



Effective Advocacy

May 9, 2023

Help Us Build Communities in God's Vision of Justice

Holy Spirit,

We praise and thank you!

You anoint us to

bring glad tidings to the poor

proclaim liberty to captives

recover sight for the blind

free the oppressed

and build communities in

keeping with God's vision of

justice.

Show us how to be

light of the world

salt of the earth

seeds that sprout love

and leaven that infuses

humanity with the desire to

promote human dignity and

solidarity.

Help Us Build Communities in God's Vision of Justice

Help us to listen so that
those in need can lead our efforts to
proclaim a more hopeful vision
liberate captives from injustice
heal the blindness of the powerful
free us all from self-centeredness
and build community.

Amen.

Source: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Advocacy with Elected Officials

- U.S. Senators and Representatives
- State Senators and Delegates
- County Supervisors



WHAT ELECTED OFFICIALS CARE A LOT ABOUT	WHAT THEY DON'T CARE MUCH ABOUT
Verified constituents from their legislative district (or state for U.S. Senators)	People from outside their legislative district (or state for U.S. Senators)
Advocacy that requires effort — the more effort, the more they care: calls, personal emails, and especially showing up in person in the district	Petitions, form letters, a tweet, or a Facebook comment (unless they generate widespread attention)
Local press and editorials, maybe national press	Wonky DC-based news
An interest group's endorsement	Your thoughtful analysis of a proposed bill
Groups of constituents, locally famous individuals, or big individual campaign contributors	A single constituent
Concrete asks that entail a verifiable action — vote for a bill, make a public statement, etc.	General ideas about the world
A single ask in your communication — letter, email, phone call, office visit, etc.	A laundry list of all the issues you're concerned about

Forms of Advocacy

- Petitions
- Social media messaging
- Letters
- Emails
- Phone calls
- Visits
- Town hall meetings
- Public comment hearings
- Letters to the editor

Petitions

- Easy but generally ineffective
- More useful for the sponsoring organization



Photo credit: Garry Knight

Social Media Messaging

- Easy but often ineffective



- Use visuals.
- Tag the elected official.
- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Make a specific ask.
- Provide a link to additional information or site where others can take action.

Letters

- Takes more effort, but generally more effective
- Use when immediate action is not needed



Letters (cont.)

- Limit your letter to one issue.
- Be respectful and professional; avoid spelling and grammatical errors.
- Handwriting your letter is better than typing it, if your handwriting is legible to others; if not, typing it is better.
- Put your address at the top, so your elected official's staff will see you're a constituent.

Letters (cont.)

- Be succinct: state your specific ask and give your main reasons in a paragraph or two. Use your own words.
- Humanize your message: state briefly why the issue is important to you or how the issue affects people in the elected official's district/state.

Email

- Often better than a letter, particularly when action by the elected official is needed within next two weeks
- Limit your email to one issue.
- Be respectful and professional; avoid spelling and grammatical errors.



Email (cont.)

- Be succinct: state your specific ask and give your main reasons in a paragraph or two. Use your own words.
- Humanize your message: state briefly why the issue is important to you or how the issue affects people in the elected official's district/state.

Email (cont.)

- Using the comment form on an elected official's website
 - Otherwise, generate your own email and include your mailing address in the email.
- Writing to two or three elected officials on the same issue
- Sending email from an advocacy organization's website
 - If you do, personalize it with your own message.
- Don't overdo it with email

Phone Calls

- Effective, particularly on hot-button issues



- Limit each call to a single issue.
- Give your name, city, and zip code.
- State your position in a single sentence, asking the elected official to support or oppose the pending action.

Phone Calls (cont.)

- Having a substantive discussion with a staff member:
 - Introduce yourself to the receptionist and ask for the appropriate legislative aide.
 - Introduce yourself to the aide and get the aide's name. Explain why you're calling (your ask, etc.).
 - Ask where the elected official stands on the issue.
 - If the aide is not available, leave a message and ask the aide to call you back.
 - Follow up as needed.

Visits with Elected Officials or Staff

- Probably the most effective form of advocacy
- Gives your group a chance to convey more information than in a letter or email
- Gives the elected official or staff a chance to ask questions
- Can help develop a productive relationship



Visits (cont.)

- Tips for a visit with elected officials or staff:
 - Choose a topic, preferably a single issue with some specific action pending.
 - Decide who's going, including people who can bring different experiences and concerns to bear on the issue.
 - Schedule your visit with the elected official's office.
 - Prepare for the visit, including developing an agenda, deciding who will say what, and deciding what written materials to bring.
 - Decide who will serve as the group's chief spokesperson and who will take notes.

Visits (cont.)

- Sample agenda for the visit:
 - Introductions
 - Express appreciation for an action the elected official has taken
 - State the group's ask
 - Provide and briefly explain any written material you've brought
 - Group members share their stories
 - Ask for the elected official's or staff's response
 - Repeat the ask
 - Thank the elected official or staff for their time

Visits (cont.)

- Tips for a visit with elected officials or staff (cont.):
 - Be clear, concise, and respectful.
 - If you're asked a question to which you don't have an immediate answer, offer to get back to the elected official or staff with the answer.
 - Follow up after the meeting by sending an email thanking the elected official or staff for the meeting and responding to any questions left unanswered during the visit.

Town Hall Meetings

- Can also be very effective
- Speaking opportunities are limited



Photo credit: Miami Dade College Padrón Campus

Town Hall Meetings (cont.)

- Tips for a town hall meeting:
 - Find out when the next town hall meeting will be.
 - Ideally, get a group together to attend or participate in the town hall meeting, and have each person register.
 - Research your elected official's position and voting record on the issue.
 - Prepare a list of questions for your group to ask the elected official in light of your research.

Town Hall Meetings (cont.)

- Tips for a town hall meeting (cont.):
 - The group should get there early, spread out, and find seats near the front of the room.
 - When the floor is opened for questions, everyone in the group should raise his/her hand to be called on.
 - The first member of the group to be called on should ask the first question.
 - After that question is answered, everyone else in the group should raise his/her hand again. Whoever is called on next should ask the second question on the list. And so on.

Public Comment Hearings



- Another effective advocacy tool
- Can make a brief statement
- Often allows you to address multiple elected officials at once

Photo credit: Will Benson

Public Comment Hearings (cont.)

- Tips for a public comment hearing:
 - Find out when the next public comment hearing will be.
 - Ideally, get a group together to attend the hearing, and have each person register.
 - Decide on the issue(s) your group will cover and decide what aspect of the issue(s) each person will address.
 - Prepare your remarks in writing and make multiple copies.
 - Practice and time your delivery, since you have only 3 minutes for your presentation.
 - Your written materials can be a bit longer and can include attachments.

Public Comment Hearings (cont.)

- Tips for a public comment hearing (cont.):
 - When your name is called the first time, move to the “on-deck” chair, bringing the copies of your remarks.
 - When the speaker before you finishes and your name is called again, give the clerk the copies of your remarks, then return to the lectern and begin your remarks.
 - Maintain a positive tone and good eye contact.
 - Conclude with your specific ask.

Letters to the Editor

- Yet another effective advocacy tool
- Allows you to reach a wide public audience and elected officials at the same time
- May have beneficial effect even if not published



Photo credit: The Clermont Sun

Letters to the Editor (cont.)

- Tips for writing an effective LTE:
 - Respond to an article, editorial, or op-ed in the paper.
 - Follow the newspaper's guidance on how to submit an LTE.
 - Be timely.
 - Share your expertise.
 - Refer to the elected official you're trying to influence by name.
 - Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting.

Letters to the Editor (cont.)

- Tips for writing an effective LTE (cont.):
 - Refute, advocate, and make a call to action.
 - Include your name, address, and daytime phone number.
 - If your letter is printed, clip it out and send it to your elected official with a brief cover note.

Advocacy Resources and Networks



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF
CATHOLIC BISHOPS

<http://usccb.org/take-action>



<https://vacatholic.org/action-center>

Advocacy Resources (cont.)



<https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/our-vision-and-ministry/advocacy/action-center/>



<https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/advocacy>



<https://www.crs.org/get-involved/advocate-poor/public-policy>

For more information:

Bob More

Care for Our Common Home Ministry

rmore.paxchristi@gmail.com