

Contacting Your Legislators

There are several ways that state and national legislators can be urged by concerned citizens to support life-protecting legislation: personal visits, telephone calls, letter writing and rapid communication.

PERSONAL VISITS

Take every opportunity to educate your legislators. Contact their area office for an itinerary of speaking engagements or check the local newspaper for upcoming events that the legislator will attend. Visit legislators in their district offices. They may have more time to talk and can relate to you as a constituent. A visit to the legislator's office in the state or national capitol is also effective.

Checklist:

- Make an appointment.
- Gather information about your legislator, especially his stand and voting record on the life issues.
- Know specifically what you want to accomplish during the meeting.
- Be on time for the appointment, but be patient if your legislator encounters unexpected delays.
- Your first and lasting impressions are important. Look and act your best.
- When introducing yourself, start on a positive note. For example, compliment the legislator on his voting record.
- Be brief and concise, but cover all points, which concern you.
- Let your legislator talk.
- Listen to what he has to say. Take notes, if necessary.
- Respect the legislator's knowledge of the issue and respond to questions asked. If you cannot answer, admit it, and offer to find the answer. This will give you another opportunity to visit, call, or write, thus developing a continuing relationship.
- Offer to leave useful statistics, charts, or data, or to send more information. Most importantly, offer literature, which educates the legislator on the issue.
- Do not threaten or be sarcastic! Even if a legislator cannot vote for your side of the current issue, he may be helpful to you on another occasion. **DO NOT BURN YOUR BRIDGES!**
- Leave your business card with a note about how the legislator should vote on specific bills.
- Send a thank you note reiterating your main points.
- Ongoing contact is needed to encourage pro-life legislators to stay pro-life.

Because an issue is pending in Congress or the State Capitol, do not assume that your legislator is knowledgeable on the subject. Low-key, friendly conversation can be very meaningful, particularly if its theme is repeated often enough by a variety of people. The legislator will begin to get the message that there is an issue that is really important to constituents.

TELEPHONE CALLS

You may prefer to call your legislator, especially if you have met previously through a personal visit. Though you will most likely talk with an aide, a phone call is particularly effective if time is short.

Suggestions:

- Always make phone calls during normal waking hours (9am-9pm) but do not be surprised if your legislator calls back any time of the day or night.
- State legislators can usually be reached at their Annapolis office during the General Assembly (January - April).
- Federal legislators can be contacted in Washington or at their home office.
- Identify yourself, reminding the legislator of a previous meeting or contact.
- State your business clearly, concisely and courteously.
- Have some notes jotted down so you will remember everything you wish to discuss.
- Be sure to give a bill number and title.
- Listen carefully to what your legislator says or asks. If you do not have the answer, tell him you will investigate further and call back.
- Thank your legislator for the time and consideration given you.
- Follow a telephone call with a letter restating the points of the call, especially if you must leave a message with an aide.

LETTER WRITING

Most legislators keep a mail file on every bill and review it carefully when the bill comes to the floor for a vote. A legislator may read portions of a well-written letter aloud during committee hearings or floor debate. A few persuasive letters may determine how a legislator votes.

Suggestions:

- Write on personal or business letterhead (with employer approval).
- Identify your topic immediately.
- If you write about a specific bill, refer to it by number and subject.
- Confine your letter to a single issue and a single page.
- Explain why you support or oppose a particular issue so that if amendments are proposed, the legislator will know their effect on your position.
- Back your position with reliable facts, figures, and personal experience.
- Include favorable pro-life articles and editorials.
- Be clear, concise, and reasonable.
- Do not make threats. You may need that legislator for another matter.
- Be yourself. Use your own words. Avoid stereotyped phrases and sentences that give the impression of form letters.
- Write your legislator while a bill is in committee or just before a vote is taken.
- Always sign your name legibly. Include your return address in your letter in case the envelope is discarded.
- Check the spelling of your legislator's name, and address him properly (The Honorable...).

- Thank your legislator if he votes to protect life. He will know that you are aware of his voting record.
- Be persistent. Do not be offended by a negative answer from your legislator. Write again and get others to write. A legislators mind can be changed!

RAPID COMMUNICATION

- Email is an excellent source to get information quickly and in large numbers. Remember to include your physical address so your legislator will know you live in his district.

FACTS ABOUT GOVERNMENT

1. Both U.S. Senators represent everyone in Maryland. State Senators represent designated districts within Maryland.
2. Only one U.S. Representative (Congressman) represents a given district to the U.S. House of Representatives. There are 8 congressional districts in Maryland.
3. State senators and representatives are simply called Senator or Representative. U.S. Representatives are called Congressmen.
4. U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives perform their legislative work in Washington. State senators and state representatives do their legislative work in Annapolis
5. The Maryland House of Delegates is the lower house of the General Assembly, the state legislature of the U.S. state of Maryland, and is composed of 141 delegates elected from 47 districts.

USE THESE WORDS CORRECTLY

LEGISLATOR - (noun) The person who makes the laws. (Rep. Yates is my legislator.)

LEGISLATION - (noun) The law itself. (Rep. Jones sent me a copy of the new legislation.)

LEGISLATURE - (noun) All the legislators together. (The legislature meets 40 days a year.)

LEGISLATIVE - (adjective) Relates to legislation. (The legislative session finished in March.)

LEGISLATE - (verb) To pass a law. (You cannot legislate kindness.)