

Keep track of when you contact your legislators, what issues you are contacting them about, and what their response was.

Contact with Your Legislators

Issue	Response

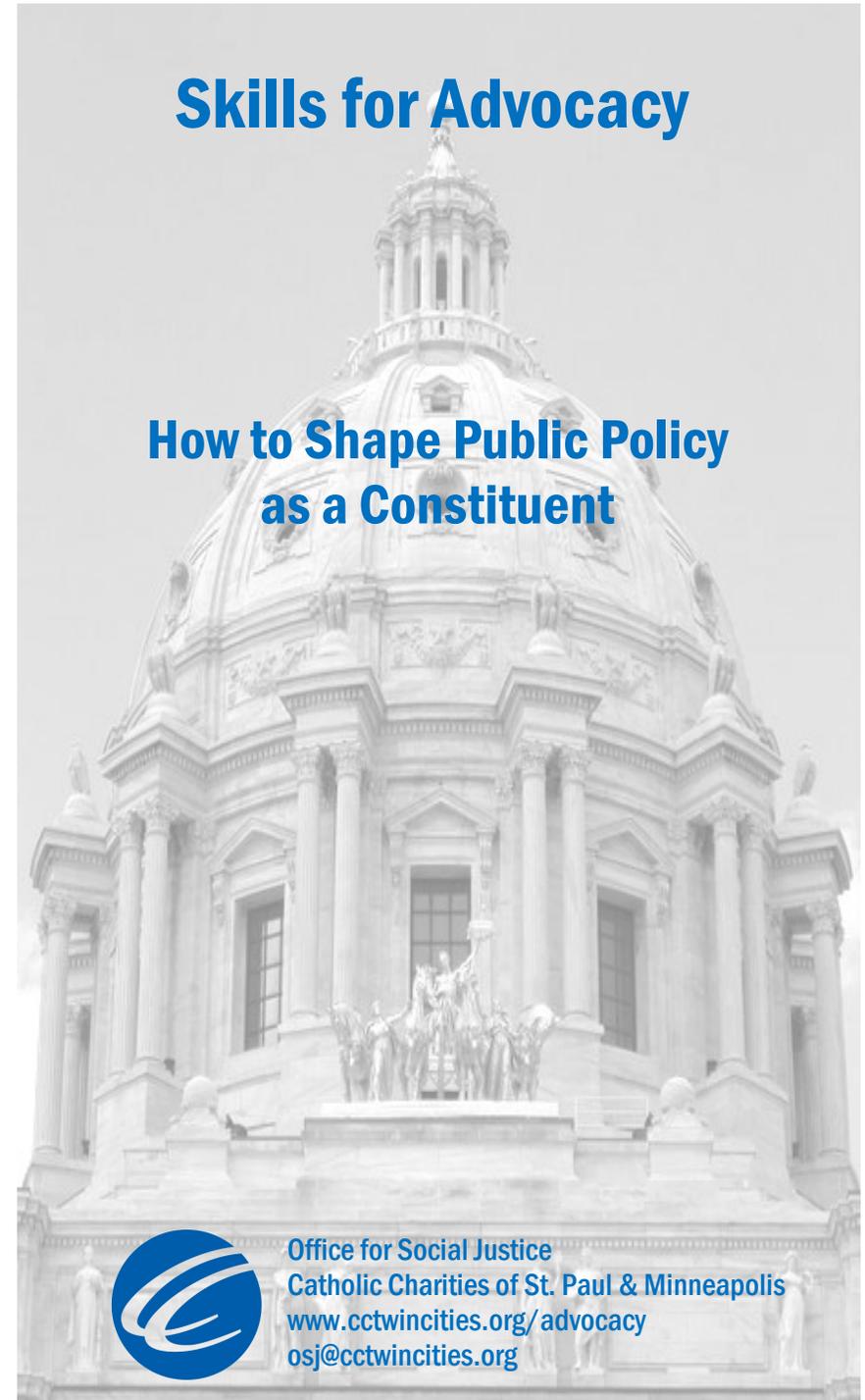
Resources

MN Legislature

www.leg.state.mn.us/

Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice

www.cctwincities.org/advocacy



General Advocacy Guide

How to Shape Public Policy as a Constituent

Stay informed. Learn about the issues. It may take time but begin now. Get to know your elected officials. Pay attention to how they vote and what they value.

Write letters and emails. Use the telephone. Schedule meetings. Following simple guidelines in this booklet, you will quickly master various forms of advocacy. Always keep in mind that, in a democracy, citizen advocacy is our vital right and responsibility. Voting is only a first step!

What to Include

With all forms of advocacy, there are key things to include:

- Your name and address
- Affiliations that connect your concern or opinion to a larger body of people (e.g., Catholic Charities Sowers of Justice Advocacy Network, your parish, or another organization)
- A request—what do you want them to do?
- An offer for follow-up conversation or information

DOs and DON'Ts

- Do be respectful and polite, no matter what.
- Do be brief and to the point.
- Do be specific; include bill numbers if you have them.
- Do know your facts.
- Don't underestimate the value of your experience.
- Don't bluff. If you don't know, be honest and follow up with the information later.
- Don't discuss more than one issue at a time.
- Do thank public officials and not just when you're asking for their support.
- Don't underestimate your right to be heard.

Your Legislators

State Senator:

Key Issues or Bill #	Their Stance	How They Voted

What issues do you agree on?

What issues do you disagree on?

What does she/he value?

State Representative:

Key Issues or Bill #	Their Stance	How They Voted

What issues do you agree on?

What issues do you disagree on?

What does she/he value?

Building a Relationship with Your Legislators

Having a relationship with your legislators allows your advocacy to be most effective. With a relationship, you are able to build a rapport with them—they will trust your credibility and opinion as a constituent, regardless of whether they agree with you. Knowing your legislators also allows you to know what interests or concerns are important to them, and what values they operate from. This knowledge helps you learn how to approach them in the most effective way on a variety of issues.

Relationship-Building Tasks

- Make an appointment with your legislators. During session it may need to be at their office in St. Paul and on a specific issue. Out of session, try to meet them in a local setting.
- Contact them simply to say thank you or congratulate them.
- Talk to them about issues you are passionate and knowledgeable about.

Strategy

Keep track of what committees your legislators are on, and what committee leadership positions, if any, they hold. When bills come to their committee, they have an opportunity to support, reject, or change them, and those are all opportunities for you to affect change.

Keep track of their stance on a variety of issues, and what values they seem to hold most dear. Connect with them when possible on shared stances.

Communicating Effectively

Whether you agree or disagree on an issue, there is likely common ground between you. Work to find common values, experiences, or beliefs.

Tips for Specific Forms of Advocacy

Find out who represents you and how to contact them at www.gis.leg.mn/iMaps/districts/

Writing Emails or Letters

- Be legible.
- Use a clear subject line for an email. For letters, state your topic in the first sentence.
- Ask for a response.
- Personal letters and emails get the most attention.

Telephone Calls

- Rehearse before calling; write out bullet points.
- Be prepared to leave a one-sentence message.
- Call after business hours if you would feel more comfortable leaving a message.

Meetings with Your Legislator

- Call their office to make an appointment if possible.
- Rehearse what you plan to say.
- Leave something behind, such as a fact sheet or copy of a bill.
- Take notes about their position, and any follow-up you offer.

What if your legislator is in a committee hearing or a floor session when you plan to meet with them?

- You can pull them off of the floor or out of a committee hearing to talk with you.
- Hand a written note to the page stationed at the door of a hearing or floor session, include where you will be waiting for them, and how to spot you. For example, “I’m by the water fountain, and I’m wearing a blue sweater.”
- Your legislator will come meet with you if they are able to step out.

How a Bill Becomes Law

1. Bill

The idea for a new law is drafted as a bill and introduced by sponsors in both the House and the Senate.



2. House Committees

The House holds committee hearings on the bill to discuss it and make changes, if necessary.



3. House Floor

After the committees finish their work, the full House of Representatives votes on the bill.



4. Senate Committees

The Senate also holds committee hearings on its version of the bill. These can go on before, during or after the House hearings.



5. Senate Floor

Just as the House does, the full Senate must vote on the bill.



6. Passage

If the House and Senate pass the same version of a bill, it is sent to the governor for action. If the language of the bills differ, then the differences have to be worked out by a conference committee.



7. Conference Committee

If the House and Senate can't reach an agreement on the language, they can work out the differences using a conference committee.



8. Governor

If the House and Senate pass the conference committee report, then it goes to the governor where it can be signed into law or vetoed.



Strategize

Your advocacy will be most effective when done at key times in the legislative process. Your legislators will be most receptive to your concerns and opinions when they are preparing to provide their own input through a vote or debate.

Know what committees and leadership positions your legislators hold. Know where a bill is in the legislative process, and when it would be most effective to act.

"Capitol Steps: From Idea to Law"
House of Representatives Public Information Office. 2011, (4-5)
http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hinfo/leginfo/How_a_bill.pdf