<input type="text"/>					

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Most representatives use social media in some capacity, and it's a great way to further engage with them. This is especially true for a concentrated effort from supporters of an issue. We're inviting friends and allies of the Action Alliance to make a huge push on social media during our Virtual Legislative Advocacy Week to both show representatives how much Virginians care about survivors, and to tell them there are ways they can help!

For your convenience, we have created lists for social media accounts for representatives which are updated as needed:



- [VA Senate](#)
- [House of Delegates](#)

Note: not every representative uses Twitter or Facebook, and some use neither.

The Action Alliance [Twitter account](#) also maintains lists of members of the General Assembly for the [House](#) and [Senate](#).

## 3. IN-PERSON VISITS WITH LEGISLATORS

### POCOHANTAS BUILDING: 9TH AND MAIN STREET IN RICHMOND

If you have not already done so, please schedule meetings with your legislators as soon as possible. The best time to schedule meetings is usually between 9:00 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. However, you may have a legislator that offers a meeting later in the day.

[Click here to find out who your legislators are.](#)

Keep up to date on #VLAW2018 by following us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#); we will be posting #VLAW2018 notices and updates throughout the week!

### HELPFUL TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

- 1) Check in with the member's front desk staff. If you have business cards, have one ready to hand to staff when you arrive at your legislator's office. This helps them "announce you" and tell the Legislator/Staff who has arrived for a visit.
- 2) Don't be disappointed if you don't get to meet directly with your legislator. The legislative assistants/aides (LA's) will take notes and pass your message on to their boss. LA's are often experts in certain policy issues (education, healthcare, etc.) and are sometimes the *best* person to speak to, since their boss depends on them to navigate the hundreds of bills introduced each session.
- 3) Decide in advance on your most important message and make sure you lead with that—schedules during this time are very tight!☺
- 4) Thank the legislator and staff for meeting with you.

- 5) Introduce yourself and where you live and/or work. It is important for the legislator to know that you live/vote in their district OR serve people in their district. Many offices *only* want to speak with constituents. However, if you represent an agency which serves their constituents, that is also a great way to demonstrate why these issues matter to their district.
- 6) If you are with an agency, provide a brief description of your program and services.
- 7) A great way to start discussions on issues is to simply ask, “How familiar are you with sexual and domestic violence issues?” This can help guide what you share and establish rapport – they may already champion these issues, or they may not know much and look to you for education.
- 8) Tell your personal story – why are sexual and domestic violence issues important to you?
- 9) Be prepared for tough questions and try not to take them personally. By asking those tough questions, legislators are often seeking information that will help them in the process. As advocates, we are bringing issues to their attention and possibly educating them, so tough questions may also be an opportunity to educate and address misconceptions.
- 10) It is ok if you don’t know the answer to their questions. Thank them for the question and tell them you will get the information they asked for and get back to them. Action Alliance staff will help you follow up.
- 11) Thank them again for their time—encourage them to contact you if they have questions about any sexual and domestic violence issues that come up during session and let them know that the Action Alliance can be a legislative resource to their office.

## **IN-PERSON VISITS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **WHERE AND WHEN DO I GET LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY MATERIALS (FACT SHEETS, TALKING POINTS, POLICY PRIORITIES LIST, ETC)?**

Staff will have materials ready for you to pick up at the Action Alliance office by request.

Links to access/download materials will be emailed to registrants no later than COB February 2<sup>nd</sup>. We also encourage you to check the [Action Alliance’s Policy website page](#) where we will be posting Action Alliance priorities and relevant information and fact sheets.

### **WHEN SHOULD I START SCHEDULING MY VISITS?**

The General Assembly begins January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018. We recommend you start calling to schedule your visits as soon as you’re able! It is never too early to get on your legislators’ calendar.

Those who have scheduled meetings with legislators and their staff will have the opportunity to hold a 10-15 minute meeting to share your views on pending sexual and domestic violence legislation. Because the meetings are brief, it can be helpful to practice what you want to say and how to say it both concisely and powerfully. Based on your experience with sexual assault and domestic violence, think about what the most important message is relative to the bills up for consideration. How would your life, your family, or your clients’ lives be impacted if the legislation you’re advocating for is put in place?



Unsure who your legislators are? [Click here](#) and enter your address in the search box in the upper right-hand corner.

### **WHAT IF I AM UNABLE TO GET A SCHEDULED APPOINTMENT?**

If you cannot schedule a meeting, you are encouraged to go by your Delegate and Senator's offices and speak briefly with their staff/legislative assistant. Everyone is encouraged to leave behind information on your local agency and the Action Alliance Policy Priority Summary.

### **WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING ON MY VISITS?**

You should bring information and materials about your community, your programs' services and stories that demonstrate the impact of your services. The Action Alliance staff will deliver information packets to all legislators that will have fact sheets and statewide information on the Action Alliance's key priorities. Lobby Day participants will only be responsible for giving legislators information about their community and agency's services and leaving a copy of the Action Alliance's Legislative Priorities Summary Sheet. We hope this reduces the number of materials that participants have to carry with them on their visits.

### **WHAT SHOULD I WEAR AND EXPECT WHEN VISITING THE CAPITOL?**

Dress is business attire. However, you will need to walk several blocks from public parking to the General Assembly Building so wear comfortable shoes.

Please bring your ID and be prepared to pass through a security screening and have your personal items screened by an x-ray machine prior to entry to the building. Please note that all packages and bags are subject to physical search.

## **4. FOLLOWING UP**

Following up with your legislators is a great way to reinforce your initial message and to stay on their radar – it also gets counted as another registered contact from a concerned constituent or a community advocate on this particular issue!

Your method of follow up may depend on your initial method of contact. If you called your legislator and spoke with a legislative aide or an office rep, it may be a good idea to send a follow up email to their office (you can find their [email addresses here](#)) and just mention who you spoke with, on what date, and about what topic/bill(s). Thank them for the conversation and ask that they continue to support survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence by taking action on the topic and/or bill(s) that you discussed. You might also consider giving them a call back a few days later to thank them for the discussion and ask if the Delegate or Senator has agreed to support the bill/issue that you discussed.

Of course, you can always reach your representative in a much more public forum through Facebook and Twitter. A message via social media may be a particularly impactful way to register your thanks or to reinforce their needed support on a bill or issue you're concerned with. Twitter is a particularly useful platform for this – just remember to use the hashtag #AmplifySurvivorVoices.



Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence  
**ACTIONALLIANCE**

1118 West Main Street  
Richmond, VA 23220

[www.vsdvalliance.org](http://www.vsdvalliance.org) | [info@vsdvalliance.org](mailto:info@vsdvalliance.org) | 804.377.0335

@VActionAlliance

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