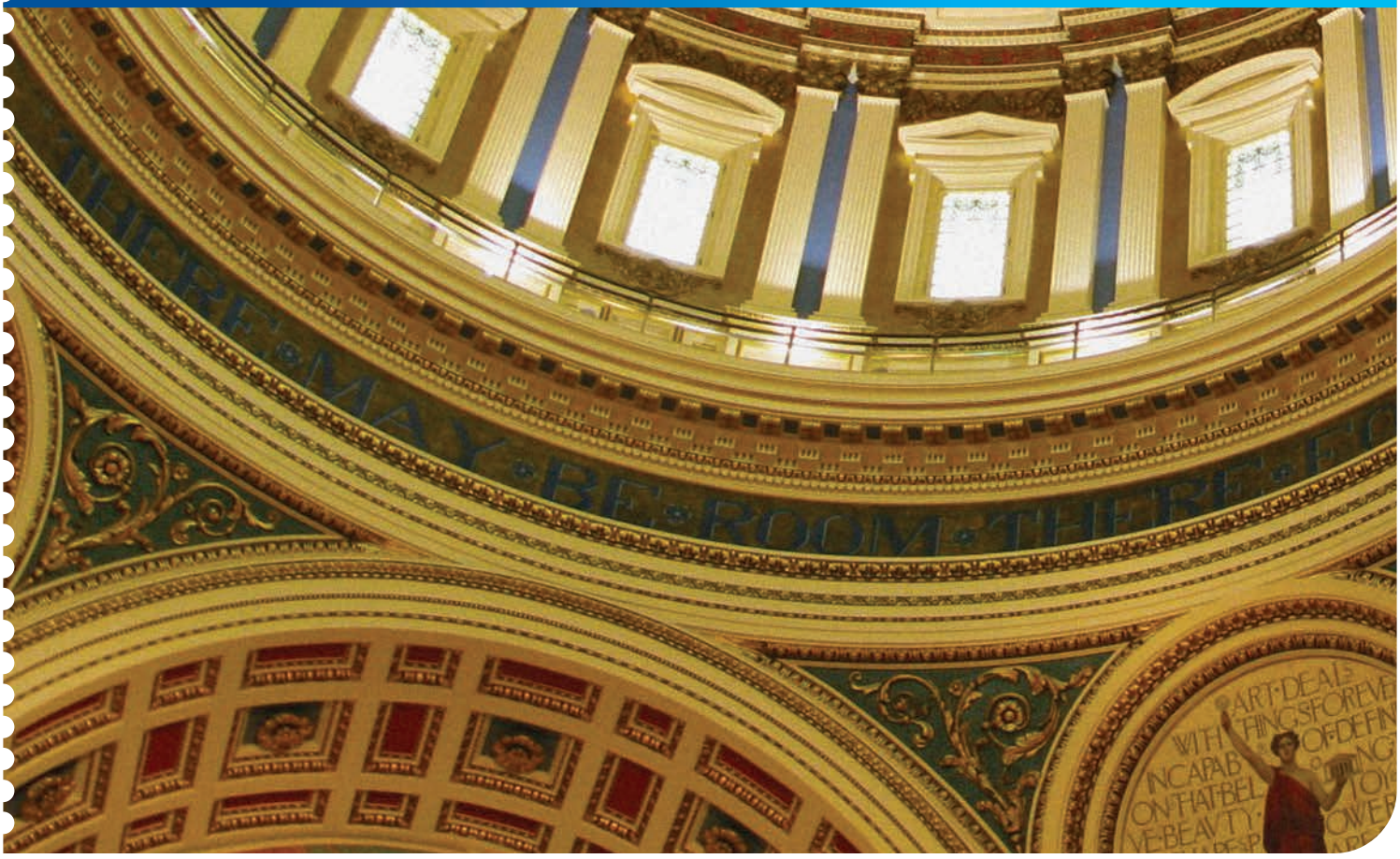
PENNSYLVANIA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



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In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do.

***-Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,* United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

WHY VISIT YOUR LEGISLATORS?

- Every year issues come before the state legislature that affect the Catholic Church, our schools, ministries and Catholic individuals in a direct way.
- If you are hosting an event, are featured in a positive news story or run a program that has a benefit within the community, your legislators should hear about it.
- It's important for lawmakers to meet with their Catholic constituents to hear about the issues that matter to them and to learn why they matter.
- As Catholics we have a moral obligation to get involved with the public debate. When we fulfill this civic duty together, we can make the "the weight of (our) convictions so influential that, as a result, the exercise of civil authority will be just and laws will accord with the moral precepts and the common good."[1]
- It's important for legislators to learn about the Catholic presence in their communities and how it benefits all of their constituents, regardless of creed.
- A meeting will always be more memorable than an email.
- Studies show that in-person visits from constituents have the most impact on legislators and their staff – more than emails, phone calls and letters!

SETTING UP A MEETING

- Find your legislator via our website, www.pacatholic.org.
- Meetings in the legislator's district office are usually best, because legislators are typically less busy than when in Harrisburg. Also, it will save you travel time.
- When requesting the meeting, explain that you are a constituent and that you would like to talk about issues that are important to you.
- Sometimes the legislator is not available, but a member of his or her staff is. The staff member will pass along your comments to the legislator. Do not be

[1] *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, 14*, Vatican II, 1965

disappointed if you meet with staff. Often they are well versed on issues and can be very influential to a legislator's position.

TALKING TO LEGISLATORS

Know thy legislators:

- Google the legislator's name to find his or her website. Read the online biography page and find out about your legislator's interests and hobbies.
- Visit www.pacatholic.org to see what legislative issues are currently being pursued.
- Study your legislator's voting records and statements, particularly on the issues for which you are advocating.
- Do you have any mutual friends? Find out what you have in common.
- If you are unsure or uneasy about a visit, contact PCC staff to ask for more information at 717-238-9613.

> **We in America do not have a government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.**
>
> **- Thomas Jefferson**

Be clear about your request:

- Assume legislators/staff know little or nothing about what you do and the issue you've come to talk to them about, until you learn otherwise.
- Your job is to inform, educate and ASK for their support on an important issue. Their job is to REPRESENT you and your neighbors.

Explain the issue in terms important to them:

[Remember: politicians work just as hard at survival as any other business.]

- Why is it in his or her interest to support our position?
- What is the benefit to the community?
- Is the idea/issue popular? Be able to demonstrate this in some way.
- Can they make their mark with this issue?
- Are you or your family, parish, school, or organization helping their constituents in some way?

Always tell the truth:

There should only be two responses to questions posed to you:

- The answer.
- Or if you don't know, "I'll find out." It's okay to tell them you will email or call with the information they are requesting.

Listen Closely To Their Answers:

"Yes" sounds like:

- "I agree, and will support that."

"No" sounds like:

- "I'm with you but hope it doesn't come up for a vote."
- "I don't want the committee to consider this legislation."
- "You make some good points."
- "Send me more information."
- "I do not support…but might not oppose."

WHAT YOUR LEGISLATORS MAY NOT KNOW

- Come with a few positive anecdotes about how your ministry, parish, school or family helps and participates in the community.
- Your "ask" should be specific. For example, "Please support continued funding for these programs in this year's budget at the same level as last year."
- Explain the services provided by the Church in your region, and give a quick overview of other ministries such as Catholic Charities or other facilities in the legislator's district.
    - Many people do not know the depth or reach of the Catholic presence – including charities, schools, parishes, families, etc. – and are not aware that many of the community organizations they are familiar with are Catholic.
- If you have this info, share how many people were helped in your area in the last year.
    - i.e. what important services are you providing for their constituents?
- Remember: Numbers are good, but adding a personal story makes the meeting memorable.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Remember to send any additional information the legislator or staff may have asked for in a timely manner
- Please remember to mail or email a thank you note to the legislator for meeting with you, and repeat your specific request in a kind manner.
- In the future, if you are hosting an event, are featured in a positive news story or run a program that has a benefit within the community, your legislators should hear about it. You can always contact your legislator again!

EXAMPLES OF SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS FOR CURRENT ISSUES

Abortion Opt-Out:

- Please pass legislation that prohibits insurance providers that participate in the insurance exchanges created by the federal health care reform law from covering elective abortion services.
- Favorable votes were taken in both chambers last session, indicating widespread support, but the bill did not make it to final passage.
- Taxpayer money should not fund abortions. Please represent me and the other Catholics in your district by helping this legislation get passed this year.

School Choice:

- Please add additional funding to the existing Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program. The longstanding "EITC 1.0" program has helped hundreds of thousands of students attend the school of their choice, including Catholic schools.
- The EITC 2.0 program is helping even more students by creating special scholarships particularly for income eligible students in the lowest performing 15% of public schools.
- These programs allow students a chance at the best possible education and support parents in choosing the best educational option for their children. Please increase funding to these programs.

Federal Issue – HHS Mandate:

- When legislation comes before you, please represent me by supporting measures that ensure that the rights of conscience of all participants in our nation's health care system will be respected.
- I am extremely disappointed in the decision of the Department of Health and Human Services to continue to demand coverage of sterilization, contraception and abortion causing drugs.
- I agree with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which points to key areas of concern: the narrow understanding of a religious ministry; compelling church ministries to fund and facilitate services such as contraceptives, including abortion-inducing drugs, and sterilization that violate Catholic teaching; and disregard of the conscience rights of for-profit business owners.
- Thank you for representing me by taking a stand in support of religious liberty.

If you cannot meet with your legislator, you can email them through the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference's Advocacy Network here.

www: pacatholic.org | *facebook:* pacatholic | *twitter:* @pacatholic