



WREN

Women's Rights & Empowerment Network

# ADVOCACY 101

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Best Practices Toolkit

Updated January 2017

## Best Practices for Calling Your Legislator

A few calls into an office over a short period of time can bring an issue to the attention of your legislator in a big way!

When making a call remember the following tips:

- When connecting to a legislator's office, **let the staffer know that you are a constituent** or community member and what issue or bill you are calling about. More than likely you'll speak only with the staffer who will relay the message to your elected official.
- **Keep it simple and brief.** Staff receive a high volume of phone calls every day, so state your name, how you want your lawmaker to vote and why, and thank staffers for their time.
- **Know your facts.** Have the basic information about the bill in front of you when you call and be able to specifically name and describe the bill and your opinion on what your legislator should do.
- **Don't sweat the hypothetical unanswerable question.** Some advocates worry that they will be asked a question they don't know how to answer. Staffers typically focus on recording the message rather than asking for intricate details; however, if they do ask a question that you don't know the answer to, tell them you'll find out and call back. Just remember to follow up with the information!
- Be **courteous and respectful** – like your mama taught you.

## Best Practices for Writing Your Legislator

Concise, well thought-out personal letters are one of the most effective and time-honored traditions of influencing South Carolina lawmakers. On the other hand, email is a quick, convenient alternative that will allow you to still effectively connect with your elected officials.

When sending written communication, here are some things to keep in mind for an impactful message:

- Writing to your elected official (rather than a legislator from another district) carries power. Your vote helps elect them – or not. Be sure to **identify yourself as a constituent** and any **other credentials** (For example: "I'm a parent / young person / educator / etc.) in the first sentence.
- Keep it simple and brief. Your letter or email should address a **single issue**. Clearly state the bill you're advocating for and how you want the legislator to vote at the beginning and end of your passage.
- The middle section of your message should include **supportive evidence** – both **facts** and your **personal story** – of why your lawmaker should vote a certain way.
- "Cookie-cutter" form letters and emails to legislators will initially grab attention; however, messages that tell your elected official **why you specifically care about the issue** will make for a more memorable and influential letter.
- Be **courteous and respectful** – especially when you disagree with an elected official on an issue. Close by thanking him or her for taking the time to read your message.

## Sample Sex Ed Letter to Your Legislator

Date

The Honorable (full name)

Legislative Office Address

Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Senator/Representative:

As a [community member / constituent], I urge you to support bill \_\_\_\_\_, that would work to ensure evidence-based sex education programs in our state are taught and would empower the SC Department of Education to monitor compliance with the current laws.

Based on 2014 data collected from the SC Department of Education, 70% of school districts are not meeting the minimum requirements of our sex education laws. Young people need medically accurate information about their health. Without it, they turn to less reliable sources of information, such as the media and friends, which puts them at unnecessary risk for disease and unintended pregnancy.

South Carolina is among the top ten states in the US for the highest rates of Gonorrhea, Chlamydia and AIDS according to the Centers for Disease Control's 2013 Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance.

[Why does evidence-based sex education matter to you? Use this space to tell your legislator!]

Thank you for taking the time to listen to your [constituent / community member] about this important issue. When \_\_\_\_\_ comes up for debate, I encourage you to think about the health of our state and vote YES.

Sincerely,

(Name)

(Address )

## **Timeline of Legislative Session**

South Carolina has two year legislative sessions. We currently are at the beginning of a two year session.

**First Day:** Tuesday, January 10, 2017.

**Cross Over:** Monday, April 10, 2017

**Last Day:** Thursday, May 11, 2017

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