

## Telephone Calls to Legislators

### *Will They Answer the Ring?*

**T**elephone calls can be an effective means of communicating with legislators if the calls: (1) convey a meaningful message with helpful information, and (2) are made in a timely manner.

Calls from constituents are the most effective; “telephone blitzes” are the least effective. Other calls are somewhere in between.

It is important to remember that, during the legislative session, legislators usually are attending committee meetings, conducting other legislative business such as meeting with staff, drafting legislation, preparing for bill presentations, lobbying other legislators, or participating in formal legislative work in the Senate or House chambers. Therefore, it is likely that a legislator will not be available to take your call. If that is the case, do not hesitate to leave your message with the legislator’s secretary. Trust the staff to get your message to the legislator. Leave your address so they know you are a constituent. If you are calling a member of leadership, request to speak with their policy director prior to leaving a message.

If you request a return call, you can usually be assured of getting one if you are a constituent. Non-constituents *may* get a return call. Remember that there simply are not enough hours in the day for legislators to return all calls, particularly if there is an organized blitz underway. It is important to make your call brief and come quickly to the point. Always be polite.

In conveying your message, do the following:

- ◆ Identify yourself with your name and your city or town of residence.
- ◆ If your call is regarding a specific bill, give the bill number and subject matter.
- ◆ State your support (or opposition) to the bill and a brief reason for your position.
- ◆ Request the legislator’s support (or opposition) to the bill.
- ◆ Indicate your availability to discuss the issue further.
- ◆ Leave your telephone number.
- ◆ Express thanks.

Your call will have the most impact when received within a week of the bill’s being heard in committee. It is even more effective if the legislator serves on the committee hearing the bill. Another appropriate time, but usually not nearly as effective, is shortly before the entire legislative body hears the bill.

Finally, there is the call that may or may not have impact – it all depends. This is the call that is part of an organized campaign or blitz. Usually these calls are part of an organized effort to simply overwhelm a legislator’s office. The calls do not provide much in the way of helpful information. Be careful with blitz calls. They tend to irritate legislators and staff because they take up valuable time that most believe could be put to better use. In spite of their dubious value, these calls are not totally ignored. However, you can be sure of one thing: a blitz is seldom, if ever, the main reason for the passage or defeat of a bill.