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**RESOURCE GUIDE**

**Episcopal Church of New Hampshire Advocacy**

**Participating in the political process is expected of you**

New Hampshire's state government makes it clear that you, as a resident, have a right and a responsibility to participate in the process. It says:

*“You have many opportunities to impact [the Legislative process] including testifying at hearings, writing letters or making phone calls to your representatives, or working with organizations to create awareness of the possible impact of a piece of legislation. You should know that New Hampshire's ‘citizen legislature’ is a great source of state pride.* -- From the NH General Court

**Legislative Advocacy**

As a voter, as an advocate, as a consumer and as a resident of New Hampshire, you can affect the outcome of a piece of legislation being considered by New Hampshire's lawmakers at the Statehouse. You can also propose your own suggested changes to existing laws or propose brand new laws, by working with your own elected representatives.

Our legislators say that they pay close attention when people contact them about a bill. This means that a call, letter or testimony from you may make the difference in how a legislator votes on a bill.

*"You have many opportunities to impact this process, including testifying at hearings, writing letters or making phone calls to your representatives, or working with organizations to create awareness of the possible impact of a piece of legislation. Representatives and Senators welcome phone calls at home since most of them don't have offices at the State House, and have little or no staff to help them gather information. To contact your Legislator you may call the House Clerk's office (603) 271-2548 or the Senate Clerk's office (603) 271-3420 for more information."* –NH General Court

**Who is my legislator?**

If you don't yet know who represents you in the New Hampshire Statehouse, visit:

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/members/wml.aspx>

**How to know what's happening**

Episcopal Church of NH can provide you with updates on activities at the Statehouse related to our priority issues. Episcopal Church of NH can provide you with information, including:

* Which legislator(s) sponsored the bill.
* Episcopal Church of NH’s position on the bill.
* Talking points in support or opposition to the bill.
* How to contact the elected official(s) involved.

You can also stay on top of things by visiting the nh.gov website, where you can view a piece of legislation (a bill) as it makes its way through the legislative process.You can see the current status of any bill:

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/>

We won’t be tracking each of the more than 1000 pieces of legislation for this coming session, but we’ll be on top of a handful of critical bills and we will be able to connect you to other advocacy organizations, if you want to lend your voice to an issue we aren’t tracking. If you have questions, contact Laura Simoes, Missioner for Community Engagement, at lsimoes@nhepiscopal.org.

**Before commenting on a bill or contacting a legislator:**

* Think of some anecdotes or stories which illustrate the need to support or defeat the bill and which elicit emotional, sympathetic reactions.

Whether you are going to call, write or talk to a legislator in person, the steps you take are always the same:

* First, state who you are.
* Second, state why you care.
* Third, ask directly for what you want.

Being an advocate requires being in it for the long haul. As the bill travels through the legislative process you may have many opportunities to get involved.

Other advocacy activities may include:

* Writing a letter to the committee members who will hear testimony on the bill.
* Attending a public hearing at the Legislature on the bill and give written or oral testimony in support or opposition of the bill or attending the Legislative Committee’s executive session, at which members vote on the bill, to see how the vote comes out.
* Pulling together parish or community leaders for a meeting with your local legislator(s).
* Contacting those who represent you in the legislature and ask them to vote for or against the bill when it comes up for a final vote in the House of Representatives or State Senate (a floor vote). You can also ask them to discuss the issue with their colleagues who are on the appropriate committees, or with the House and Senate leadership members.
* Write a letter to the editor to your local paper or a statewide newspaper.

**General guidelines for working with elected officials**

* **Don’t underestimate elected officials.** With rare exceptions they are honest, intelligent and want to do the right thing. Your job is to inform them what you think is right and why you think so.
* **Don’t knock the legislative process or government in general.** Those who are in office generally respect the process and they need to respect you if you want them to cooperate.
* **Be informed.** Study the facts and be fully prepared before contacting or meeting with an elected official to advocate a position. Make sure you understand the pro and con arguments about the issue at hand. Reach out to the Episcopal Church of NH for information and resources.
* **Be friendly.** Don’t contact elected officials only when you want their help. Keep in touch with them throughout the year and compliment them on their other legislative work, when appropriate. One suggestion is to invite a local elected official to a parish event to discuss how your ministry in the community supports his/her constituents.
* **Be reasonable.** Recognize that there are legitimate differences of opinion and they must be discussed in a calm and rational manner.
* **Be thoughtful.** When you think an elected official has done the right thing, say so. They get many requests and barbs, but very few ***thank you’s*!**
* **Vote!** The Episcopal Public Policy Network has resources for encouraging voter participation at your parish. Learn more at <http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org>
* **Be a good opponent.** Fight issues, not people.
* **Run for Office.** If a legislator consistently opposes something you think is important, work to elect someone who is more friendly to your issue. Better yet, run for office yourself!

**Follow-up**

After you've had any kind of contact with a legislator, it will be important to share what you learned with Episcopal Church of NH so that we can be up to date and effective in our continuing work with legislators. Please email updates to the Missioner for Community Engagement, Laura Simoes, at [lsimoes@nhepiscopal.org](mailto:lsimoes@nhepiscopal.org).