

Take Action With the Audubon Society of Rhode Island

One of the best ways to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats is through sound environmental policy. The Audubon Society of RI's Policy Department works with other conservation organizations, legislators and concerned citizens to strengthen environmental laws and regulations.

Working at the Legislature

Rhode Island's legislature is a part-time body. It normally meets from the beginning of January through the 4th of July. But sessions vary in length.

During the session, the Audubon Policy Department tracks daily bill introductions, testifies at committee hearings, and advocates with legislators for Audubon's priority bills.

Audubon issues emailed action alerts (sign up here: <https://asri.org/lead/take-action.html>) to encourage people to write or call their legislators and attend critical hearings.

Audubon works in close partnership with the **Environment Council of Rhode Island (ECRI)** <https://www.environmentcouncilri.org>. ECRI is a coalition of large and small Rhode Island environmental organizations and individuals. ECRI's mission is to serve as an effective voice for developing and advocating policies and laws that protect and enhance Rhode Island's environment. ECRI was founded under the stewardship of Alfred Hawkes, executive director of the Audubon Society of RI from 1958 to 1991. ECRI was established as a Rhode Island nonprofit corporation in 1972.

The ECRI Political Committee tracks and prioritizes environmental bills. Priority bills can be followed on the ECRI web site. Link to ECRI's 2017 priority bills:

https://www.environmentcouncilri.org/2017_legislative_agenda

In addition, every two years (on the even years), ECRI publishes a green report card (link: <https://www.environmentcouncilri.org/content/green-report-cards>), scoring legislator's voting records on ECRI's priority bills.

How you can track a bill

The Rhode Island General Assembly web site makes it easy to find and track bills.

The General Assembly home page

<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Pages/Default.aspx>

includes a tab for "Legislation".

<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/pages/legislation.aspx>

From this page, you can look at "Daily Introductions"

http://status.rilin.state.ri.us/daily_introductions.aspx

and you can click on “Bill Status and History” at a particular bill, tracking its progress
<http://status.rilin.state.ri.us>

The General Assembly also has a bill tracking tool.

At the bottom of the home page <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Pages/Default.aspx>

Look for “Bill Tracking”.

You will need to set up an account with a user name and password, but once you have registered, you can use the tracking to follow any bill that has been introduced. The bill tracking system will send you an email whenever there is action on your selected bills. It is a great tool for staying on top of committee hearings during the legislative session.

Contacting your legislator

Elected officials represent us. One of the best ways to influence policy is to call, email or write your legislator and share your position with them.

If you don't know who your state representative or senator is, the RI Secretary of State has an easy to use web site where you can enter your address and access information about all your elected officials.

<https://vote.sos.ri.gov>

Structuring an Effective Argument

Issue: Introduce the topic to be discussed. Explain why this is in the decision makers interest to address.

Position: Take a stand and make an ask. What do you want the decision maker to do?

Points: Present your points, emphasizing impacts to constituents and local interests.

Counter-Points: Based on your research, present and de-bunk the arguments that opponents will bring forward.

Conclusion: Restate your position

Speaking with your elected official (town council, legislator, etc.)

Plan your visit.

Make an appointment.

Be prompt and patient.

Be prepared. Know what issue you are going to discuss but don't overwhelm them with materials – too many papers will be left unread.

Be brief. 5 to 10 minutes.

Be political. Make sure to show the connection between what you're requesting and the elected official's interests.

Be responsive. Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information.

Be respectful. If a legislator doesn't agree with you, be respectful of their position.

Be thankful. Thank them for their time and attention.

Follow-up. Write a letter (or email) to thank them for meeting with you. Provide any additional information requested.

Testifying at Legislative Hearings

Arrive early and sign-up.

Keep it short - no longer than 3 to 5 minutes. Speak from your own personal experience.

Type testimony and bring copies for committee members. Check the RI General Assembly web site for information on the committee you are testifying before (<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/CommitteeMembers/>). Some committees specify how many copies of testimony to bring. If you are unsure, call the committee clerk listed on the page.

Identify yourself and the organization you represent.

State your position as "for" or "against" the proposed bill; identify the bill by name and number.

Summarize your recommendations first, and then add explanation.

Restate your position at the end of your testimony.

Do not repeat points made by speakers ahead of you. If several people are speaking from the same organization, divide up the points to be made with each speaker addressing different areas.

Thank the committee for the opportunity to speak.

Answer only those questions that you can answer correctly, and answer as clearly and succinctly as you can. Offer to find the answers to other questions and promptly get back to the committee members with the information.

or with people giving opposing testimony.

Writing your legislator

After face-to-face meetings, writing letters is the next best way to communicate with legislators.

Identify yourself: Be sure to include your name, address, phone number and e-mail address.

Be specific: You should state the reason you are writing in the first paragraph. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, be sure to identify it.

Be focused: Address only one issue per letter and, if possible, keep the letter to one page.

Be personal: Explain how the legislation you're writing about affects you, your family, your friends, your business or community.

Be clear: Let the legislator know what action you'd like them to take.

Calling a legislator

Be sure to introduce yourself.

Think about what you want to say.

Name the bill or statute. Be clear and specific.

Do not ramble in your conversation. Don't forget to ask your legislator their view on the position.

Make an appointment to meet with him or her in their office. If you feel talking about the issue further would be beneficial.

Offer to provide additional information.