

Your Rights and Safety at Public Meetings

Before you attend:

Know your rights.

- You have the right to attend and observe public meetings. Most meetings allow public comments during designated times or on designated agenda items.
- You cannot be removed for expressing a certain point of view. However, disruptive behavior (such as shouting, chanting, interrupting officials running the meeting, or refusing to adhere to time) may constitute grounds for removal.
- Recording/taking photos is generally allowed if non-disruptive, but check the rules in advance.

Know the meeting rules in advance.

- Check the meeting agenda and determine whether public comment is allowed.
- Know the time limits for comments (typically 1-3 minutes) and if advance sign-up is required.
- Prepare short, fact-based, and focused remarks to help you deliver your comments effectively. Check out our [Speak Up Guide](#) for more information on how to prepare your message!

Plan ahead.

- Attend with a buddy: Ask a friend or family member to go with you.
- Keep belongings light: If possible, bring your ID and essentials only.
- Turn off Face ID or fingerprint access to your phone. Adjust your settings so that only a unique code can unlock it.
- Tell a trusted contact (who is not attending) about the meeting and plan to check in after.
- Write down a legal hotline number or friend's phone number (on your arm or on a small note).

If you are removed or arrested:

(While removals or arrests are unlikely, it is important to think defensively.)

Stay Calm & Assert Your Rights

- First, ask: "Am I free to leave or am I being detained?"
- If being detained, you may say: "I'm exercising my right to remain silent. I want a lawyer."
- Do not resist, argue, or explain.
- Provide your name¹ if asked to do so, but you do not have to provide additional information.
- Do not consent to additional searches.

After Your Arrest

- If you have not already, contact a lawyer immediately. See resources below.
- Write down everything you remember (names, actions, witnesses, statements made).
- Even if charges are dropped, you may consider filing a complaint if your rights were violated.

Other Things to Consider for Sex Education Advocates

- Be prepared to face misinformation: Others may mischaracterize sex education. Stick to facts and respectful messaging. Do your best to remain calm and focused, even if others do not.
- Let your presence and words speak for themselves: informed presence can be a powerful form of advocacy.

Other helpful legal resources:

ACLU: [aclu.org/know-your-rights](https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights) | National Lawyers Guild: [nlg.org/know-your-rights](https://www.nlg.org/know-your-rights)

¹ Roughly half of U.S. states require that individuals provide their name if stopped by law enforcement on suspicion of committing a crime.

Questions? Contact us at sdavidson@educateusaction.org.