

Myths about Advocacy



1. **As Catholics, I/we shouldn't "do" politics.** The Bishops' teachings tell us, "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation." Catholic Advocacy gives us an opportunity to join our voices with those in need without partisanship. Writing a letter, sending an email, leaving a brief phone message—these are all ways to educate elected officials about poverty. By doing one of these easy activities, you can advocate for those in need in your community. Tell your elected officials your story and tell them what you want them to do to support those who are poor and struggling to survive.
2. **My elected officials just don't seem to care about poverty issues, so why bother?** It can seem like elected officials do not care or that they only want to focus on one or two "pet" issues. However, access to food and shelter is a basic right for everyone, and poverty has impacted many of our neighbors. Sometimes legislators are truly unaware that poverty is a problem in their own community. Hearing from you and other constituents in their district makes legislators aware of poverty present in their district and can influence them to think about and act differently on the poverty issues.
3. **I don't have time! I am too busy to get involved in advocacy.** There are many ways advocacy can be done in less than ten minutes. It can be as easy as a few keystrokes at your computer. A phone call can take three minutes. A conversation with a friend can last 10 minutes. Posting a sign can take seconds. Reading an email to educate yourself about an issue can take a minute. Those seconds and minutes can make a world of change. There is power in numbers, and even though making one phone call may not seem to make a difference to you, elected officials will take notice and appreciate your efforts to participate in the democratic process from your faith perspective.
4. **I'm shy.** Don't Worry! Remember, you are not alone. You will be doing this together as a parish or group, and there will be others there to speak and provide support. A lot of advocacy can also be done from your home computer or phone. Remember, we give you everything you need to email, write or call your elected officials. Don't feel like you have to dive into the deep end by going to a face-to-face meeting by yourself or speak at a town hall meeting. Communicating with your elected officials by email, letter or fax or meeting with your elected officials in a group is a great way to generate support for policy priorities that reduce poverty.
5. **I am intimidated/scared. I am not an expert in government—I am just a regular person.** From the outside, it certainly can seem frightening to correspond with or talk to your legislators. However, they expect you to contact them about your concerns. Remember your representatives work for you—it is their job to listen to your stories and respond to your requests. The fact that you are just a "regular citizen" is your best asset when communicating with your elected officials. In fact, elected officials are more likely to listen to you, a constituent, than a hired lobbyist because you live (and vote!) in their district and you can speak firsthand about how poverty is impacting your life and community.
6. **It doesn't make a difference. I have heard that elected officials delete constituent emails, ignore phone calls and/or send generic responses to letters.** It may seem that way sometimes, but communications from constituents truly do have an impact on elected officials. Legislative and congressional offices count all calls, emails, faxes, and letters they receive from constituents. It may take only seconds to sign and mail a post card or form letter, but your personalized message will be noticed. Many elected officials have shared stories with us about the difference our visits and input have made on the way they voted!
7. **I'm a Republican and my elected official is a Democrat / I'm a Democrat and my elected official is a Republican.** Poverty can affect people regardless of their political affiliation, and addressing poverty is not a partisan issue. When you contact your elected officials, just identify yourself as a constituent and a member of your parish and/or community. It doesn't matter what your political affiliation is, the most important thing is to speak and act from your Catholic values and to share this perspective with your representatives.