

# Advocacy Guide

## Raise the Age - Wisconsin



### Welcome to Our Advocacy Guide!

Thank you for advocating for Raise the Age Legislation and connecting with your elected representatives! This Advocacy Guide provides a step-by-step guide of how to contact your legislators and conduct an effective advocacy meeting to discuss Raise the Age legislation. Reach out to the RTA Coalition if you have any lingering questions!

### Why Should I Meet With My Legislators?

Your State Assemblyperson and State Senator are your elected representatives in the State Legislature, who are responsible for crafting and passing legislation that affects all Wisconsinites. State Legislators hold the keys to passing Raise the Age legislation here in Wisconsin. So why meet with them?

State legislators are tasked with creating policy and passing legislation that represents the views and interests of their constituents. Therefore, legislators appreciate input and conversations with people in their districts as they can get a better understanding of what is important to those they represent. In fact, many elected officials tally the calls and written messages they receive from their constituents as well as their meetings with them.

Whether you believe they already agree with you or are convinced they will not, us as advocates don't want them to be able to claim that they haven't heard from their constituents. The more people that lift their voices, sometimes over a long period, the more likely our legislators will listen and understand our perspectives to serve the people in their districts and get re-elected. Speaking with legislators helps them do their job better and allows our priorities to remain front in center as they draft policy and legislation.

### How Do I Contact My Legislators?

The first step in contacting your legislator is to know who your legislator is. The easiest way to do this is the tool found on the Legislature's home page: [legis.wisconsin.gov](http://legis.wisconsin.gov). Go to the center right of the page to fill in your address under "Who Are My Legislators?"

If you do not have computer access, you can call your local town, village, or city clerk's office to find out who represents you. Your local library may be able to help you with this also.

## Scheduling a Lobby Visit

Once you find your state legislators, reach out to schedule a virtual or in-person lobby visit. Using the [legis.wisconsin.gov](http://legis.wisconsin.gov) webpage, find the phone numbers of your two elected representatives. Call each office to schedule an appointment.

### Remember these five things when you call:

- Identify yourself as a constituent. Constituents who vote for the representative have more influence than those whom the legislator does not represent. Identify yourself as a constituent and you will have their attention!
- Identify what issue or priority you are wanting to meet to discuss. In our case, state your support for raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction, and ask for an appointment to speak with your representative about the importance of raising the age.
- Ask what times work best for them, and try to work around their schedule. Legislators often have busy schedules, especially during a budget season. Legislators and their staff appreciate flexibility in setting a date and time.
- Ask how the elected official would prefer to meet. While our state still wrestles with the Covid-19 pandemic, we want all parties to feel safe and comfortable during the visit. If you feel comfortable meeting in person, then ask if their office would prefer to have the meeting in person or over Zoom. If you would prefer to meet virtually, ask what time they would be available for a Zoom meeting and offer to set up an invite.
- Speaking with a legislative aide or other staff member is ok! While many would rather meet with their elected official directly, remember that legislators often lean heavily on the policy guidance of legislative aides. Meeting with staff members can gain you a valuable and influential advocate with your elected representative.

Once an appointment is set, thank them for their time and the opportunity to speak with them about this issue.

### Virtual Advocacy Meetings

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Raise the Age Coalition would encourage all advocates to consider setting up a meeting via Zoom. The same principles apply as in-person visits!

### Tips on Zoom Meetings from the Wisconsin Catholic Conference:

- Make sure to check and confirm when and where your meeting will occur.
- Make certain your video and audio equipment work before the meeting and arrive early, if necessary, to test it.
- Also have any meeting access information on-hand, like a web link, as well as other ways to access the meeting if needed, such as a phone number, password, or other information.
- Include one “point-of-contact” phone number in case someone can’t access the meeting.
- Try to choose a meeting space that is free of items that may cause distractions or loud noises that could interrupt the meeting. Turn ringers and notifications off on your computer and mobile phone.

## Preparing for Your Legislative Visit

Prepare for the meeting by deciding the following:

- What information and messages do you want to convey?
- What do you want the legislator to do? What is your “ask?”
- Who will be speaking and in what order (when meeting with fellow advocates)? What will each person’s points be? Who will make the ask? Try to meet ahead of time to plan.

Make sure to be on time for your appointment. Be prepared, dress neatly, be polite and be brief.

Also prepare a leave-behind item that summarizes RTA and why it should be a priority for your elected officials. Download or print available resources from [raisetheagewi.org/advocacy](http://raisetheagewi.org/advocacy).

### Suggested Template for Your Legislative Visit

While effective legislative visits can take any number of forms, here is our suggested template for how to outline your legislative visit:

- At the beginning of the meeting, have everyone introduce themselves, state who they represent, and briefly state why RTA is important to you. Be sure to mention that you are a constituent from their district.
- After introductions, you and your other advocates should start discussing 3-4 key talking points about what RTA is important to you and why your Legislator should also prioritize RTA. To help guide your talking points, see our RTA Talking Points document.
- If able, we suggest connecting these talking points directly to your Legislator personally, whether it is tying it to their district, personal experience, or to policy interests that are already important to them.
- After discussing your policy talking points, make an Ask. This is a specific action that you would like your Legislator to make. For Raise the Age, we suggest the following:
  - If your Legislator is on the Joint Finance Committee, ask that they include the Raise the Age provision and allocation in this year’s biennial budget.
  - If your Legislator is not on the Joint Finance Committee, ask that they support Raise the Age policy as a budget provision or as separate legislation. If they are in support of RTA, you could also ask if they would take leadership on drafting and pass a RTA bill during this year’s session.
- After your ask, give time for the legislator to respond or ask questions.
- Once you have responded to questions or comments, thank them so much for their time and leave the meeting. If meeting in-person leave behind your RTA materials.

## After Your Visit

The days following your legislative visit serve as valuable times to follow up and keep your issues on your legislator's radar.

- First and foremost, follow up your meeting with a note thanking them for the meeting, restating your concerns, and providing further information (if necessary). Be sure to thank them for their time and reiterate their appreciation for talking with them about Raise the Age legislation. This thank you note can be sent over email or snail mail. Find the physical address or email address of your legislator at <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/>.
- Also be sure to send any further information or answer any questions that you didn't have an answer for during the meeting. Any "Action Items" that were given to you after the meeting, follow up well within a week or meeting. If you meet virtually, email them your leave behind items to remind them of your priorities.

## Where Else Can I Learn More?

In addition to this guide, our coalition members have some additional resources that provide excellent insight and information on how to maximize your lobby visits and give additional guidance on what to expect. Here is a short list of helpful guides:

- **ACLU** - "[How to Engage Elected Officials.](#)"
- **ELCA Advocacy** - "[Virtual Visits](#)"
- **Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies** - "[Helpful Hints for Advocating with State Legislators](#)"

## Connecting as a Person of Faith

RTA - Wisconsin is built on a strong partnership between secular and interfaith organizations, and we want to inform faith leaders on the unique gifts they can bring to direct advocacy.

As a person or faith or faith leader, consider the following:

- Include what particular faith values have driven you to support RTA. What part of your faith informs your position on this policy?
- Discuss how your congregation or faith community lives out these values. If you are a faith leader, discuss how you lead your faith community to live out the values that guide your passion for RTA.
- If you share a faith background with the Legislator, be sure to talk about shared faith values and how they can inform us on RTA policy.
- If you are a faith leader, be sure to mention your leadership role and your home faith community. Faith leaders are trusted pillars in most communities, and identifying yourself as one only makes what you have to say more important.