

## **Phone Calls to Legislators**

A few phone calls from constituents can make a powerful impact with state lawmakers. So few people bother to pick up the phone, that when they do, legislators know this must be an important issue. Phone calls are a particularly effective advocacy tool if they are timely within the legislative process. When you know how the legislative process works and how a bill becomes a law, it is easier to figure out when you should be calling legislators to ask them to co-sponsor a bill, to support a bill in committee, or to use their leadership power to advance a bill to the full chamber for a vote.

It is important to remember that, during the legislative session, legislators usually are attending committee meetings, drafting legislation, preparing for bill presentations, lobbying other legislators, or debating in the House or Senate chambers. Therefore, it is likely that a legislator will not be available to take your call. Don't hesitate to leave your message with the legislator's secretary who will get your message to the legislator.

In general, phone calls are most appropriate for a constituent to make to his/her own elected officials. However, lawmakers in leadership positions that have more power in the political process can respond to the public pressure of a coordinated phone campaign. Members of leadership are supposed to build their policy priorities from the needs and concerns of the entire state, not just their individual district, so they may be influenced by a large number of calls from voters across the state.

### **Tips for an Effective Phone Call:**

- Identify yourself as a constituent; provide your name and address.
- If you are calling a member of leadership, request to speak with their policy director prior to leaving a message.
- Reference the issue or the specific bill that you'd like to discuss.
- State your support or opposition to the bill and briefly summarize the reasons for your position.
- Be clear if you're seeking an additional action from the legislator. Do you want the legislator to co-sponsor a bill? To vote yes/no in committee? To bring up the bill for a vote?
- Indicate your availability to discuss the issue further and leave your telephone number so that the legislator may follow up with you.
- Keep the conversation brief, not exceeding five minutes.
- Send a thank you note as a follow-up to the conversation.
- Take a step to continue your dialogue beyond this initial meeting. For example, you might invite the Representative to visit a particular agency or organization in your area.

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#### **Sources:**

- Kansas Action for Children. "Advocacy Toolkit." <http://www.kac.org/kac.aspx?pgID=891>

## Sample Phone Message

**Senator's Office:** Good afternoon, this is Mary in Senator DoGood's office.

**Advocate:** Good afternoon Mary. My name is Jane Q. Public. I am the director of Bright Beginnings, an early childhood program in Kansas City. Senator DoGood is our Senator and I would like to speak with her for a moment if she is available.

**Senator's Office:** I'm sorry, Senator DoGood is in a committee hearing right now, can I take a message and have her call you back?

**Advocate:** Yes, thank you! I'm calling to ask for her support for Senate Bill 776. This bill will increase access to quality, affordable early childhood programs for low-income children and families. There was a hearing on this bill in the Senator's Children's Services committee last week and I'd like to urge her to support Senate Bill 776 if it comes up for a vote tomorrow.

**Senator's Office:** Ok, support SB 776, I got it. Do you have any information you can send about the bill?

**Advocate:** Of course! I can email the Senator a fact sheet with more information.

**Senator's Office:** Great, I will make sure Senator DoGood gets your message.

**Advocate:** Thank you so much for your time and have a great day!