

Effectiveness in Lobbying

For Catholics, public virtue is as important as private virtue in building up the common good. In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. Every believer is called to faithful citizenship, to become an informed, active, and responsible participant in the political process.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*(2000) available at: www.nccbuscc.org/faithfulcitizenship/citizenship.htm

The Texas House and Senate meet every other year on odd years. Below are some suggestions to insure that your efforts are successful.

Remember the Multiplier Effect

Legislators recognize that voters often do not take the time to express their opinions. Therefore they give added weight to the opinions of those who take the time to contact them.

- **1 Telephone Call** = another **10** people hold the same or similar views
- **1 Original Letter** = another **20** people hold the same or similar views
- **1 Visit to the Home Office** = another **50** people support the views being presented
- **1 Visit to the State Capitol** = another **100** people hold the same or similar views

How to Contact Your Legislator

The website of the Texas Legislature can be found at www.capitol.state.tx.us/capitol.htm. If you are uncertain about who represents you, enter your address or zip code on the page “Who represents me?” (also titled “Find Your Incumbent”). A list of your elected representatives will be displayed.

Remember that the state legislature redistricted Texas in accordance with the 2000 Census, so some legislative districts have changed.

The **mailing address** of all state senators’ offices in the capitol is The Honorable (name of the Senator), P.O. Box 12068, Capitol Station, Austin, Texas, 78711.

The **mailing address** of all state representatives’ offices in the capitol is Representative (name of the Representative), P.O. Box 2910, Austin, Texas, 78768-2910.

General Guidelines to Successful Lobbying

1. **Act together.** Section 1905 of the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (2nd ed.) quotes the *Epistula* (Letter) of Barnabas in urging that we act together to promote the common good. “Do not live, entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already justified, but gather instead to seek the common good together.” *Ep. Barnabae*, 4, 10: PG 2, 734. When we act together, our public officials know our concerns are not merely those of an isolated individual, but rather represent an important part of the community.

2. **Act on time.** When you receive a message that action is needed (an “action alert”), try to do what is asked as near as possible to the time requested. Legislators are particularly likely to pay attention right before various votes on a bill. Therefore it is important that they hear from you at those times.
3. **Be specific.** Know the bill number you are contacting the legislator about, and be clear in asking for the action you want taken. For example, “Senator, this is Susan Q. Public, and I am calling to urge you to **vote yes on the passage of Senate Bill 102** banning all cloning in the state of Texas.”
4. **Be consistent.** When legislation is being considered, certain concerns or arguments begin to be heard repeatedly. It is important that legislators hear a consistent message about these concerns, so use the materials provided with an action alert in writing or talking with your Representative or Senator.
5. **Be positive in your message.** Scripture teaches “The wise man is esteemed for his discernment, yet pleasing speech increases his persuasiveness.” Prov. 16:21. Avoid threatening language of any kind. Public officials have already won at least one election, and they almost universally believe they can do it again. “We are pleased to work to elect those who share our position,” is much more effective than “We will work to defeat you in the next election if you don’t vote our way on this bill.”

Guidelines for Lobbying in Person

1. **Always make an appointment.** Legislators and their staff members are busy people, particularly during the legislative session. Make an appointment before going to see them. When making the appointment, ask for the name of the staff member who deals with the issue. Don’t be put off if you only meet with the staff member. Often these people are the real decision makers, since legislators cannot know every bill that has been proposed in a session.
2. **Be prepared.** Always bring two copies of information; one for the legislator and one for the staff member. Know the bill number, and what action you want the legislator to take.
3. **Be on time.**
4. **Lobby in pairs.** Meetings go smoother if you have one person to speak and the other to listen and take notes. Try to get a commitment.
5. **Write a summary immediately after your meeting.** Memories fade, and get jumbled when meeting with more than one legislator.
6. **Write a thank-you note.** Be sure to include the date, place and subject of your meeting, confirm any action the legislator (or staff member) agreed to take, and repeat your request that the legislator take a specific action (i.e. support or oppose a bill).

Guidelines for Writing Legislators

1. **Be timely.** **Communicating with a legislator is particularly important when a bill is placed on the committee or legislative calendar to come up for a vote. If your letter arrives after the vote, it has little or no effect.**
2. **Write in your own words.** Legislators give more weight to letters that seem to be written in the words of the sender, rather than copied from a form. If you are writing in response to an action alert, take a few minutes before writing to think about how to say things in your own words.
3. **Be concise.** Public officials get lots of mail, so limit your letter to one or two brief paragraphs and never more than two pages if at all possible.
4. **Be respectful.** Legislators want to make voters happy. Tell him or her what you want them to do, and why. Never threaten or personally attack the legislator, even when expressing disappointment with his or her vote. “I was saddened to learn that you voted against women receiving information regarding the risks to abortion” is much more effective than “Only a fool would believe abortionists tell women about the risks of abortion.”
5. **Follow through.** Find out what action your legislator took related to your request, and send a follow-up note when possible. “I was delighted to see that you voted in favor of the proposed moratorium on the death penalty” lets the legislator know that you are keeping track of his or her vote.

Guidelines for Lobbying by Email

1. **Recognize legislators weigh email differently.** Since the Anthrax scare of last year, legislators are more responsive to email. However, because of the possibility of sending multiple messages with little effort, it is sometimes considered less representative of voters’ views.
2. **Use the subject line to state your message.** As staff members review email, they can clearly distinguish your email from spam if you put your message in the subject line. For example, “Please support House Bill 17” lets the staff member know the relevance of your message and the action you want taken.
3. **Avoid attaching files.** State your message in the email, rather than attaching a file since files are the most common source of destructive viruses. If you want to send supporting documents with your message, consider faxing the message instead.

Guidelines for Lobbying by Telephone

1. **Identify yourself clearly.** The most effective phone calls are those from people who live in the district of the senator or representative receiving the call. “Hello. This is John Q. Citizen, and I live in _____, which is in your legislative district.”
2. **Be prepared.** Know the bill number your are calling about, why you support it, and what action you want the legislator to take.
3. **Ask for a written response.** At the end of the call, ask for a written response explaining how the legislator voted on the legislation you are calling about.

Finding Contact Information for Your Legislator

State Legislators

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Federal legislators

You can identify your congressman by entering your zip code on the House of Representatives website at <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>. Members of the United States Congress can be reached through the general switchboard (202) 224-3121, or by writing to them at United States House of Representatives, Washington D.C. 20515. The House of Representatives website (www.house.gov) contains additional contact information, including the address and phone numbers for district offices in Texas.