

## How To Advocate Effectively

Legislators enjoy hearing from constituents because it helps them win reelection. They are busy people who can't answer all emails and phone calls, but **they will prioritize constituents.** **BIG emphasis on kindness and respect in all interactions with your legislators and their staff. Some staff members are volunteers or interns--you will get further with nice behavior.**

Remember Specific, Knowledgeable, and Flexible!

# Be Specific, Knowledgeable & Flexible



### SPECIFIC

*Be detailed in what you are asking for; include a handout.*

### KNOWLEDGEABLE

*Have a full understanding of "other side" and their perspective.*

### FLEXIBLE

*Have alternative suggestions instead of complete opposition; what are some other ways to accomplish a similar goal? Know what is absolutely crucial to your position.*

When you meet with your legislator, be

## **SPECIFIC**

Be specific in what you are asking for; include a handout or attachment, if possible. Support this bill (name, number). Prepare by looking up proposed legislation in order to know about the bill you are supporting by using:

Virginia State bills:

[Bill Tracking - 2020 session > Legislation](#)

US Congressional bills:

<https://www.congress.gov>

Consider an outline for your handout: intro, where you live, what group you're representing, what is the issue, why for support or lack of support for bill number, effects of issue, what will be fixed with this issue, please vote yes.



## **KNOWLEDGEABLE OF COUNTER-ARGUMENTS**

You need a full understanding of “other side” and their perspective. You will create a stronger pitch for your side if you can articulate the counter-argument.

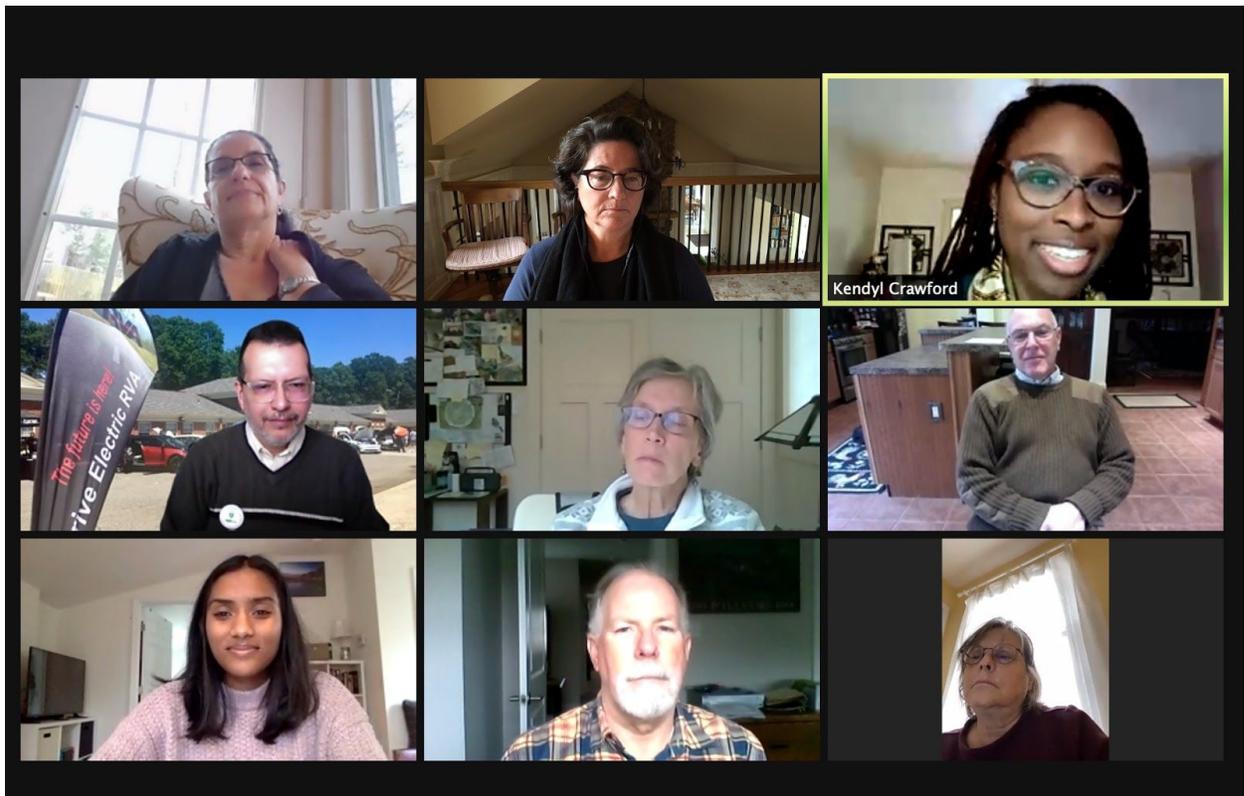
## **FLEXIBLE**

Have alternative suggestions instead of just opposing something 100%; what are some other easy ways to accomplish a similar goal? There can be different ways to do something. Is there something close that would be an alternative?

Due to Covid, what resources can keep us up to date?

- Committee calendars
- Register to speak online
- Follow floor calendar
- Phone calls and virtual meetings

ALL require planning and flexibility.



### **How to Advocate Efficiently**

Efficiently meaning there are many ways to communicate--what is best at what time?

You could:

- Set up an in-person meeting with legislator
- Schedule a Zoom meeting
- Set up an in-person meeting with staff member
- Contact with a phone call
- Send an email

- Send a letters
- Send a direct message to their FaceBook page
- Sign up for Action Alerts from groups you align with and they will prompt you to write your legislator
- Develop a relationship and maybe get cell number

If you are respectful and informative, it can be a fruitful relationship.

### How to contact your Legislators

- Legislators' contact information can be found here:

#### VA Legislature

<https://viriniageneralassembly.gov> Click Members and Session, pick senator and rep and it gives district office address, this is most important office location.

#### US Congress

<https://www.congress.gov/members?q={%22congress%22:117}&searchResultViewType=expanded>

(this site will give the DC office address and a link to the member's website where district offices can be found)

- Request a meeting by email or phone call
- Subject of email: Request a meeting
- Body of email: be brief and close quickly

*Intro, where live, ask for time, membership of a group, state issue or bill number, share names of anyone else who will be at the meeting, offer flexibility with time for meeting.*

## Tips on the Many Ways to Advocate

### **Emails**

Emails can be effective for touching base; don't expect it to be in depth. Friendly encouragement. Most elected officials get negative emails. Consider once a month or once a quarter to get to know your representative.

Example:

*Dear Senator Hashmi,*

*I am the co-chair of the conservation committee for the Tuckahoe Garden Club, a nearly 100 year-old Richmond club with over 125 members devoted to gardening, historic preservation of gardens, and conservation of our natural resources. Some members are your constituents.*

*We are focusing more and more each year on conservation, climate change effects, and legislation that can make a difference. I know you, too, are an advocate of healthy environmental policies. As part of our conservation efforts, I wanted to share with you two quick things:*

*1. Please enjoy this Youtube video tutorial our club made, showing award-winning floral designer, Meredith Lauter, instructing us on how to create tabletop centerpiece floral arrangements using all natural products (no plastics).*

*<https://youtu.be/2IS-NIzRt7k>*

*2. I know you are on Instagram. We have a conservation Instagram account which we invite you to follow: @TheGreenCrusaders.*

*I hope to participate in a Zoom session with you, coordinated through the Garden Club of Virginia and The Virginia Conservation Network, later this month.*

*Best,*

*Jill Mountcastle*

## Phone calls

Two types:

1) They can be preferred as a substitute for a meeting: longer, personal phone call where you explain your positions. Very typical lobbying style call. A Zoom call would be appropriate here as well.



2) Quick, short high volume calls during legislative sessions. Very helpful for the official to get a lot of these calls. Excellent day-of reminder on day of vote.

Ten calls from constituents can be enough to nudge. People may overestimate what officials and their staff really know what the temperature is regarding an issue. Make them feel the pressure.

You may call and ask where a legislator stands on an issue. It may feel discomfoting as a legislator to get many calls from voters just asking what their vote will be--makes them feel extremely accountable.

## Petitions

Good for more vague or sweeping statements (“no building of dirty and polluting forms of energy”) but must be started EARLY. Do in run-up to session, a couple of months out. Phone calls create pressure closer to the time of votes.

## Social Media

Risky because it quickly gets mean and spiteful. Think of it as an extra way to share your opinion with your lawmaker. May require a special training. Tag them and include images and videos

## Letters

Suggestions: writing holiday cards. Comment on something they did LAST session and say thanks, something respectful. For Virginia state legislators' mailing address go to: <https://viriniageneralassembly.gov> Click Members and Session, pick senator and rep and it gives district office address; this is the most important office location for mail.



## Follow up and Continue the Relationship

Example of follow up email

After 2021 Conservation Lobby Day Zoom with a legislative aide:

Hi Kayla,

Thanks for taking the time to listen this morning from 10:00-10:25 a.m. to our adhoc group discuss conservation issues. And thanks for giving us extra time. I wanted to write to you to provide a brief summary of what I said.

- I am a private citizen and an avid gardener, and I speak on behalf of myself and the Garden Club of Virginia.
- **The most important point I wish to convey to Senator Hashmi is this one: I firmly believe that we have to include private property in our conservation goals. Eighty-six percent of the country east of the Mississippi is privately owned, and 83 percent of the entire country is privately owned. We cannot succeed if we confine our conservation**

**efforts only to protected areas.** For more information on this concept, please see the book "Nature's Best Hope" by University of Delaware professor Doug Tallamy.

- **I ask Senator Hashmi to support HJ 527, the proposed study on the sale and use of invasive plant species.** In my opinion, it should be prohibited to sell invasive plants in garden nurseries. They do not attract pollinators and can quickly overtake an area (think kudzu) which are the biggest concerns. Additionally, removing invasive plants from a backyard is labor intensive and can be expensive if it must be outsourced. I know this from personal experience. **If it is difficult to remove them and easy to plant them, we have a growing problem, pun intended. This proposed study is a slam-dunk for approval and I urge Senator Hashmi to vote yes.**
  
- **I also ask Senator Hashmi to support HB 2030 for the local regulation of and notice on the use of Neonicotinoid Pesticides.** They are in widespread use, and under scrutiny for their ability to leach into the environment. This bill is a targeted approach on the use of outdoor spray and the implementation of local control. From personal experience, **I have noticed fewer bees in my own yard.** Twenty-five years ago, there were many more. **Additionally, recent studies have shown that not only do neonics cause significant harm to pollinator insects which come directly into contact with them, there is also a statistically significant reduction in bird biodiversity as a result.** [Nature.com](https://www.nature.com) from August 2020 documented a decline in bird biodiversity in grassland and insectivorous birds at an annual average rate of 3-4% and the dynamic results on the bird population decline in the future is much higher, around 12% annually.

Again, many thanks for your time and for Senator Hashmi's consideration to support these conservation bills.

Best,

Jill Mountcastle

To be effective as a conservation advocate, it's important to stay in touch. Some ideas:

- Cards at Thanksgiving, thanking your legislators for a bill they supported
- Sending emails and making phone calls of encouragement for conservation issues throughout the year
- Direct message their FaceBook page
- Sign up for Action Alerts from groups you align with and they will prompt you to write your legislator
- Develop a relationship and maybe get cell number

**REMEMBER, ADVOCACY MATTERS!**

**There is so much private, special interest money in politics and your involvement is important!**