



Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-New Mexico

Rocky Mountain Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



ELCA World Hunger

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

ADVOCACY ESSENTIALS

Advocacy is speaking with and on behalf of the needs of another and seeking to influence public policy toward justice and the common good. Advocacy is an important companion to direct service and study.

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM advocates for just, sound and compassionate public policies consistent with Evangelical Lutheran Church in America social policy. Faithful to God's call, the ELCA's public witness is fulfilled through its advocacy ministries. Policy priorities for Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM are established by its Policy Committee and communicated to public policy makers, including legislators and the governor, through the efforts of our Advocacy Network and the work of professional staff.

COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS and the GOVERNOR

One of the most effective ways of influencing public policy and pending legislation is communicating with your legislators and the governor. They represent you and need to hear from their constituents. It is sometimes asked whether contacting legislators or the governor makes any difference. The answer is a definite YES! What you think about an issue counts and they care about what you think!

Communication Basics

- ✓ Be courteous, respectful, friendly and positive
- ✓ Don't be arrogant, condescending or threatening
- ✓ Be brief and accurate
- ✓ Be sure to mention if you are a constituent
- ✓ Listen carefully
- ✓ Be appreciative; acknowledge past support
- ✓ Be prepared; be specific; if possible, refer to specific legislation or issue
- ✓ Ask for a commitment (yes or no) on the issue you are presenting
- ✓ Follow up with a thank you note

Types of communication

Letter Writing -- Many people think that any letter to Santa Fe is just a waste of time. Nothing could be further from the truth. Legislators as well as the governor give a great deal of weight to their mail when decisions are made. Most state legislators read their mail personally.

A well-written letter can be the most powerful means of communicating with your lawmaker or the governor (See sample letter on page 4). Only a small percentage of people have ever written to a legislator or the governor. Consequently, your letter can represent many other unwritten letters. It is believed that for every one letter sent; a lot more people feel the same way but haven't taken the time to write.

In addition to *Communication Basics* listed on page 1, keep these tips for letter writing in mind:

- ✓ Write about only one issue per letter
- ✓ Neatly handwrite, type or e-mail your letter
- ✓ Try to include supporting facts
- ✓ Give reasons for your position
- ✓ Refer to a specific bill, if possible
- ✓ Put your return address on the letter as well as the envelope
- ✓ Use the proper form of address
 - "The Honorable" on the address on both the envelope & the heading
 - "Dear Representative" or "Dear Senator" or "Dear Governor" is the salutation

Email messages -- Almost all state legislators accept email messages from constituents and others. Email addresses for legislators can be found on the legislative website (www.nmlegis.gov). The governor's website has a link to a form for email messages (www.governor.state.nm.us). The same guidelines apply to email messages as letters. However, brevity is even more important.

**Remember: As long as you are sincere and polite,
there is no wrong way to write a letter or an email legislator or the governor.**

"Letters to the editor" of a newspaper -- This is a very effective way to influence public policy and opinion. Consider writing letters to all the newspapers, dailies and weeklies, in your surrounding community.

- ✓ Keep your letter short: 150-250 words is the recommended length for most newspapers
- ✓ Get to the point -- state the specific issue that you are concerned about and what action should be taken; refer to a specific bill, if possible
- ✓ Write in simple language -- editors are looking for letters that a wide audience can understand
- ✓ Sign your letter -- newspapers will not publish a letter that is not signed with your name and contact information
- ✓ Almost all newspapers prefer letters to the editor electronically

Telephone Calls -- During legislative sessions, office staff answer most calls to senators and representatives. During sessions, you can reach legislators at 505-986-4300. When you call a legislator at home, you may reach them directly or reach voice mail. You can find legislators' home telephone numbers on the legislature's website (www.nmlegis.gov). You can call the governor's office at 505-476-2200. Again, in addition to the previous "Basics":

- ✓ Talk about only one issue per call
- ✓ Be brief
- ✓ Refer to a specific bill if possible

Personal Visits - Face to face discussion can be very effective and is essential to the establishment of a good working relationship. Be as informative as you can but don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I'll find out and get back to you." Personal visits are more easily arranged either early in a legislative session or prior to a session. Remember, as a constituent, you are important to your legislator. Be certain to follow the *Communication Basics*.

Committee Hearings – Anyone may attend legislative committee hearings and anyone may testify at a hearing. Usually the committee chair will ask if anyone would like to speak either in favor of or opposed to the bill that is being considered. If you wish to speak as an individual representing your own personal views, stand and identify yourself by name and then very briefly state your position. If you are designated to speak on behalf of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM, be certain that you understand our position on the bill, stand and identify yourself and that you are with the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry and then briefly state Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM's position on the legislation. The proper way to address a legislative committee is to stand when the chair recognizes you and then say: Mr. Chair/Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is _____ and

- ❖ **Advocacy is crucial, exciting, and challenging!**
- ❖ **Treat the person that you want to influence with courtesy and respect.**
- ❖ **You can make a difference!**

SAMPLE LETTER

Date

The Honorable _____ *(Use the same address on the envelope.)*
Room ____
State Capitol
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Senator or Representative or Governor _____,

(Identify yourself, as a legislative constituent if you are one. Identify the issue you are concerned about. Add any reason you may have for a special interest in the issue, like how people may be affected by the issue.)

I am writing to you today as my senator because I am especially interested in efforts to provide more affordable housing for low-income people in our state. I feel that it is very important that all of New Mexico’s families have safe housing that they can afford. It is very difficult for families who earn at or even above minimum wage to be able to find afford adequate housing.

(Try to be specific about what you would like the legislator to do.)

I would ask that you support efforts to increase funding for affordable housing projects in New Mexico. When bills are introduced during this session, I will try to be more specific about legislation that I would urge you to support.

(Thank the legislator for her time and interest.)

Thank you very much for your time and for any efforts that you are able to make to increase the availability of affordable housing in our state.

Sincerely,

Your name
Your address