

OUR HOME

ADVOCACY GUIDE



ABOUT US

NeighborWorks Green Bay is a resident-led 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) certified housing counseling agency, and Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO). We are a proud member of the National NeighborWorks Network. Since our founding in 1982, NeighborWorks Green Bay has served Green Bay neighborhoods and the broader community with homeownership promotion services, down payment and closing cost assistance lending, community interest real estate development, and other outstanding housing services.

NeighborWorks Green Bay is a recognized leader in community development, housing revitalization, and innovative homeownership solutions. Founded as a non-profit in 1982, we partner with residents, local government, and business to deliver a variety of educational and financial programs that promote and preserve homeownership, increase financial capabilities, and strengthen community ties. We engage in real estate development activity including single-family, multifamily, and commercial projects. We are part of a network of more than 245 independent, community-based nonprofits through our affiliation with NeighborWorks America. For more information about what we do, visit us at nwgreenbay.org.





CONTENTS

<u>Overview of Guide</u>	3
<u>Principles</u>	4
<u>Ways to Get Involved</u>	5
<u>Legislative Process</u>	6
<u>Building Relationships</u>	7
<u>Contacting Legislators</u>	8
<u>Continued</u>	9
<u>Providing Public Comment</u>	10
<u>Media Advocacy</u>	11
<u>Electoral Advocacy</u>	12
<u>Advocacy Resources</u>	13
<u>Contact Us</u>	14



OUR MISSION:

We solve housing challenges and build stronger communities

OVERVIEW OF GUIDE

OUR HOME

As an organization that offers housing counseling and lending services, affordable rental units to people of modest means, community interest housing construction and renovation, and support for community building efforts internally and externally, we know that advocacy is essential.

We recognize how our current housing markets (owning or renting) across the country and in Wisconsin have become unaffordable and inaccessible, and how communities have been negatively impacted by this ongoing crisis. Although we engage in housing development, we recognize that we cannot solely build our way out of these various housing issues - and that is why advocacy is so necessary.

The housing crisis is not a singular issue and is not the responsibility of just one organization, group, legislature, or individual. This is everyone's issue and responsibility - this is *Our Home*.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is the act of supporting, defending, or arguing for a specific cause or issue. The purpose of advocacy is to bring about change, whether that is accomplished through raising public awareness, increasing support, or influencing policy for a certain issue.

If you have ever tried to promote an issue you care about, you have engaged in advocacy!

For more detailed information about advocacy, go to our [Advocacy Database](#) to learn more.

USING THIS GUIDE TO MAKE AN IMPACT

This guide entails information about our organization as leaders and experts in the housing sector, as well as understanding how legislatures operate, how to contact and connect with legislators, utilize various media outlets for advocacy, and resources about general and housing specific advocacy.

Our Home Advocacy Agenda is informed by these principles.

HOME

We believe that everyone deserves a safe, affordable, and quality place to live. We partner with and support other organizations, agencies, and service-providers who promote, provide, and advocate or assist individuals, families, and communities in obtaining safe and affordable housing options.



COMMUNITY

We are committed to supporting neighbor-led, asset-based approaches to building stronger communities in Northeastern Wisconsin. We support resident, neighborhood, and community leadership and development, and value diverse thoughts, ideas, and perspectives within communities.



CONNECTION

NeighborWorks Green Bay prides itself on our relationships with other organizations and communities within Northeast Wisconsin. We aim to be a resource and connector for people, communities, and organizations.



EDUCATION

We are passionate about educating and empowering people and communities. We must continue to learn and educate ourselves about housing markets, challenges, and the experiences of our communities. Education is a powerful tool and we aspire to provide our community members with knowledge that fosters engagement.



REVITALIZATION

NeighborWorks Green Bay works to sustainably leverage community resources and revitalize current structures, systems, or groups, whether that is a physical home or building, government regulation, neighborhood, or community.



GROWTH

As an organization, we are committed to growing our services and expanding our footprint in our community and beyond. Our values and goals will remain flexible to change. Our organization will always be searching for innovative housing and community solutions.



WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

- 1 LEARN** more about advocacy and housing issues at nwgreenbay.org and through our advocacy resource database.
- 2 JOIN** the *Our Home* advocacy network by going to nwgreenbay.org and signing up for our advocacy email notifications.
- 3 READ** about our priority policy issues at nwgreenbay.org.
- 4 RESPOND** right away to our email and social media action alerts!
- 5 RECRUIT** friends, colleagues, family to join our advocacy network and efforts.
- 6 CONTACT** your legislators or other key stakeholders through emails, letters, phone calls, social media, or a meeting.
- 7 WRITE** a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on a particular housing issue.
- 8 ATTEND** *Our Home* events - watch for emails and social media posts.
- 9 TESTIFY** at a public hearing about the importance of an *Our Home* issue or other housing issue.
- 10 VOLUNTEER** to be an advocacy spokesperson to raise awareness about housing policy issues and generate support.
- 11 HOST** or volunteer at a local *Our Home* meeting or event.
- 12 SPEAK** to other groups about your experiences with *Our Home* or other housing issues.
- 13 INFORM** yourself about electoral information and housing ballot initiatives.



LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The legislative process begins with an idea or issue that needs to be addressed through legislation. These ideas or issues can be presented by legislators, the governor, agencies, community-based organizations (such as NeighborWorks Green Bay), and constituents (like you!). Advocacy can be undertaken throughout the legislative process by almost everyone, so we should all have an understanding of how legislative processes work!

The information below is a condensed version of federal, state, and local legislative processes and actual processes may differ. For more in-depth information about legislative processes, go to our [Advocacy Database](#).

FEDERAL LEVEL

First, a representative sponsors a bill. The bill is then assigned to a committee for study. If released by the committee, the bill is put on a calendar to be voted on, debated or amended. If the bill passes by simple majority (218 of 435), the bill moves to the Senate. In the Senate, the bill is assigned to another committee and, if released, debated and voted on. Again, a simple majority (51 of 100) passes the bill. Finally, a conference committee made of House and Senate members works out any differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. The resulting bill returns to the House and Senate for final approval.

Courtesy of [U.S. House of Representatives](#).

STATE LEVEL

A new bill is read before the Assembly or Senate; this is called an 'introduction', or its 'first reading'. Often, bills are referred to by number at this point: for instance, 2013 Assembly Bill 20, or 'AB20'. If they support a bill, legislators from the same house can sign on as co-authors, while members of the opposite house sign on as co-sponsors. The legislature usually sends a bill to a relevant committee. For instance, a bill about schools would probably be referred to the Assembly or Senate Committee on Education. Committees are groups of legislators who focus on a particular topic, like education or housing. Committees generally hold public hearings, where they hear from experts and from the general public. In response to research and hearings, a committee may offer amendments to a bill. Then, it sends its analysis back to the legislature, usually with a recommendation: **Should the legislature pass this bill?** When a bill is read again before the legislature, this is called the 'second reading'. Legislators vote on individual amendments, and may offer more amendments. Then, the bill is read a third time, and legislators vote on the completed bill with any amended changes. If it passes, it's sent to the other house and undergoes the same process. If amendments are made in the second house, the bill is sent back to the first house, to make sure that they agree. When a bill has passed both houses, it's sent to the governor, who may sign it or veto it. Once a bill has been signed into law, it usually takes effect a few days later.

Courtesy of [Wisconsin State Legislature](#).

LOCAL LEVEL

Many local legislatures are divided into two tiers: counties and municipalities (towns, villages, and cities). A county's legislative power is exercised by the county board of supervisors and the majority of Wisconsin cities have a common council, which acts as the legislative branch of government. Similar to the State and Federal levels, representatives, alders, organizations, agencies, and constituents can propose legislation, ordinances, requests, and policies that will often be reviewed by specific committees and then at common council or county board of supervisors meetings. Once approved, these proposals become part of the municipal code or ordinances (depending on local government structure, some vary).

KNOW YOUR LEGISLATORS!

Knowing who your legislators are is an important part of legislative advocacy. You can find a complete list of your local, state, and federal representatives at [USA Gov](https://www.usa.gov).

Building relationships with your legislators is important:

- For legislators to make informed decisions on behalf of constituents, it is important that they get to know you and your community.
- You can establish yourself as a source and connector of information and community.
- You can also share your story or stories of community members that would be an impact for legislative efforts.

Also remember, legislators are voted in by constituents, so you have the right to vote in or out legislators who are or are not supporting and implementing legislation that you want enacted.

SHARING STORIES

An essential part of advocacy is storytelling. Legislation impacts our daily lives either directly or indirectly, and many people have stories and experiences of this impact. For legislators, and even other organizations or agencies, it is useful to hear and learn about constituents' perspectives to coincide with other data or statistical information - it often helps make a stronger case for or against specific legislation.

Sharing stories can:

- Connect legislators to what is happening in your community.
- Help gain media coverage for a given issue or legislation.
- Inspire other people and advocates to join a given issue or effort.

Sharing your story is personal and can include a mix of emotions so it is important to recognize if it would be comfortable for you or not. Seeking out other people who have experience with storytelling and could tell your story on your behalf could be another option. Even if sharing your story altogether is not an option, you still have the knowledge of your experience and truth and there are other ways to engage in advocacy beyond storytelling!



Contacting your representatives is a form of advocacy! You have the right to contact legislators about topics or legislation that impact your lives and communities. This is a great way to directly voice your opinions about legislation to the people who will vote and make decisions on your behalf.

For more in-depth information about contacting legislators, go to our [Advocacy Database](#).

WRITING AND SENDING AN EMAIL

- ***Our Home*** often sends out legislative action alerts via email to subscribers ([click here to become a subscriber](#)) that includes an automated email template for you to directly send to specified legislators. It is best to add a personalized message with these emails, usually an additional sentence or two, and then you can send the email directly to legislators!
- When legislators receive hundreds of personalized messages about a certain issue, they are more likely to notice and take action.
- If you do not receive our email subscriptions for action alerts and/or just want to send your own email to legislators, here are general guidelines to follow:
 - Find legislator emails through [USA Gov](#), [Wisconsin State Legislature](#), and your local government website ([Green Bay](#), [Appleton](#)).
 - Use a clear subject line, such as “Please Support or Do Not Support [bill number]”
 - Begin email with “Dear [Senator/Represented elected official’s last name],”
 - Then write your position about the specific legislation and briefly explain why. For example, “I urge you to support/defeat (name the issue or bill). (Reason why you think it should be either passed or defeated or personal information about the legislation/issue). Thank you for taking the time to listen to my concerns.”
 - You can also encourage legislators to let you know their position on the legislation or issue.
 - Complete the email by writing “Sincerely,” and your name. It is also helpful to include the region you reside or write, “Constituent of Green Bay,” to emphasize your community and voting power.



WRITING AND SENDING A LETTER

Sending letters to representatives is also a great way to voice your opinion or position about legislation! You can find the addresses for representatives' offices through [USA Gov](#), [Wisconsin State Legislature](#), and your local government website ([Green Bay](#), [Appleton](#)).

Similar to writing and sending emails to representatives:

- Letters should begin with “Dear [Senator/Represented elected official’s last name],”
- Write your position about the specific legislation, explain why, and/or include a personal story.
- Conclude the letter by writing “Sincerely,” and your name. It is also helpful to include the region you reside or write, “Constituent of [Insert your city, town, village],” to emphasize your community and voting power.
- Some people often write and mail postcards as a form of letter writing as well!

CALLING LEGISLATORS

Calling legislators is another method for contacting representatives and can often be quicker than emailing or writing a letter. Calling also emphasizes tone of voice and emotion, which can be impactful for legislators and staff to hear! Often times you will be asked to leave a message with their legislative staff or on their voice mail.

You can find legislators' phone numbers through [USA Gov](#), [Wisconsin State Legislature](#), and local government websites ([Green Bay](#), [Appleton](#)).

When calling here are general tips:

- Identify yourself, mention where you live, and share that you are calling about (legislation, issue). You can mention you are affiliated with NeighborWorks Green Bay or are a housing advocate.
- Be brief in stating the purpose of your call and it can be helpful to prepare talking points ahead of the call.
- If the representative is not available, make sure you leave a message!

A Simple Calling Script:

- Hi, my name is [first and last name].
- I live at [home street address or city/town/village].
- I am calling [lawmaker’s title and name] about x-issue.
- Add 1-2 sentences about why this is important to you and/or the community.
- I hope to count on their support [for or against] this issue.

When state legislatures hold public committee hearings and during local government city or common council meetings, there is usually an opportunity to provide public comment or testimony. Public hearings or city council meetings are open for the public to attend and participate in legislative action. Providing comment or testimony is important, especially at the state legislature since public hearings are meant for constituents, organizations, and groups to voice their opinion on specific legislation or issue and it helps legislators make amendments, move forward, or halt the legislation. It's also important to remember that you don't have to ONLY provide public comment or testimony for legislation or issues that you may be against, you can also do it for issues you support!

TESTIFYING AT STATE HEARINGS

- To see the hearing schedule for a committee, go to this [link](#). You can also search for the committee on the [Wisconsin State Legislature website](#) or use the 'Committees' tab in the top menu of the website to browse committees. Hearing notices are listed near the top of the page, immediately below the list of members.
- **When you arrive, fill out a hearing slip and wait to be called by the committee.** If you cannot stay for the entire hearing, notify the messenger or 'page', near the door, and ask to be called early.
- They ask that you **keep your testimony to five minutes or less, and bring a copy of your testimony for each committee member.** In particularly long hearings, the length of testimony may be limited, usually to about three minutes.
- You can also **express your support or opposition to a bill without testifying. When you arrive, check the box on your hearing slip indicating that you support or oppose the bill but do not want to testify.** This will be noted in the committee's report to the Senate or Assembly.

LOCAL LEGISLATURES

For Local Legislatures the process may be similar-check your local government's website for more information!

Providing Comment for the City of Green Bay's Common Council Meetings

- Go to the [City of Green Bay website](#) and navigate to the government section, where you will find sections and information about commissions and committees; meetings, agendas, minutes; and providing public comment.
- To provide public comment, fill out the [Comment Form](#) ahead of time. Submitting the form does not obligate you to speak. If you decide to speak, they ask that you keep your comments relevant to the topic being deliberated, and compose your comments to last around 3 minutes.

For more information about testifying and providing comment at state and local legislatures, check out our [Advocacy Database](#) or go to the state or local legislature websites.

There are various ways to engage in media advocacy and it often involves sharing information with the public to gain support and attention for a given issue!

1 SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow and engage with *Our Home* and NeighborWorks Green Bay advocacy posts on Instagram and Facebook! We often have posts about advocacy and calls to action about specific housing legislation or issues! Our Instagram is @nwgreenbay and Facebook is NeighborWorks Green Bay.

Your legislators and representatives are also on social media! You can contact them through their social media accounts as well and follow their legislative actions. You can find most legislators by searching their name on social media platforms and through [USA Gov.](#)

2 WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor (LTE) are short letters for publication about an issue of concern and are often written in response to a published story. LTE can agree with or oppose a published story or could add to the article by offering a different or missed point of view. You can write letters to LTEs of a local or national newspaper, magazine, or online blog. LTE can be centered on a personal story or statistical information and data.

Most newspapers, magazines, or blogs have sections titled “Contact us” or “Stay Connected” where you can find information about how to write a letter to the editor and where to specifically send it. For example, [The New York Times](#), [USA Today](#), and [Green Bay Press-Gazette](#) have such information.

Writing letters to the editor can be similar to writing letters to legislators and representatives, but more information and steps about how to write letters can be found on our Advocacy Database.

3 CALLING RADIO SHOWS

Share your thoughts about housing issues or policies! Help spread information or share housing advocacy stories by calling into radio shows.

[Wisconsin Public Radio](#)

-Call 800-642-1234 during the program or email ideas@wpr.org.

-Please be sure to follow their [call-in guidelines](#).

[UWGB-Radio GBX](#)

-Fill out their [contact form](#) to connect with the radio station.

Use your voice at the voting polls!

VOTER ELIGIBILITY

- You are a U.S. citizen;
- Will be 18 years of age on or before Election Day;
- Have resided in Wisconsin for at least 28 consecutive days before Election Day;
- AND are not currently serving a felony sentence, including probation/parole.

VOTER REGISTRATION

- Check and confirm that you are registered to vote!
- You can check if you are registered through [MyVote Wisconsin](#). If you are not, you can go through the process right there. This is also where to go to update your registration information, such as if you have moved.
- [MyVote Wisconsin](#) also has information on what is on the ballot for your region or district, polling places, voting absentee by mail, and tracking your ballot.
- Keep in mind the **deadlines** for voter registration (which vary every election), but current information can be found through [MyVote Wisconsin](#). You can also register to vote at your polling place on the same day as an election.
- A similar resource is [Voter Information](#) from The University of Wisconsin-Madison.

VOTER IDENTIFICATION

Acceptable forms of identification for voting include:

- A valid Wisconsin driver license or Wisconsin state ID
- U.S. passport
- U.S. Uniformed Services card
- Veterans Affairs ID
- Tribal ID
- Certificate of naturalization



NeighborWorks Green Bay is here for you as an advocacy resource!

Utilize our advocacy database on our website to find more information about advocacy, housing advocacy, general housing information, tenant/landlord laws and legislation, Section 8 housing, housing legislation, legislative advocacy tools, housing testimonials, and other housing or homeless advocacy groups.

OTHER ADVOCACY RESOURCES

[Association for Career and Technical Education - Advocacy Resources](#)

[Community Tool Box - Organizing for Effective Advocacy](#)

[Habitat for Humanity - Advocacy](#)

[National Low Income Housing Coalition - Advocates' Guide](#)

[NeighborWorks America Publications & Research](#)

HOUSING ADVOCACY GROUPS IN NORTHEAST WISCONSIN

[Brown County Homeless and Housing Coalition - Advocacy Committee](#)

[JOSHUA - Brown County Housing Advocacy Fellowship; Housing Task Force](#)

[Brown County United Way Advocacy Council](#)

[Brown County Youth Action Board](#)

[Home Builders Association of the Fox Cities - Housing Advocacy Committee](#)

[Northeast Wisconsin Housing Policy Institute](#)



CONTACT US

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