

## Having a Voice

Ways to contact your senator or representative:

- Phone their office/ leave a message, or ask to have the legislator return your call.
- Email to their office.
- Go to a town hall meeting.
- Make an appointment to meet with legislator.
- Sign an online petition.
- Write a letter to the editor.

Timing is everything. Nip it in the bud: Make shortly after a bill has been introduced and is in committee, or has moved to another chamber. A huge rapid response that clogs up the phone lines is most effective. If the bill clears the committee(s), call before a floor vote. For less urgent circumstances where time permits, Emails or handwritten letters are good.

Every communication you make is entered into a database and counted. Flooding is the most effective way to get the legislator's attention.

### Tips for telephone calls

- Use the legislator's title: Senator Gardner, Senator Bennet, Representative \_\_\_\_\_
- Identify yourself and what state (or town) you are from (you may be asked for a zip code)
- Be polite even if you are letting the person know you're strongly against the Bill.
- Clearly and briefly state the issue and what you want the legislator to do.
- Consider thanking them for their service.

Tips for letters, emails, or visits: all of the above, plus

- Some relevant facts from reputable sources
- Information on how the issue personally affects you
- Let them know that a larger group (friends, church members, etc.) feel the same way

### Remember

It has never been more important to support legislation we consider beneficial to the common good, or more crucial to cry out about legislation and policy that harms us. Even if you never done this before, write yourself a short script about one topic, and make one call. Your anxiety will soon disappear. Don't let special interests rule our country.

## Why Contact Your Elected Officials About a Bill?

- ❖ We speak for the poor and vulnerable populations who normally don't have a voice.
- ❖ We advocate dignity and justice for all people. We were called to do this.
- ❖ When we act as a coordinated network or advocates and reach out to public officials on relevant timely issues, we effectively impact public policies, and achieve things on a scale and scope we couldn't do otherwise.
- ❖ Without people's input, representation is, at best, and at worst, a personal agenda.
- ❖ If people don't participate in government the only remaining influences are
  - LOBBYISTS
  - BIG DONORS (Supreme Court decision on Citizens United)
  - PARTY PRESSURE
  - RE-ELECTION CONCERNS
  - CAMPAING FUNDING CONCERNS

## Facts About Lobbyists

- ✓ Because most people cannot afford to hire a lobbyist, many people interests are utterly unrepresented, so the lobby corps disproportionately represents the interests of the wealthy industries or individuals
- ✓ Spending by Lobbyists is huge. In 2015 alone:
  - § Pharmaceuticals/ health products spent \$238 million
  - § Insurance companies spent \$156 million
  - § Oil and Gas \$129 million
  - § Business Associations like Chamber of Commerce American Medical Assn, \$128 million
- ✓ In 2015 total lobbying spending the US amounted to \$3.22 billion
- ✓ Number of registered active lobbyists in the US from 200 to 2016 is 11, 143
- ✓ Between 1998 and 2010 money spent lobbying per year more than doubled
- ✓ In Colorado there are 6 lobbyists for every legislator (Morgan Carroll story)

What do lobbyists do? "Research" for legislators. "Explain" bills to legislators, write their own bills and shop for legislators, buy meals and gifts for legislators, befriend and flatter legislators, offer legislators their own full-time for assistance, and occasionally threaten that certain votes would dry-up their re-election funds.

So, while it is easy to become disappointed, cynical, or apathetic, that response simply insures the victory for special interests and the weakening of our democracy.