

TOOLKIT FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

A GUIDE FOR
FIGHTING LOCAL
ABORTION BANS
IN TEXAS





QUICK START GUIDE

The most important step is to notify the reproductive rights movement in Texas by emailing abortionaccess@aclutx.org. This notification will go to the professional advocates in several different organizations working on this issue and they will reach back out to you to provide support.

Join the [Texans Against Abortion Bans Facebook Group](#). This is a group that has several hundred local advocates who are working to fight against these bans in their communities across Texas. They will be a resource for you as you prepare to fight the ordinance in your community.

Reach Out to Council Members

- It is an important first step to determine if the City Council is taking the ordinance seriously and if anyone is open to opposing the ordinance.
- You can get most city council members official contact information on the city council's website.
- You can choose to call, email, or go in person to speak with your council members or the mayor.
- Check out Step 3 of the full toolkit below for a guide to talking with your council members.

Get the Word Out in Your Community

- Many cities have social media pages that the community monitors for local news. If your community has a page like this, post to the page about the ordinance and use the talking points to frame your argument.
- Local news outlets will generally be interested in the ordinance. We can help you reach out to the local media.
- There are often progressive groups in towns and counties, no matter their size. Reach out to the leaders of those groups and ask them to help you organize against the ordinance.

Attend Your City Council Meeting

- Check out Step 6 of the toolkit first.
- Review the "Draft Testimony" in this toolkit and also review the talking points.
- If there seems to be a significant amount of opposition to the item, recruit folks to attend the meeting with you and even consider creating signs for the meeting to make sure the council knows you are there and not alone.
- Make sure you share the talking points with anyone you have recruited to attend the meeting with you.



ANTI-ABORTION ADVOCATES WANT TO OUTLAW ABORTION IN YOUR COMMUNITY. WE NEED YOUR HELP TO STOP THEM.

Anti-abortion extremists are trying to outlaw abortion and emergency contraceptive in Texas communities.

If the phrase “sanctuary city for the unborn” sounds like something out of a dystopian fiction novel, I have some bad news. Anti-abortion activists in Texas are crisscrossing the state to make sure that dystopian fiction becomes a reality.

The laws they are proposing would criminalize abortion in the city in question should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned by the Supreme Court. Waskom, Texas was the first city to pass the proposed local abortion ban.

While the law is not currently being enforced, this practice of using policy to chip away at access and antagonize those needing abortion care is a highly dangerous, even deadly reality. The future that many people have feared is now at our doorstep.

A future where people’s basic rights to reproductive healthcare get drop-kicked back to the 1950s, when hundreds of thousands of people were seeking abortions, and thousands were hospitalized or died from unregulated abortions because there were no safe, legal alternatives.

While this is certainly a scary reality, there is something you can do right now to help make sure that no more Texans are subjected to these ordinances. Anti-abortion activists driving this campaign have tried to get other cities to adopt the ordinance, but in some cases have failed to do so because of engaged reproductive rights advocates on the ground in those towns. Local advocates have sounded the alarm in cities like Mineral Wells and have helped make sure people in their town turn out to voice their opposition. They also ensured that organizations had enough notice to turn up the heat on those city councils.

Now it’s your turn. In this toolkit you’ll find step by step instructions and the resources you need to help prepare for the fight in your town.

HOW TO TAKE ACTION IN SIX STEPS

Step 1: Monitor Your City Council Agendas

We need people in all 962 cities and 254 counties in Texas engaged with their city council and county government meetings. Most city councils meet twice a month on a regular day and time and County Commissioner's Court will often meet every other week. They are all required to post the time and place of the meeting as well as an agenda at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

We need you to start monitoring the agendas of your city, county, and other cities in your area to make sure no reproductive or abortion rights items appear. In the vast majority of cases, the meeting agendas are posted online. You will simply have to go to your city or county's website and click on the agenda for that week and scan it for any red flags.

Hopefully, this will only take five minutes of your time every two weeks. Consider setting a reoccurring alarm every two weeks as a reminder.

If an abortion related item appears on your agenda, please notify us right away at abortionaccess@aclutx.org.

Step 2: Recruit Your Rapid Response Team

The more people from your community that you can get engaged in this fight, the better. Your elected officials will respond if they feel like there is a ground-swell against the ordinance from the community. It only takes a few voices in opposition to make a big impact.

Here are a few ideas on how to recruit and retain people for your Rapid Response Team:

- Ask your family and friends. The best way to start is with the people closest to you in the community. Let your family and friends know what you are up to and hopefully they'll be excited to help you out.
- Talk about it in community spaces. Are you a member of a local civic organization? Do you attend a place of worship regularly? Or are you involved with a local sports team? Any one of these places could be an opportunity to find an ally. We know this is a topic that is

sometimes hard to talk about with acquaintances, but by dipping your toe in the water in these spaces with people you already know, you might be surprised at how many likeminded people you find.

- Identify other pro-abortion leaders in your community. Many people that care about abortion are also involved in advocacy around other local issues or may be interested in particular political or social justice organizations. Identifying a geographically and culturally diverse group of committed pro-abortion leaders in your community is invaluable when convincing local elected officials to protect abortion access. Starting the conversation and sharing the toolkit are great ways to make a connection with other local reformers.
- Make it fun. Consider hosting a house party or happy hour with the people you identify for your Rapid Response team. This is a great opportunity to share the goals and resources from this toolkit with your team and get them excited about making a real difference in their communities. It's also an opportunity to have a little fun in the process. For more information on having a successful house party, please see our guide attached.
- Keep them connected. Consider starting a Facebook group, WhatsApp Group, or email chain with your rapid response team members. Share advocacy materials and updates from the movement, post local events that might be of interest, and consider organizing regular check-ins or meetups. The goal is to keep everyone informed and engaged. NOTE: If you do decide to do regular meetups, this is a great opportunity to invite in guest speakers, to prepare for council visits, share your personal stories, and brainstorm testimony ideas as a group.
- Encourage action. Although some local allies may prefer to remain vigilant watching city council for anti-abortion agenda items, there are plenty of actions you should encourage the Rapid Response Team to take immediately. For example, encourage them to meet with their own city council members. In most cities in Texas, city council members represent individual districts. Having individuals from different districts visit their representatives will show that there is widespread support for abortion access in the community. If they are interested in visiting their members, please share this toolkit with them.

Step 3: Meet With Your Elected Officials

City councils and County Commissioners Courts are made up of a diverse group of individuals who often do not share the same viewpoints or values. Knowing what motivates each of the elected officials in your area can make a huge difference in whether or not we are able to successfully stop an ordinance. For more information, check out the "Contacting Your Council Member How To Guide" attached. Once you've reviewed the document, you will be ready to meet with your elected official.

Follow the below tips for a successful meeting:

- Get to know your local landscape. Compile information about your elected officials in one place. Try to find out what their policy positions are on reproductive rights and other progressive causes. Based on that research, try to determine if they are likely to support or oppose your position. Please feel free to use the form attached for your information gathering.
- Identify local decision-making processes. In some communities, the mayor may drive the local agenda while in other communities it might make more sense to target your city council member. As you gather information about local officials, also identify key local officials for outreach.
- Set your meeting. Identify your city council representative or a key local decision-maker and set a meeting with their office. Often the best way to do that is to email them at their official addresses or call their office phone number during business hours, which can usually be found on the city website.
- Prepare for the meeting. Prior to the meeting, reach out to us at abortionaccess@aclutx.org, make sure you are up to date on the local abortion bans that have been passed throughout the state, and review the messaging guidance attached.
- Make your case. The purpose of every council visit is to educate the member on the issues and ask them to support your position. To educate the member talk to them about the issues from your perspective. Let them know why it matters to you personally. Use that personal information combined with the guidelines for having a successful office visit here to be persuasive.
- Make your ask. After you have made your case, make your ask. We suggest one or all of the below asks as options, depending on the council member's reaction:
 - o Ask them to oppose any anti-abortion proposal that comes before the body;
 - o Request that they notify you if any anti-abortion proposal is being circulated at the Council;
 - o Discuss the viability and general local impact of a pro-choice ordinance and see if they are willing to offer a pro-choice ordinance or resolution at a City Council meeting. If they say yes to this, let them know that we will be in contact with further information on possible ordinances and next steps.
- Leave the "Local Abortion Bans are Unconstitutional" page with their office.
- Report Out. After you have met with your member, record the information on your Elected Official information sheet and send the sheet to us at abortionaccess@aclutx.org. We will contact you about next steps.

Step 4: Get Social

Social media is a powerful tool to use to build momentum around abortion access and to educate your community. In fact, 68% of people in this country get their news from social media. You can use social media to rally and thank your supporters and to respond to your opposition. Below are some general tips to maximize your social media effort.

Facebook is great for reaching supporters quickly. You can choose to either post on your own personal Facebook wall to create interest or you can create or join a local abortion advocacy group and invite your current friends to join. You also need to commit to posting on, at least, a once a week basis in your group. You can always pre-schedule your posts to help keep your page current. For content ideas please be sure to follow the organizations who have developed this toolkit.

Twitter is great for inserting yourself into the conversation and reaching a substantial amount of people. When using Twitter make sure you use relevant hashtags in your post. Do not create a hashtag unless you have a specific need to do so. Instead use already established abortion access hashtags. You can use other people's handles to call out or speak directly to other twitter users. This can be a great way to informally engage with your law makers.

Step 5: Control the Narrative

Educating the public and generating support and attention for the issue is a crucial part of any local advocacy campaign. You can use the threat of an abortion ban, the possibility of a proactive agenda item, or other events happening locally and elsewhere to try to generate earned media. A couple of good strategies to use when trying to generate media attention are Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor.

Op-Eds are pieces you submit to a media outlet that reflect your opinion about an issue. They are a good opportunity to educate the public and advance your advocacy within your local community. Most newspapers have rules about how to submit op-eds and the format they must follow in order to be considered for publication. If the newspaper does not have posted guidelines, feel free to call up the op-ed editor and ask for them. When writing an op-ed make sure to tailor your piece to your audience and stay focused on your issue. Use facts and research to support your opinion, but you want to also stick to clear and plain language. This is not the place for overuse of jargon. Make sure to have others read your piece before you submit it and edit all the way through at least twice before submission. After submission, make sure you follow up with the editor.

Letters to the editor are used to respond to something that was printed in the newspaper. A letter is a good strategy if you are looking to uplift something that was printed or if you would like to offer a new or contrary perspective. If you are considering submitting a letter to the editor, make sure it is timely. You'll need to respond as soon as you can to a published piece. You will also need to follow the rules for submission for that newspaper. A few quick tips include:

- Read previous letters. Previous letters show you what types of letters the newspaper likes to publish.
- Keep it simple and to the point.
- Shorter, well written letters that are direct are more likely to get published.
- Know your audience. Familiarize yourself with what the paper likes to print and try to write toward that audience.
- Edit your work several times and ask a friend to read it before submitting.

If you are interested in submitting an op-ed or letter to the editor and would like more guidance from us or would like us to help in the editing process, please reach out to either the ACLU of Texas at abortionaccess@aclutx.org or Planned Parenthood Texas Votes at media@pptexasvotes.org.

Step 6: Prepare for the City Council Meeting With the Anti-Abortion Agenda Item

If an abortion related item does pop up on your agenda, now is the time to go into action. The first step, as mentioned above, is to notify one of the partner organizations listed. After that you'll want to make sure you are fully prepared for the meeting. You will need to:

- Notify your rapid response team. Let your recruits know the date and time of the meeting and ask them to attend the meeting. You should also encourage them to prepare testimony against the agenda item.
- Prepare to testify. Testimony is an oral statement offering your perspective on the agenda item in question. It is important that you commit to testifying, since in person testimony in city council hearings is viewed as an important reflection of the opinion of the community. Testimony is often time limited to 3 minutes or less. The length of allowed testimony will generally be posted on the agenda. There are also often instructions posted on your city council website.
- Draft your testimony. Make sure your testimony includes your name, what council district you live in, how long you've lived in the community, if you represent anyone other than yourself, and your position on the agenda item (for or against it). The body of your testimony should include why you hold the position you do. This could include a personal story, data from research, and/or examples gathered from other community members. End by reiterating the action you want the council to take on the agenda item. Please find a model testimony draft attached, to use as a guide, but we encourage you to draft your testimony in your own words.

ACTION RESOURCES FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

