

# Phoning a Legislator about an Issue

## Why phone?

- Lets legislators know what you (and the public in general) are thinking
- May encourage legislators to take the action you want
- Reassures legislators if they agree with you and are getting negative feedback

## When to phone?

- When an issue is “ripe”, such as when a vote is imminent
- When a letter cannot be sent, received, inspected for dangerous materials, and read (2–3 weeks) in time for an important decision/vote/event
- When legislators’ aides will not have time to read all the emails before an imminent vote/action
- During their office hours (allow for time zone if calling D.C. – 2:00 Central is 3:00 Eastern)

## How to prepare?

- Find the name and number of the bill, and write it down.
  - Every bill has a number
    - H.R. means it is a House Resolution – Call your Representative about this one
    - S.R. means it is a Senate Resolution – Call your Senator about this one
  - Every bill also has a name
  - Make sure you know what’s in the bill and understand what it’s supposed to do.
- Decide what you want the legislator to do (vote for/against the bill? co-sponsor?)
- Think about why you want the legislator to take the action you are requesting
  - How will it affect you, personally? (Or family, or a friend)
  - How will it affect your local community?
  - Write this down, either as notes or as 1 or 2 sentences – no more.

## How to call and be heard?

- Call the D.C. or Austin office; keep trying if the line is busy
- First, identify yourself: “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I live in \_\_\_\_\_. Could you get a message to \_\_\_\_\_?”
- At this point aides will say something like, “Of course. What is your zip code?” They may possibly even ask for a street address. This is to verify that you are a constituent. Give the information asked for. Then the aide will say something like, “What message did you want to give to \_\_\_\_\_?”

- Identify the issue first. “I’m calling about (name and number of the bill), and I think it is important because (give your reasons, referring to your notes if you need to).”
- “I would like for \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.”
- If you are told that \_\_\_\_ agrees with you, convey your thanks and support.
- If you are told that \_\_\_\_ does not agree with you, express your disappointment courteously.
- Don’t burn bridges; you may find them useful tomorrow.