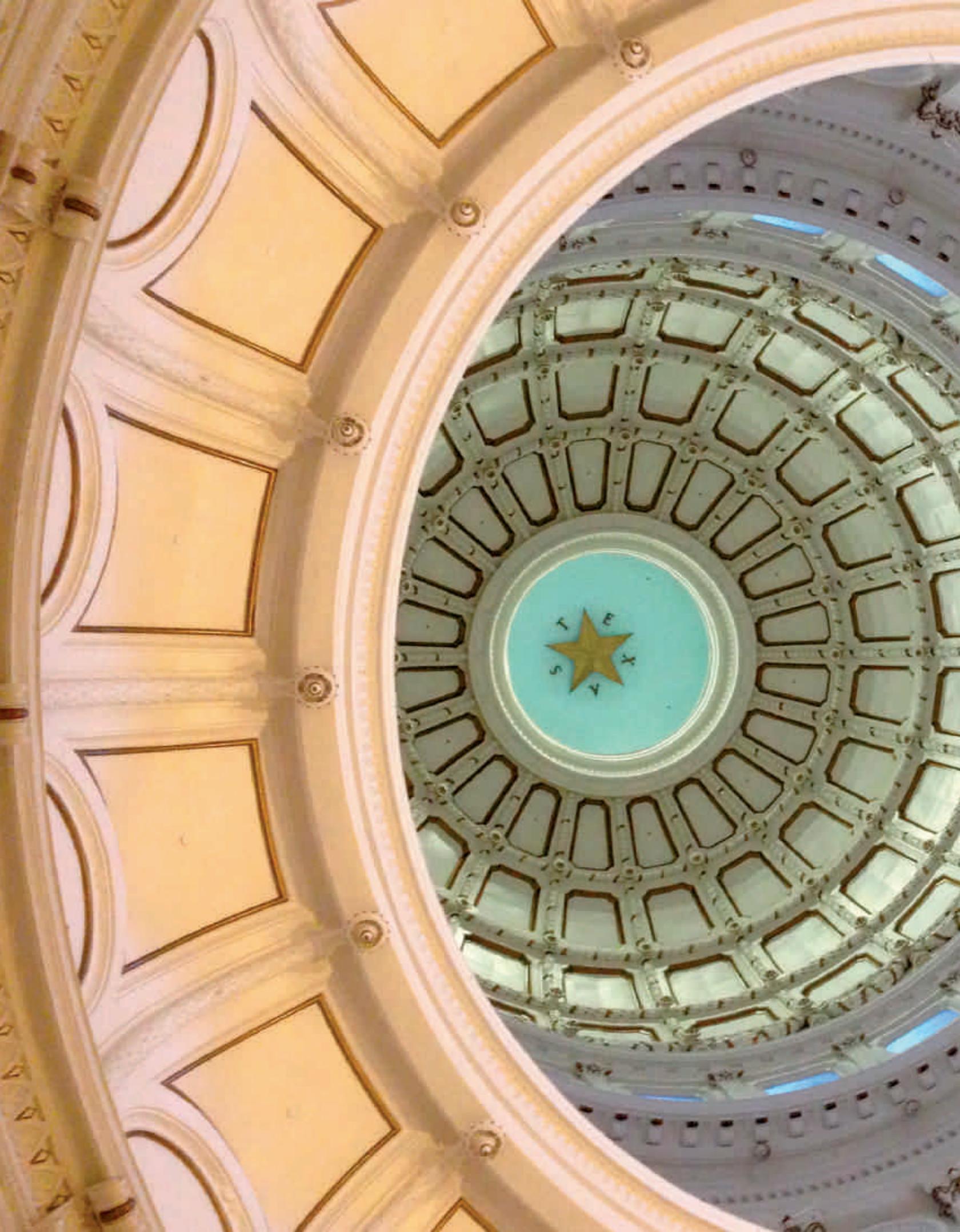




Texas Interfaith Center  
for Public Policy ★ TEXAS IMPACT

# FAITH IN DEMOCRACY





Welcome! This publication is a handbook for state-level public policy advocacy in Texas. It is designed for use in faith communities, but the information in it is useful for any would-be advocate.

The handbook includes background on how faith and advocacy are related; what our faith traditions tell us about public policy; how the legislative process works in Texas; and how Texans can advocate for policies they care about. It is not specific to a particular policy issue, and it is completely nonpartisan.

The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy and Texas Impact advance public policies that reflect the common social statements of mainstream faith traditions. We guide individuals and faith organizations through the often-turbulent waters of politics and faith to bring their collective witness and wisdom into the processes of democracy.

When interfaith leaders launched Texas Impact nearly 50 years ago, American mainstream faith communities were on the front lines of advocating for civil rights, economic justice, and peace for all people. While some of the specific issues have changed over the decades, the faith communities' call for justice, freedom, and peace is as strong today as it was in 1973.

Many people worry that today's believers are disengaged from the public square, or that the only prophetic voices are coming from extremists. We disagree. Our members are 4 times as likely to vote as other Texans...and they are evenly split between Republicans and Democrats.

Every generation of Americans and Texans must reaffirm the values of religious freedom, common good, and responsibility to the future. We believe diversity makes Texas stronger, and community makes us better.

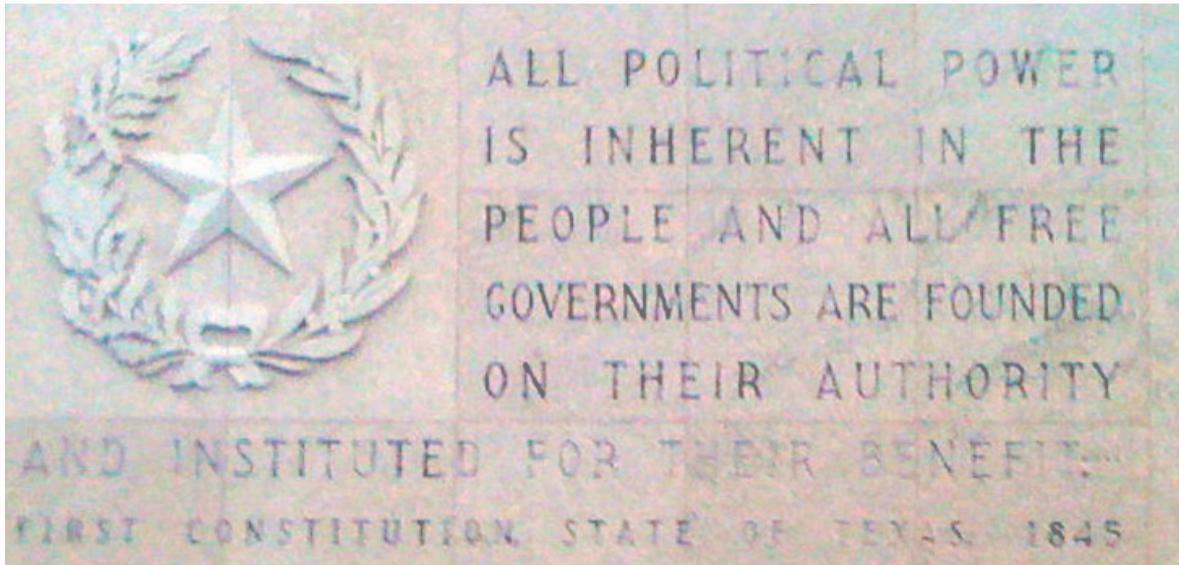
Thank you for your faithful leadership!

Love,



Bee Moorhead  
Executive Director  
Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy/Texas Impact





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## **Advocacy, Policy, and Faith**



### ***The Story of the Children in the River***

*One summer in the village, the people in the town gathered for a picnic. As they leisurely shared food and conversation, someone noticed a baby in the river, struggling and crying. The baby was going to drown!*

*Someone rushed to save the baby. Then, they noticed another screaming baby in the river, and they pulled that baby out. Soon, more babies were seen drowning in the river, and the townspeople were pulling them out as fast as they could. It took great effort, and they began to organize their activities in order to save the babies as they came down the river. As everyone else was busy in the rescue efforts, two of the townspeople started to run away along the shore of the river.*

*“Where are you going?” shouted one of the rescuers. “We need you here to help us save these babies!”*

*“We are going upstream to stop whoever is throwing them in!”*

**The purpose of this publication is to help you and your faith community...**

- ...participate in public policy discussions in informed, thoughtful ways**
- ...express your faith in the public square**
- ...honor diversity of opinion**
- ...respect laws governing political activity by religious organizations**

“The Children in the River” is a story often used to explain the difference between direct service and advocacy. Most faith communities have an existing connection to some kind of direct service—to their own members, or to a wider population. Faith communities often are involved in advocacy as well, but many local congregations and their members are not familiar with advocacy, and don’t understand the difference between direct service and advocacy—or charity and justice, as they are sometimes described.

This toolkit is designed to help individuals and communities of faith advocate effectively on public policy issues. But many local congregations and their members are unsettled by the term “public policy.” They may believe that public policy is related to politics, and they may believe religious groups are not permitted to espouse positions on public policy issues because of “separation of church and state.”

#### *What Are Direct Services?*

Direct services are those activities that meet a concrete need. They are not intended to create permanent systems change. Direct services can be very simple and straightforward, like collecting canned food for a food bank. They can also be extremely complex and resource-intensive, like providing agricultural assistance to developing countries. Direct services can be provided by just one individual, such as a volunteer, or they can be team efforts. Often, when a local congregation is deciding whether or not to take on a direct service project, the primary cost considerations are financial: how much money will it take to provide the service, and/or how much staff or member time will be required.



#### **advocacy**

*[ad-vuh-kuh-see]*

noun, plural ad·vo·ca·cies.

the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending; active espousal

*What Is Public Policy?*

Public policies are the rules and laws that are passed by school boards, city councils, state legislators, and congress. Policy also means the administrative actions taken by school administrators, mayors, governors, and presidents. Some of the most important public policy decisions focus on how we spend our shared resources through public budgets.

*What Is Advocacy?*

Advocacy means vocal support for something. It can mean support for a legal or medical client, but in the context of this publication, advocacy means support for a law or other type of policy. Like direct services, advocacy can be simple and straightforward, like talking to a city council member about a traffic light, or it can be highly complex, like a national effort to change drunk driving laws. Also like direct services, individuals and groups can both advocate. Often, when a local congregation is deciding whether or not to engage in advocacy, the primary cost considerations are relational: what individuals and groups have opposing views on the issue at hand, and how might they react?



*Are Congregations Allowed To Engage In Advocacy?*

Yes! Congregations, like all nonprofit entities governed by Section 501c3 of the federal tax code, are **permitted to advocate and educate** the community and elected officials about issues like hunger, environmental damage, inequality, and other injustices in the world. Advocacy can range from hosting workshops on issues and letter-writing parties to visiting elected officials and testifying in legislative hearings. It can also include direct action protests.



Nonprofits, including congregations, also are **permitted** to engage in **nonpartisan get-out-the-vote activities**. These include things like voter registration drives and block-walking, as well as driving voters to the polls. They can also include candidate forums, as long as the forums stick to specific rules.

Nonprofits are **prohibited** from engaging in **partisan political activity** if they receive funding that is tax-deductible for the funder or donor. That means they cannot give money to candidates for office, including funding candidate advertisements, and they cannot endorse candidates. Congregations must abide by these prohibitions if they are governed by Section 501c3 of the federal tax code—which most congregations are.

Nonprofits including congregations are prohibited from partisan political activity because the donations they receive are tax-deductible. This means that if they support candidates, they effectively are using the taxes all Americans pay to benefit a particular candidate—even though some taxpayers don't want to pay to support that candidate.

*What is hurtful to yourself, do not to your fellow man.  
That is the whole of the Torah, and the remainder is but  
commentary. Go forth and study. —Hillel*



## **What Does Democracy Have to Do With Love?**

The bishops, ministers, and lay leaders who established Texas Impact wrote that it was “increasingly clear” that the prophetic call to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God” could not be accomplished without attempting to influence public policy. But if we are meant to love our neighbor, who IS our ‘neighbor’?

For most of us, our neighbor is not just someone in our neighborhood. We are connected with many others, through our work, in our churches, and through the media. On the nightly news, we can see victims of disasters from half way around the world and feel our heart going out to them. Many feel that ALL the earth’s inhabitants are our neighbors...including future generations and even the nonhuman parts of the Creation.

This broader definition of neighbor is important because many neighborhoods are segregated by race and economic status. It is more complicated to ‘love our neighbors’ when we have no personal contact with those most in need.

This is where public policy comes in. For Americans, the particular characteristics of our democracy provide a vital bridge between “neighbors” who don’t know each other.

*No man is a true believer unless he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.*

*—The Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), Bukhari 13*



Democracy is a way of organizing society that places the power to make decisions for society in the hands of elected representatives, rather than in the hands of kings, warlords, or emperors, which was the case through most of human history. Recorded history is about 5,000 years. American democracy is less than 250 years old, making it a relatively new development. Our Founding Fathers were inspired by the dream of a society in which people governed themselves for the greatest good of all.

Nevertheless, the initial vision of U.S. democracy was limited by the prejudices of the time. When the U.S. constitution was adopted in 1789, it extended voting rights only to white male property owners. The history of democracy since 1789 has been one of ever increasing inclusiveness, extending the rights and dignity of citizenship to all adults... men and women, whites and blacks, rich and poor.

This increasing inclusiveness was not only a political struggle - it was a moral and spiritual struggle as well. The abolition movement drew on Christian teachings. The women's suffrage,

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?—Micah 6:8*

child labor, and civil rights movements all drew strength from faith communities.

Our spiritual understanding should continue to guide us today in terms of what is just and ethical.

## **What Does Public Policy Have to Do With Faith?**

Public policies are invisible, but they powerfully shape our lives. Like the air we breathe, we can't see them, but we depend on them.

Public policies affect every aspect of how we live, from the food we eat and the cars we drive...to the schools our children attend and the jobs we work at...even what happens to our bodies after we die is a matter of public policy.



We usually establish public policies to **solve a problem**—either an existing one, or one we hope to avoid. We usually adopt public policies to solve problems when there is a **conflict or controversy** over some aspect of the problem or the solution. If everyone agreed about the nature of the problem and its solution, there would be no need to establish a policy. And it's important to remember that we usually establish public policies to address issues **someone cares** about. If there is an existing or proposed public policy about an issue, don't assume it is frivolous just because it is not important to you.

The democratic process is inherently political. Politics has become a negative word to many, associated with corruption and dishonesty. Many are so disillusioned they avoid political involvement. But the goal of good public policy requires the active participation of people who hold a moral and spiritual commitment to the common good.

In the story of the Good Samaritan in the Christian tradition, Jesus told of the Samaritan who went to help a man who had been beaten and robbed on the road to Jericho. While charity of this kind is an important part of spiritual life, Martin Luther King challenged us in 1967 to go further —“...one day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring.”

The combined effect of all of our public policies, which are democratically created, determines the structure, or 'edifice' of U.S. society. And social problems cannot be solved without changing public policies.





## The View From One Tuesday Morning Food Pantry

*At our food pantry, we begin Tuesday mornings with worship. There is a time for prayer, music and fellowship. Then we provide education through announcements, and we provide extensive reference sheets so that people can learn about resources in our local area that are specific to their needs. We provide services which always include nutritious food, personal one-on-one counseling sessions, financial assistance and emergency food and hygiene kits.*

*We connect with our community when we open our doors to people in need, but we acknowledge that we are not enough. Our church's outreach ministry is committed to expanding our connections with service providers in the local community.*

*We've learned that a person who is homeless needs to know how to register at the city's resource center; an abused mom who comes for help needs to be in touch with a shelter that meets her needs; the person with an outrageous electric bill needs to talk with a customer service rep, get on a payment plan, and access the utility's assistance program.*

*We have a contact at our county's behavioral health unit who will make an appointment with a person who is agitated and has a history of mental illness. We know the names of members of our local police department's homeless outreach unit and they visit on a regular basis. Our local probation office refers ex-offenders to us for workboots, which we provide once we confirm that they are necessary for job placement.*

*Currently, our congregation connects with over 20 organizations in our community. This helps to ensure that our volunteers are good stewards of our limited resources. Connecting with our community helps to multiply our gifts.*

*Our community connections also help us understand the link between our church's ministry and larger public systems. It is the combined efforts of local and state agencies and faith-based groups that make it possible for many in our community to survive.*

*Gretchen Stone and Bobbie Sanders, University Presbyterian Church, Austin*

*Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:31*

## **Reimagining Service**

### ***How Does Your Congregation Serve The Local Community?***

Do you host or contribute to a food pantry? Fill backpacks for low-income students? Offer your facilities as temporary shelter? Sponsor health fairs for uninsured neighbors?

As we minister to the vulnerable and disadvantaged, it is important to imagine and work towards a society where ***system-caused suffering*** no longer exists.

There will always be a role for faith communities in the care of souls, hearts, and minds, but there are also ways faith communities can advocate for systemic change while caring for bodies and lives. We will continue to need food pantries when economic disparities cause homelessness and high costs of living. We will continue to need to support victims of family violence as long as we do not address the underlying gender roles and mental health disparities that cause violence.

Food pantries, donations during times of disaster, and hosting community needs events are all important ways to serve our communities and the greater world, but in many cases they are merely covering a wound with a bandage. If we truly wish to heal the wounds, we must identify and alter the systems that are doing the wounding.

For this reason, we must take what we learn from our service to the community and pair with advocacy—our concern for the individual paired with care for society, and creation as a whole. When you can connect the immediate needs you meet through direct service with the overarching systemic problem, you can be a powerful force for change, impacting lives in your local community and the wider world. For that, we invite you to participate in ***Reimagining Service***.

To begin, imagine your community as a world without pain or struggle. What prosperity can be found? What love? How do people thrive and flourish?

### ***What will it take to make that change possible?***

The first step is to ***know your community***. What are its strengths and how are they being used? What are its weaknesses and how are they already being addressed? What are your lawmakers' stances on the community's needs and challenges?

*Hope is the belief in the probability of the possible rather than the necessity of the probable.*

*—Marshall Ganz*

**Ways to Learn About Your Community and Reimagine Your Service**

1. Ask those you serve. Hear their story and their struggle. Chances are, they themselves understand what kind of systemic issues cause them to need your service. Give them a chance to tell their story and educate you on the bigger story behind their struggle.
2. Speak to community partners. Your congregation has an intimate connection to the community and its people, but you are not the only ones. Speak to those working at local shelters, clinics, charities, and offering mental health services.
3. To locate what services are offered in your area, use resources like **211.org**.
4. Share what you learn. Hold classes; teach Bible studies; preach about the issue; share your experience with those around you.
5. Work with community partners and other faith communities in the area to provide encompassing services to those in need. You don't have to recreate the wheel, nor do you have to do this alone.
6. Be open-minded and open-hearted. Understand that these issues may run closer to home than you thought. Your heart and your mind will be changed as you dig deeper into these issues and that's okay. Be open to the possibility that those you serve will serve you in turn.
7. Take note of any special community concerns; for example, if your community is near a prison, or a country border, or has a large migrant population. These particularities shape your community needs and guide how you do advocacy.

## Storytelling for Social Change

### Using Your Story to Advance Justice

When we think of the legislative process, it can be hard to see how and where we fit in. The word “legislative” makes us think of politicians, lobbyists, organizers, or other prominent political figures who we consider to be the “real” policy-makers. We rarely stop and consider that as individuals and voters, we are also activists, lobbyists, and policy influencers.

Our personal stories are the most powerful tools we have to advance public policy consistent with our faith traditions. Our political history has been shaped by stories of individuals working to abolish unjust policies. Our faith traditions all teach us through the stories of individuals. Stories help us share our values when connecting with elected officials over a particular issue. We find our stories through our own lived **experiences**, and the experiences of our **families**, our **social circles**, those we **work** with, and our **community**.

#### Claiming Your Expertise

Claiming your expertise means believing that you are the best expert on you. No one can explain your perspective better than you can. No one can tell you your personal experiences are wrong or aren't real. Your public policy advocacy is always founded in some way on your story...even if you haven't thought about that connection before.

#### Connecting Your Advocacy to Your Story: Creating a Public Narrative

Creating a “public narrative” means telling your story in a way that connects the particularity of your story to a broader concern or issue. Your story is unique to you—but your experiences and the experiences of others in your community probably are not unique.



*When we tell our own story, we teach the values that our choices reveal, not as abstract principals, but as our lived experience. We reveal the kind of person we are to the extent that we let others identify with us. —Marshall Ganz*

**Why is This Issue Important to You?**

Remember, the issue is important to you, personally, because you know something about it. For example, what if lawmakers were considering establishing a new on-demand transport program for older Texans?

Here are some reasons that might be important to **you**:

- you might be a senior and need transportation
- you might have a family member or friend who has trouble getting around
- you might volunteer at your church's senior ministry and meet an elderly participant who can't get to the store to get food or medicine

**Why Is This Issue Important In Your Community?**

Connecting your story to an issue in your community shows why this story is bigger than you and your immediate contacts. Your story needs to clearly convey what specifically it is you are fighting for and who else in your community shares your vision and goals. Creating a narrative that highlights the shared interest of your community invites your audience to also see themselves as part of your community.

Using our senior transportation example, here are some ways you might show that this issue is important to your wider community:

- maybe five local congregations including yours have collected statistics on seniors they serve who need transportation
- maybe you attended a neighborhood association meeting where folks were complaining about the lack of senior transportation
- maybe you saw an interview on your local news about the growing number of seniors living alone in your county

**Why is This Issue Urgent (Important Right Now)?**

Your call to action should be urgent and should ask your audience to respond to the challenge you have given them. When narrowing down your call to action, consider immediate next steps, not just the final goal.



*To be a person is to have a story to tell.  
-Isak Dinesen*

We often expect lawmakers to know more about the policy process than we do, but that's not always a good assumption. State legislators and members of Congress consider thousands of bills and budget requests, and they can't all be experts on every item. That's why it's crucial for you to make the connection between your story and the current opportunity.

Be ready to tell your lawmaker the details they need to be able to take the action you want them to, including:

- where the issue is in the legislative process—just an idea, a bill in committee, or coming up for a final vote?
- the exact nature of the solution—is it a bill or an appropriation? Is it federal, state, or local? Is it a total solution or one piece of a puzzle?

**Prompts to Get You Started**

*Try starting a conversation about an issue you care about using one of these phrases:*

I want to tell you about ....

Let me introduce you to \_\_\_\_\_. S/he is \_\_\_\_\_.

I can't stop thinking about ...

Everything changed when ....

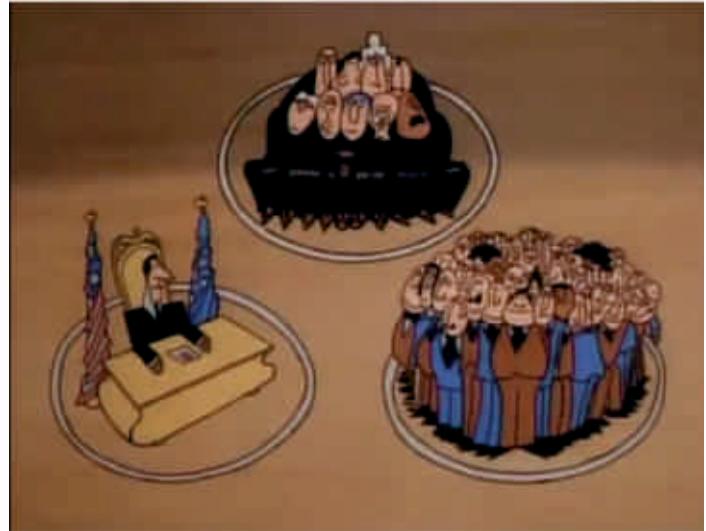


**A Powerful Story is...** ...Brief...Clear...Specific...  
Purposeful...Sincere...Urgent ....Authentic

## Return to “Schoohouse Rock”

### Fundamentals of US and Texas Government for Advocates

The United States has a federal system of government, which means that powers are divided between the national government and state governments. Compared to other democratic countries, the state governments play a more important role in the U.S.; the federal government has only those powers enumerated in the Constitution, and the states retain all others powers. This structure is designed to limit the power of the central government, and it also keeps more policy decisions closer to “the people—” who are the ultimate sovereign.



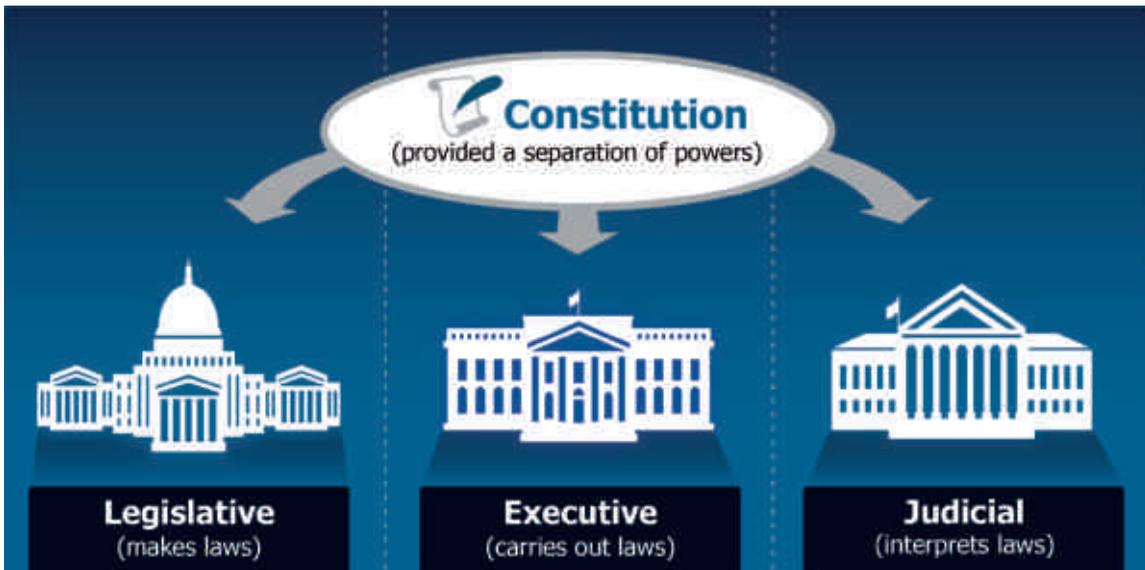
### The Branches and Levels of US Government

	Executive	Legislative	Judicial
Federal	President	Congress	Federal Courts
State	Governor	Legislature	State Courts
Local	Mayor	City Council	Municipal Courts

As an advocate, it is important to understand with which branch and which level of government you are interacting. In the US, we have three levels of government—federal, state, and local. We also have three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislative branch *makes* the law. The executive branch *enforces* the law. The judicial branch *interprets* the law.

### Dear Sir or Madam:

Members of Congress are addressed as “Senator Doe,” “Congressman Doe,” or “Representative Doe.” Member of the Legislature are called “Senator Doe” or “Representative Doe” but *never* “Congressman.” It is correct to address correspondence to all of them using “The Honorable Jane Doe.”



The founders created this separation of powers so that *checks and balances* would limit the power of government. The three branches are each operative at all three levels. So, for example, you could visit lawmakers at the local level (city council); the state level (legislators); or the federal level (Congress). You could call your local executive (mayor); your state executive (governor); or your federal executive (the President).

In the United States, the people have the right to interact with all nine types of government. However, advocates interact most often with the legislative branch. Unlike the judicial branch— which often requires a costly attorney in an adversarial process over the interpretation of laws that have already been made and enforced—the legislative branch was designed to be the public’s first point of contact. In fact, most legislative offices at the state and federal levels are set up to provide constituent services in each district office, so that constituents from throughout the district have access.

### ***The Texas Legislature***

Like 48 other states, Texas has a *bicameral* legislature. With the exception of Nebraska, state governments mirror the federal government, with the legislative branch divided into two *chambers*. These are typically called the House and the Senate. Before a bill can become law, it must be approved by both chambers. State lawmakers in a Senate are called “senators,” and those in a House are called “representatives.” Texas has 31 senators and 150 representatives.

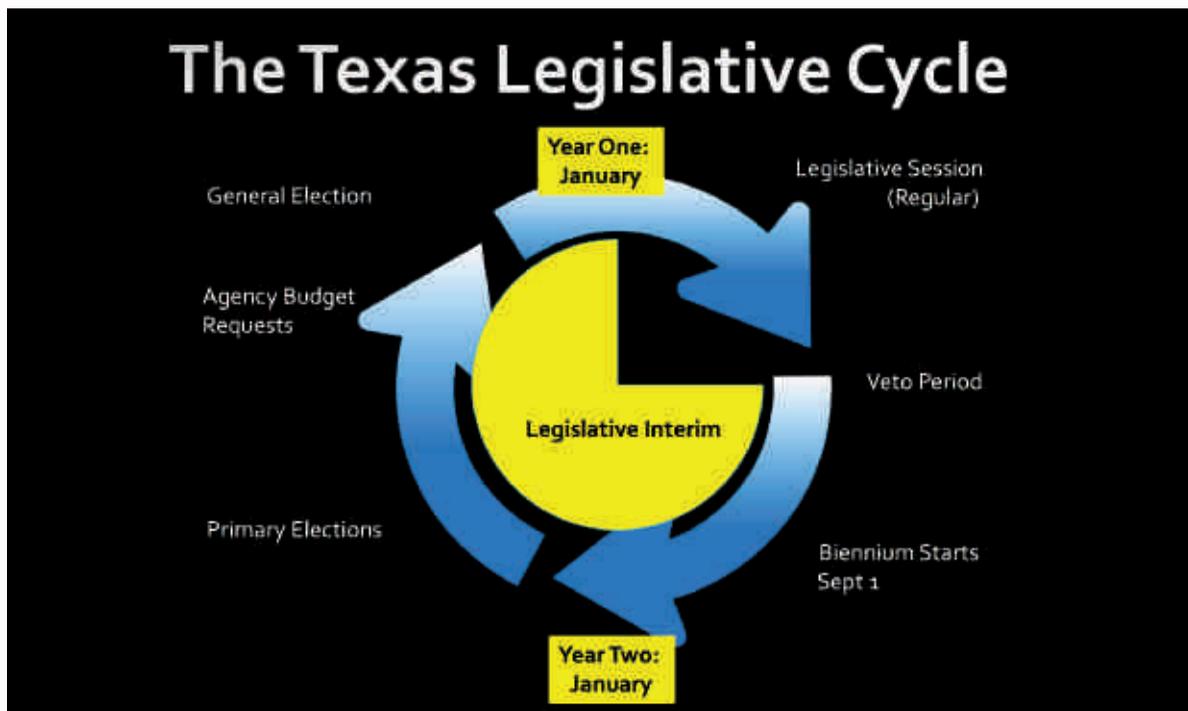
### **Capital Idea!**

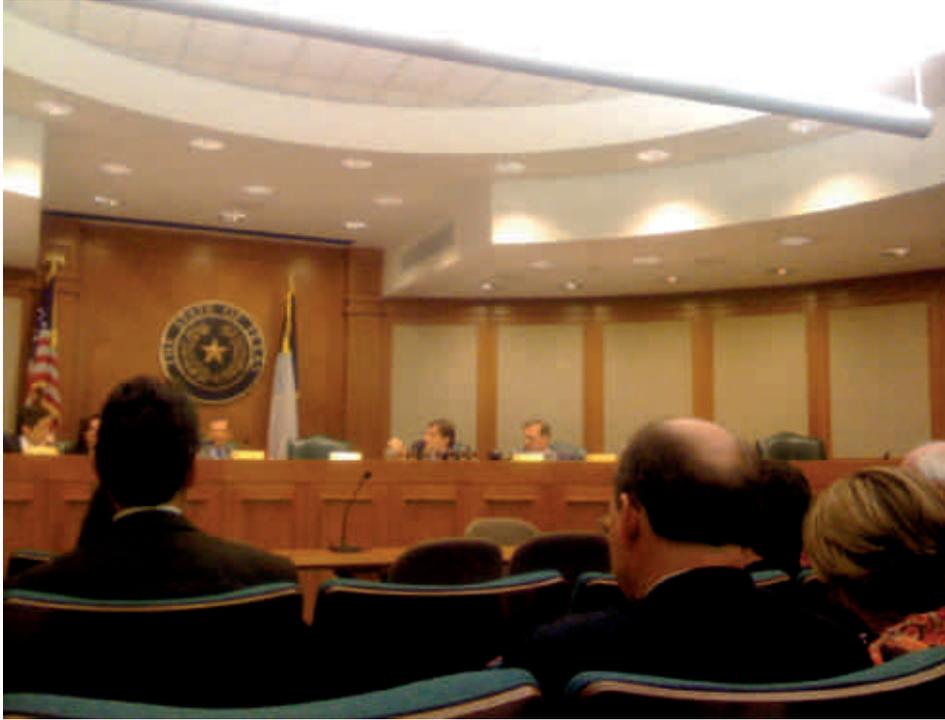
It is correct to capitalize the words “Senator,” “Congressman,” and “Representative” when those words precede a person’s name, as in “Senator John Doe.” It is incorrect to capitalize those words when they are being used generally. For example, it would be correct to write, “I am proud to introduce my senator, Senator Doe.”

Unlike most states, the Texas Legislature is biennial, meaning that it meets only once every two years. The Texas Legislature convenes on the second Tuesday in January of odd numbered years. When it meets, it does so for 140 days. The last day of the legislative session in Texas is called “Sine Die,” which means to adjourn without designating a date for a subsequent meeting. After it adjourns Sine Die, the Texas Legislatures cannot meet again unless the governor calls them back for a special session. Each special session can last a maximum of 30 days, but the governor can call as many as he or she chooses.

The biennial legislative schedule was designed when Texas was a sparsely populated, agrarian state. In recent decades, as the state has become bigger and more complex, the Texas Legislature has adopted a more year-round pattern. Legislative hearings to monitor the work of state agencies and study policy issues take place during “the interim”—the 18-month period between regular legislative sessions.

Few public policy issues are addressed conclusively in a single legislative session. Most go through a cyclical process of problem identification; legislation; implementation; study and measurement; analysis and recommendations; and then further legislation.





### ***Committees***

The presiding officer of each chamber—the Lieutenant Governor in the Senate and the Speaker of the House—appoints that chamber’s committees. The appointment of committees—both in terms of what committees are created and in terms of who serves on which committee—is among the most important decisions each presiding officer will make. The power to appoint committees represents a major source of the power of those offices.

The Texas Legislature must dispense with 6,500 to 7,500 bills in a typical legislative session. The bulk of the work happens in committees. Committees are organized around policy issues such as “health” or “transportation,” or around functional areas such as “investigations” or “intergovernmental relations.”

Every bill that is filed will be referred by the presiding officer to a committee, providing another source of substantial power. The presiding officer also appoints committee chairs. The chair of a committee has the authority to decide which bills the committee will hear, take votes on, or chose to “leave pending.” While all 31 senators and 150 representatives begin with the same amount of power, being appointed to a committee or as the chair of a committee can give some members more power than others.

## **Calendars**

Most bills do not advance past the committee stage. Even those that make it out of committee will not necessarily make it to the floor of each chamber for consideration by the entire body. In Texas, each chamber has a process for scheduling (and not scheduling) which bills the entire body will consider on the floor. In the House, it is the House Calendars Committee. In the Senate, the Lieutenant Governor has that authority unilaterally—one reason why many describe the Lieutenant Governor as the most powerful office in the state.

In the House, the Speaker appoints the Calendars Committee. The chair of that committee proposes a daily list, or “calendar,” of bills to consider, and the other committee members then vote on that proposed calendar. Having the power to propose a calendar means that the chair of the Calendars Committee can decide never to place a particular bill on the calendar at all.

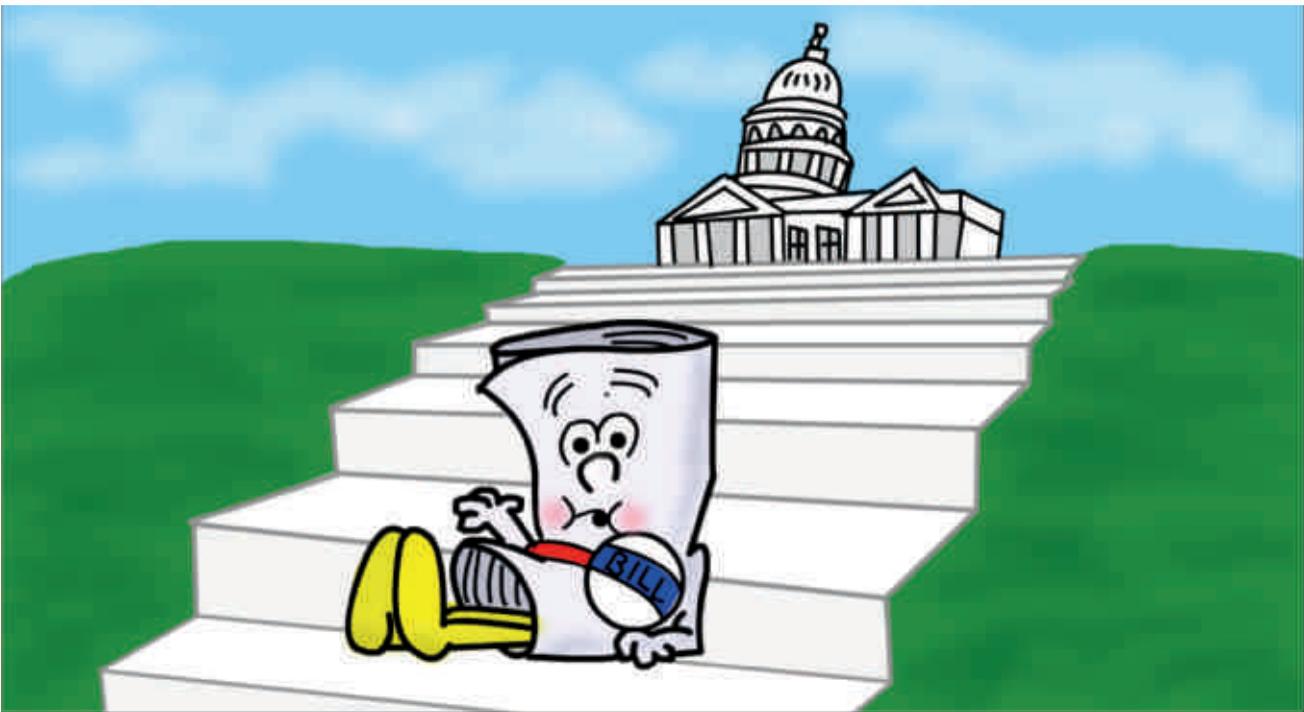
In the Senate, the Lieutenant Governor decides what is placed on the Senate Intent Calendar for floor action. If the Lieutenant Governor never recognizes a senator to present their bill on the floor—even though the bill has passed its Senate committee—then that bill is dead. However, the Lieutenant Governor does not have the power to force a vote on any bill. The Senate has a procedure by which a minority of senators can block a bill from consideration. Known as the “three-fifths rule,” this rule stipulates that 13 of the 31 Senators can form “a block” and prevent a bill’s consideration on the floor. In practice, this means that when a senator asks to be recognized by the Lieutenant Governor to bring a bill to the floor, the senator probably has secured a commitment that at least 19 Senators will vote for the bill.



Often, the Calendars Committee and the Senate Intent Calendar are characterized as arcane and mysterious, but they are simply process tools designed to order the flow of work during the legislative session. The calendar processes in both chambers are open to public participation and influence as much as the rest of the legislative process.

### ***The State Budget***

The only bill that the Texas Constitution requires lawmakers to pass each legislative session is the biennial state budget. Failure to pass a budget means that there must be a special session. Usually, the presiding officers of both chambers try to move a budget bill early—usually around mid-March—as one of the first bills. Every bill is usually still alive at this point in the session, meaning that legislators are more likely to be interested in making compromises in the interests of passing their own legislation. Another reason the presiding officers try to move the budget early in the session is that the Governor, the Senate, and the House typically have competing budget priorities. Getting a budget deal means the House, the Senate, and Governor must all come together and agree upon spending targets. Since each chamber must pass an identical bill before it is sent to the Governor, this means the presiding officers want to give their conferees—the five members each presiding officer gets to appoint to the budget conference committee—time to negotiate with each other and the Governor's Office.



## Tools and Tips for Effective Advocacy

Like other grassroots advocacy organizations, Texas Impact exists to inform and amplify our members' voices—not to speak for them. As a solo advocate or working with a group like Texas Impact, start by asking the basic question “Why should anyone listen to me?” The answer lies in the 4 C's of public policy advocacy:

**Credibility.** Lawmakers want to hear from people with a variety of perspectives who can help them think through an issue. Advocate out of your own expertise—don't just parrot talking points someone gives you.

**Character.** Lawmakers have to be able to rely on information they get from people they don't necessarily know well. They will listen to individuals who prove themselves to be dependable and trustworthy.

**Constituency.** Lawmakers listen hardest to folks who can vote for them.

**Community.** Lawmakers are elected to represent their entire district—but they can't possibly know everything about it. Show your legislator the needs of your community and help them identify solutions.

Joining a civic engagement group is one of the best ways to position yourself as an effective advocate. As a member of Texas Impact or another grassroots group, you can advocate and testify with like-minded fellow Texans. Texas Impact and other grassroots groups have teams of registered lobbyists who are there to help you navigate the advocacy process, educate you on policy, and train you to be an effective spokesperson for the issues you care about.

### *Goals and Accountability*

We expect elected officials to be accountable for their work in the policy process...we should hold ourselves accountable, too. Here's your to-do list for basic civic participation:

- Know who represents your district at the local, state, and federal levels
- Learn about the candidates (and contribute to or volunteer for those you support)
- Vote in every election

### *Learn About your Legislator*

Lawmakers are human beings. That might seem obvious, but we often forget the importance of connecting with them on a human level. Know basic information about them to help foster a relationship.

When you first meet a lawmaker in person, bring up any common experiences you share. Are you both members of the same faith tradition? Do you both coach youth soccer?

*A leader is someone who helps improve the lives of other people or improve the system they live under.*

*—Sam Houston*

*Faith in Democracy: A Public Policy Advocacy Handbook for You and Your Congregation*

a member of your congregation belong to the same professional association as your representative? These connection points can make a bigger impact than all the policy research in the world.

**The worksheet on page 51 of this handbook provides a starting point for building your knowledge of your legislators.**

The first step is to identify who your elected officials are. Visit [fyi.capitol.texas.gov](http://fyi.capitol.texas.gov) and enter your address to find all of your state and federal elected officials.



STEP ONE: If you are just looking for your **state** representative or senator, and not elected officials at other levels of government, you can also search on the Texas Capitol website, [capitol.texas.gov](http://capitol.texas.gov). For House members, visit [house.texas.gov](http://house.texas.gov); for senators, visit [senate.texas.gov](http://senate.texas.gov).



STEP TWO: Once you find your state representative or senator, click on their name from the roster.

STEP THREE: The legislator's home page will tell you a lot of information—about the legislator, but also about the district they represent (and that you live in.)



## Phone

- Find state legislators' phone numbers on senate.texas.gov and house.texas.gov
- Find phone numbers for members of Congress at house.gov and senate.gov
- Most lawmakers also have offices in their district—those numbers are on the same websites, and they may be less busy
- Ask to speak to the staff member who handles the issue you are calling about, but if they aren't available then talk to whoever is available
- Be sure to say you live in the district: legislative offices normally make tallies of phone calls from constituents who are 'for' and 'against' an issue
- If you say you will email additional information, be sure to get the email address of the person you are talking to
- Clearly state your position on the issue
- Thank the staff for their time

### **Sample phone call script:**

*Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I live in \_\_\_\_\_. I am calling to thank Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_ for his/her service this legislative session and to let you know that I and members of my congregation are praying for the Representative/Senator and his/her staff.*

*As a person of faith I want to urge the senator/representative to vote yes on SB/HB\_\_\_\_, which would [whatever the bill does]. Can you tell me how the senator/representative plans to vote on that bill?*

*(If the legislator does not have a position or does not know about the bill, you can offer to email additional information. You also can leave your number in case the legislator wants to call you back.)*

*Thank you for your service to our district!*



## Using Social Media for Advocacy

Social media for advocacy is different from using Instagram to show off your new shoes or turning to your FB peeps with a plumbing problem. But don't be intimidated! Just be sure to follow our do's and don'ts and you'll be fine!

Be aware: some engagement is better than no engagement, but much of our 'activism' online isn't as impactful as we would like it to be. Engaging online can be extremely useful for spreading information, organizing groups, and planning events, but it's better to communicate with lawmakers "IRL" (in real life)—elected officials are inundated with electronic communications.

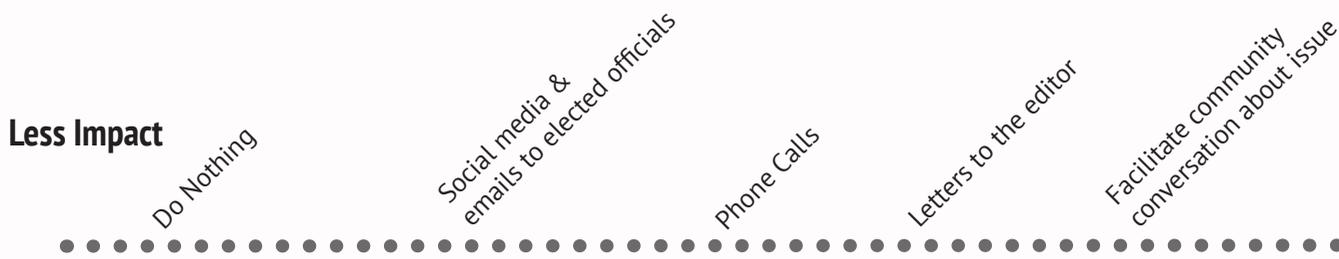
### General Do's of Social Media

- Tag legislators on social media
- Like and follow them to know what they are working on
- Engage their posts by liking, sharing or commenting
- Engage credible advocacy and civic engagement groups
- Use proper hashtags to draw more attention to your posts



### General Don'ts of Social Media

- Get in long-winded debates with others
- Post articles from uncredible sources
- Spam legislators' social media accounts
- Post offensive content or insult people



*Know the issues*

## Email

Email can be the quickest and easiest way to get a message to your legislator, but it's not necessarily the most effective. Lawmakers receive a lot of emails, many of them generated by "click here to email your representative" systems. Some lawmakers block that kind of email or have separate email accounts to receive mass email campaigns.

It's not that much harder to call the office instead of emailing, and it will make a much bigger impact.

Sending an email can be more effective when you want to provide background information about an issue that isn't up for a vote soon, or when you specifically want to associate yourself with an organization that is generating a lot of emails.

If you email an elected official, observe the following customs:

- Make sure your subject line is a clear position (Please vote no on \_\_\_\_\_)
- If you are using an organization's online form to send the email, edit the sample subject and text to increase the likelihood it will be read
- Identify yourself and your connection to the legislator - i.e. as their constituent, a person of faith, your role in the community, etc.
- Be brief! It's better to write a short email and call to follow up than to try to get all your thoughts into one email
- If you use an email form, know what site you are working through and if it is credible

Raise media awareness

Handwritten letters

Talk directly to legislator  
or staff

Organize others for action

**More Impact**

## Impacts of Common Advocacy Interventions

*Know the legislative process*

## *Letters to the Editor*

Letters to the editor are great public policy advocacy tools. They help to shape public opinion, and they inform legislators about constituent concerns. Letters to the editor are more than just the statement of one individual. For every letter that is printed, there are many other, similar letters that didn't get printed, and many other individuals who share your feelings but didn't submit a letter.

One of the most important aspects of letters to the editor is their tangibility—elected officials and others can collect them over time to track opinions and issues of importance. You should hope and assume that people you don't know will clip your letter and use it as part of a body of evidence, so it's worth making sure you say exactly what you mean. It's also worth using tried and true strategies to increase your chances of publication.

Use Texas Impact's "Foolproof Recipe for Policy Communication" in the Resources section of this handbook to make sure your letter is clear, concise, and complete!

### ***Tips for Getting Your Letter Printed***

- Respond to something that was in a newspaper, even if you have to stretch to make the connection. Make reference to the printed sources in your letter, even though the paper will probably take out the reference when they print your letter.
- Keep your letter to no more than 150 words, not including your name and contact information and the reference to the source.
- Submit your letter by email (preferred) or fax.
- Don't forget to include your FULL contact information. The paper uses that information to verify that you actually submitted the letter and that you aren't a front for someone else.
- If you have a digital "headshot" of yourself, attach it as a graphic file to your letter and the paper might print it.
- Remember: the sooner you get your letter in after you read the original story, the better chance that it will be printed, even if it isn't printed until several days after the story appeared.

### ***Getting the Most Mileage Out of Your Letter***

Getting your letter printed is great, and there are a few simple things you can do that will increase its impact:

1. If you submit a letter to the editor, let your grassroots group like Texas Impact know so that we can be on the lookout for it.

*Know what your faith says*

2. If your letter gets printed, let Texas Impact and others know. If your letter is available online on the newspaper's website, simply email the link to us, as well as to your denominational/faith newspaper, and the newsletters of other groups you belong to.
3. If your letter gets printed, clip the letter and the header of the page it's printed on - including at least the name of the newspaper and the date, photocopy the letter and header together on one page, and fax them to your elected officials. If you like, include a personal note, or at least hand write a short memo indicating that you are a constituent.
4. If your letter was printed in a statewide paper, email it to your local paper and suggest they reprint it. If it was printed in your local paper, email it to the nearest statewide paper and ask them to run it.
5. Post a copy of your letter on your congregation's bulletin board if you have a space for such items.



*Know the players*

## *Community Issue Forums*

In the early years of our democracy, houses of worship were primary gathering places where local communities met to discuss issues affecting the community and the nation. Today more than ever, people of faith can and should participate in the public discourse on current issues. An issue forum is an opportunity to convene in your house of worship to deliberate issues, problems, and potential solutions within your faith community.

Public policy issues are often highly complex. They involve detailed factual information and thorough understanding of varied perspectives. An issue forum provides a way to learn about difficult issues in a safe environment. Engaged and educated citizens can advocate and impact policy more effectively within the community. Issue forums provide a solid foundation for political action and understanding.



### ***An Issue Forum Is...***

- A safe space to learn about difficult and intractable social issues.
- A way to relate policy issues to religious social teachings in a way that wouldn't usually happen at a secular community event.
- A way to bring the community together.
- An avenue to give local experts and elected officials an audience.
- Excellent preparation for an election or a legislative session.

### ***Getting Started***

Start discussing ideas for potential issue forum topics with members of your congregation. Members of social action committees and Sunday School classes are a great place to find interested people. Start identifying individuals who can take part in the planning team for your forum. Organize a core team to start brainstorming some issues you would like to cover.

*Know the tactics that work*

Once you have some ideas as well as support, talk to your clergy leader about your intentions and share your ideas with him or her. With his or her input, set a date. Your clergy leader can be a great resource as you plan your event, so keep communication open.

***What Issues Make Good Forums?***

An ideal congregation-based issue forum addresses:

- a current public policy issue
- of broad religious social concern on which there is
- some level of controversy or difference of opinion
- that could have a variety of possible policy solutions

***Current Issues***

Current issues include topics that are in the news and/or that the Legislature is considering.

It's important to make your forum topic broad enough, but not too broad, to allow for rich discussion. For example, "Healthcare in Texas" would be too broad a topic—"The Crisis in Access to Healthcare for Children in Texas" or "The Growing Need for Home Healthcare for Seniors in Texas" would be two of many possible ways to refine the topic.

***Broad Religious Social Concern***

A congregationally based forum should address a concern that is of religious concern, not just of concern to individuals who happen also to be members of religious communities. For example, highway construction or gas prices would be current issues that the Legislature might address, but they have tenuous connections to religious social concerns.



Sometimes, a congregation might choose to address the religious social concern aspects of an otherwise secular issue: for instance, you might decide to hold a forum on the particular impact of a proposed highway on an economically disadvantaged area in your community.

***Some Level of Controversy***

If everyone in your community agrees about the issue you choose as your forum topic, there won't be much to discuss at your forum. If you believe that it's important to hold an event about the issue even though it isn't controversial, consider holding an "informational meeting" instead of a forum.

***Variety of Policy Alternatives***

If there is only one possible way to address the policy issue you've chosen as your forum topic, the audience will be frustrated and the forum won't yield much productive discussion. However, it is almost never the case that an issue only has one possible solution.

Often, policymakers prefer to present issues to the public as though there were only one solution because it makes their jobs easier or it helps them enact the solution they prefer. If, in your planning process, it begins to appear that your issue has only one possible solution (eg: raise taxes), consider changing the way you and others are "framing" the issue.

***Finding Co-Sponsors for Your Forum***

There are four kinds of organizations that your congregation should consider asking to co-sponsor your issue forum (or other events, for that matter.)

- Peers—other local congregations in your area. Consider setting a goal of having some degree of religious diversity in your co-sponsors.
- Vertical Teams—groups that your congregation relates to on a regional, state, or national level such as your district, cluster, or judicatory.
- Colleagues—groups you work with locally that are not congregations, such as your local ministerial alliance or a charity you partner with in the community.
- Friends—groups your congregation belongs to or makes common cause with at the state or local level such as Texas Impact



***What Do Co-Sponsors Do?***

Co-sponsors may want to be very involved in planning the forum and may want to assign a member to the event

committee. In most cases, however, other groups will be just as happy to help you promote your event while leaving the “heavy lifting” to the event committee.

It’s up to you to define the responsibilities of your co-sponsors. At a minimum, co-sponsorship means promoting the event, especially to the co-sponsor’s constituency in the most effective way. For instance, if a judicatory co-sponsors your event, make sure they send notices about the event to email lists they might have. If there will be costs associated with your forum like facility rental, refreshments, or printing, you could ask co-sponsors to contribute to the costs, or you could divide responsibilities so each co-sponsor assumes one cost.

### ***Religious or Not Religious?***

Texas Impact advises congregations to limit their co-sponsors to organizations that either are specifically religious, such as other congregations or local ecumenical partnerships, or interact with the religious community in an ongoing way such as a local nonprofit clinic. Opening co-sponsorship to secular interest groups usually either dilutes the religious particularity of the forum, so that it becomes less connected to religious social concern and more connected to the interest groups represented, or else makes the secular groups uncomfortable. However, you should definitely promote your forum to secular groups and make sure they and their members know they are welcome to attend.

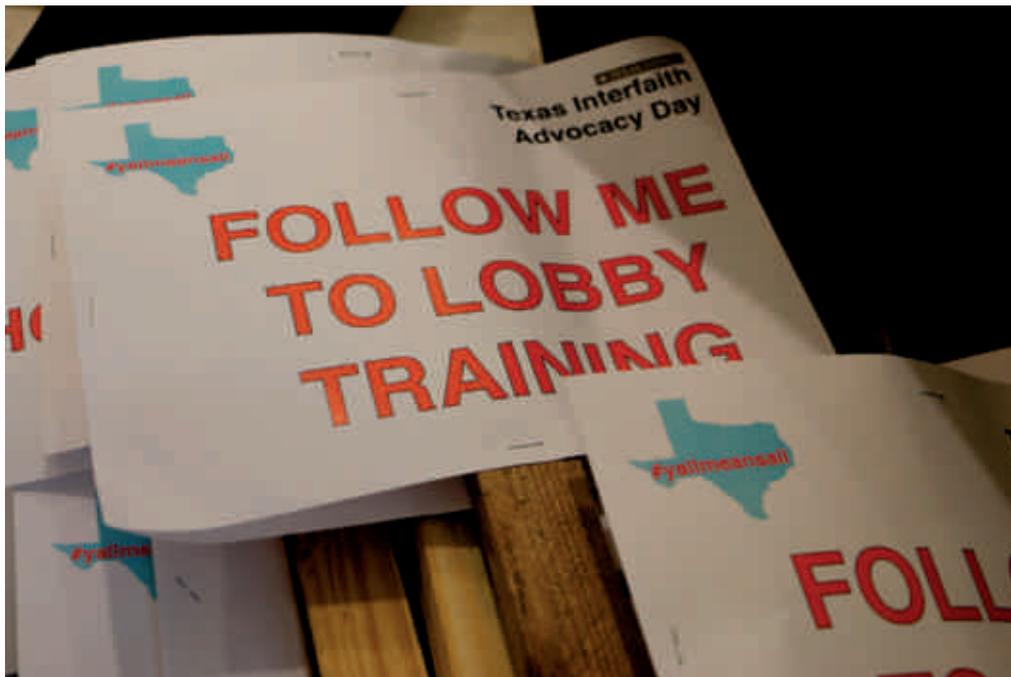
### ***Know the Law: Internal Revenue Service Guidelines for Holding an Issue Forum***

The IRS has ruled that any religious group is by law allowed to hold an issue forum. However, there are some important guidelines that must be met by a congregation choosing to engage in citizenship-building activities.

- Your forum **MUST** be nonpartisan. This means that if there is more than one elected official speaking, they can’t all be from the same party, and there can’t be any references to any party platform during the event.
- Although congregations are allowed to engage in limited lobbying, to be on the safe side the forum should not promote a “lobby” message. This means no handouts, signs or instructions to the audience to “ask your elected official to vote yes (or no) on a particular bill”.
- Finally, the moderator should not comment on the opinions of the panelists.



## Meeting With Legislators and Their Staffs



Meeting in person with legislators and their staffs is a crucial part of citizen leadership, so it's worth taking the time to do some advance preparation.

### Before the Meeting

Get fact sheets on your issues from Texas Impact or other advocacy groups. Many organizations post fact sheets on their websites. If you are meeting about a bill that has already been filed, download the latest version from the state website.

### Downloading Bills from the Texas Legislature's Website



If you know your bill number, go to [capitol.texas.gov](http://capitol.texas.gov). You can download and print the bill text, as well as supporting information like the fiscal impact statement. You can also check where the bill is in the legislative process and sign up to be notified of any actions taken on the bill.

If you don't know your bill number, you can search on [capitol.texas.gov](http://capitol.texas.gov) by author or key words.

## *Roles: Yours and Theirs*

If you are going with a group to your legislative meeting, arrange ahead of time which role each person will play. If you have time, it's a good idea to do a roleplaying exercise, especially if one or more members of the group are inexperienced.

- **Facilitator**—Introduces the group and manages the flow of conversation. The facilitator should also know the bill well and be able to comfortably discuss the talking points for the group.
- **Personal Stories**—One or two people should share their personal reasons for supporting the bill or issue.
- **Note Taker**—Someone should always focus completely on taking notes of what the legislator says. This person is usually silent during the course of the meeting. Their only job is to write down everything that goes on.
- **Silent Supporters**—In large groups, not everyone will speak. Some people can be there just to lend their support and show strong constituent support for the legislation or issue.

The legislator's staff have roles, too. Knowing who you're meeting with will help you prepare.

- **Chief of Staff**—oversees the member's staff in the Capitol office and sometimes also in the district office. Often a key political advisor to the legislator.
- **Executive Assistant**—Handles appointments and scheduling, helps the chief of staff with office administration, keeps things running smoothly.
- **Legislative Director**—Supervises the legislative staff, responsible for legislative proposals, floor work, issue oversight, etc.
- **Legislative Assistant**—Typically track specific issues areas and bills the legislator authors that fall in those issue areas.
- **Press Secretary**—Publicity director; responsible for preparing press releases, speeches, etc.
- **District Staff**—Sometimes function only in political capacity, in other cases handle policy issues. Legislators who live in or near Austin typically do not have separate district offices, but do all their work at the Capitol.



*Sample Letter or Email for Making a Legislative Appointment*

Dear Representative (Senator) \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I live at \_\_\_\_\_ . I would like to request an appointment with you or a member of your staff on (date). I would like an opportunity to discuss with you (the issue or bill you want to discuss).

Please respond to me at (list phone/fax/e-mail contact information).

(Add any other personal information/comments that might be appropriate.)

Sincerely,

(give your name and full address)

*Contacting Your Legislator's Office by Mail*

For any Texas state representative:  
The Honorable John Doe  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78711

For any Texas state senator:  
The Honorable Jane Doe  
P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711

*Sample Phone "Script" for Making a Legislative Appointment*

Hi! I'm \_\_\_\_\_, from \_\_\_\_\_. I will be in Austin on (date), and would like an appointment to meet with Governor \_\_\_\_\_/Senator \_\_\_\_/ Representative \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss (the policy issue or bill you want to discuss).

I would be more than happy to meet with the legislative assistant who works on (your issue) if the (elected official) is unavailable. Is someone available the afternoon of the (date of your visit)?

If no one is available, I would like to drop by the office anyway to leave some information for the (elected official) to review.

*Contacting Your Legislator's Office by Phone*

Find your state representative's phone number on the Texas House of Representatives website at [house.texas.gov](http://house.texas.gov)

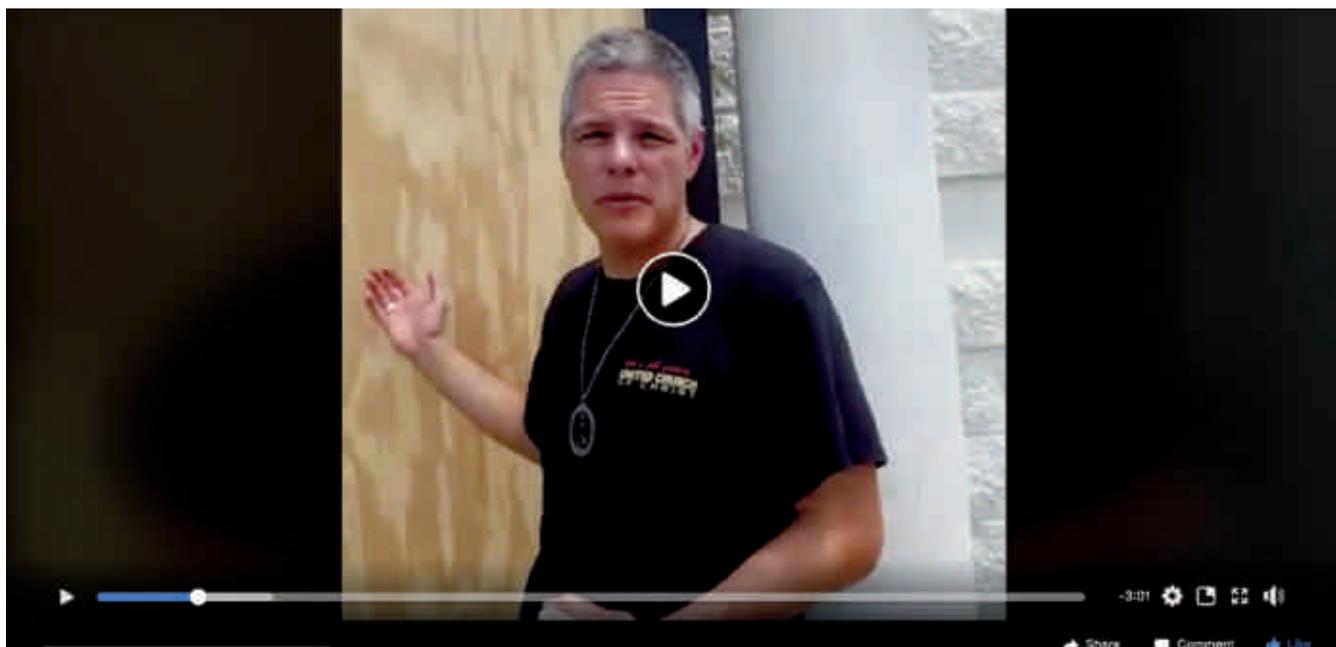
Find your state senator's phone number on the Texas Senate website at [senate.texas.gov](http://senate.texas.gov)

No internet access? Call Capitol information at 512.463.0063 for any legislator's phone number.

**Is it Lobbying?**

Your legislative meeting is lobbying if you are advocating a position on a bill or a specific idea that might become a bill. It's not lobbying if you are just visting in broad terms about a policy issue, but it's also not as effective. Lobbying is a legitimate exercise of free speech—and citizen input is a crucial aspect of the American legislative process.

## Using Video to Witness for Social Change



In addition to direct services and advocacy, sometimes we have an opportunity to participate in *ministries of witness*. The object of these activities is not to “do” something but to observe, so you can describe it to someone who can’t be there. When you have the opportunity to observe a situation first-hand, you can use your experiences to demystify the issue for other advocates and policymakers. Some common kinds of witness ministries include observing court proceedings and monitoring elections.

We know that video is one of the most compelling media for conveying information. This guide will help you tell your story effectively for sharing on social media, using Facebook Live and recording brief videos for uploading and sharing to social media. Often when you are engaged in ministry of witness, cameras are not allowed in the room or location where the events are taking place—but you can make videos that help others get as close as possible by sharing your emotions and experiences.

### *Technical Tips for Using Video for Social Media*

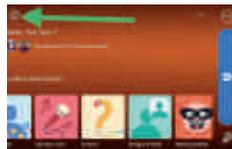
- **Keep recorded videos relatively short.** Most people stop watching videos after the first 30-60 seconds. Instead of one long video, you can make a series of shorter 30-90 second videos.
- **Turn your phone sideways (landscape).** Videos optimized for social media are filmed in landscape mode (when your phone is wider than tall) rather than portrait mode (tall and narrow). Before you start a live video or begin recording turn your phone to the right (sideways) orientation.
- **Use a selfie stick or tripod, if available.** Sometimes the shaky, in-the-moment feeling of a handheld video helps convey the urgency of your story. But it can also be distracting for the viewer. If you have a selfie stick or tripod you can control the motion and frame your shot more effectively.



1. Open your Facebook app



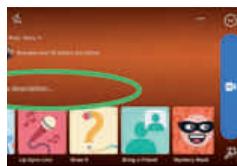
2. Tap to write a new post, and select "Go Live" from the list of options



3. Turn your phone to the landscape position. To film yourself, tap the icon that looks like a camera with 2 arrows in a circle to use the front-facing camera



4. In the "To:" section tap the arrow and select "Public" to get the widest audience (see below for more info on making a public post)



5. Add your description, your location, and tag some friends (see steps below)

6. Tap the video camera icon when you're ready to record



- **Avoid locations with wind and traffic/background noise.** It's not always possible to film in a quiet location. Wind and nearby traffic are two of the most common noise producers. If you can find a sheltered area or even an indoor space it will help with the sound quality.
- **Consider captioning when you post (if possible).** Many people watch Facebook videos with the sound off. Captioning can make your video more accessible for those with hearing challenges. If you are broadcasting to an organization's Facebook page (not your personal page) there will be an option to add captions at a later time.



### Tips for Using Facebook Live on Your Phone

- **Tell people ahead of time you're going to broadcast on Facebook Live.** For example: "Today a group of us from my church are going to witness federal court proceedings. I'll be sharing my experience on Facebook Live when we break for lunch. Come back to hear what we've experienced."
- **Go live with a strong connection.** WiFi is usually better for Facebook Live broadcasts.
- **Write a compelling description for your video.** Before you hit record, Facebook asks you to add a description for your video. Write something that will encourage your friends to tune in. For example: "Let me tell you what happened when I saw a mass trial in Brownsville today. I'm questioning whether due process exists in U.S. courts on the border."

- **Tag people who are with you, or who you want to see the video, and set the location.** This will help your video show up in more people's newsfeeds.
- **A longer Facebook Live broadcast may get more viewers.** People have a short attention span for recorded videos. However, a 30-90 second Facebook Live video won't get many viewers in the moment. Plan to go live when you have a longer span of time, maybe as long as 10 minutes. Others can join you to tell the story so you aren't just a talking head the whole time.
- **Consider making your live post "Public" regardless of your usual privacy settings.** To get the widest audience for your live post, it's helpful to make it public so anyone can share it. You can also tag people in your post so the video gets into their feeds. They are more likely to see it and share it.
- **Tell your story.** Be honest and raw about what you've seen. Share not just what you saw, but how it made you feel, why you think it's important, and what you believe needs to happen to change the fate of the people affected by our immigration and court systems.
- **Come back to see and respond to comments.** It's always good to engage with comments on your live videos when they are constructive, and if you can answer questions. It's possible the content you're sharing may attract some trolls. You never have an obligation to respond to anyone on your video.
- **Reshare your video again and again.** If you're happy with the outcome of your video, you can share it repeatedly to your Facebook page, and other pages you have access to. You can also share the link in other media, such as an email newsletter, or embed the video on a website.



## Texas Impact's Ten Commandments of Legislative Visits

### **1. Thou shalt not knock.**

Seriously. Just walk right in if it's the Capitol office, it's the culture. You'll be cool.

### **2. Thou shalt not fail to introduce thyself.**

State your name, your hometown, and any other connection to the district like a faith community or an employer.

### **3. Thou shalt not have unrealistic expectations.**

Do not be offended if you meet with a staffer. They are the legislator's brain on policy. Also, those offices are small. If the meeting is in the hall, especially if it's a large group, do not be insulted.

### **4. Thou shalt not fail to read the room.**

Is there a high level of stress? Are people freaking out? If so, offer to come back in 10-15 minutes.

### **5. Thou shalt not be a jerk.**

Always be polite. No exceptions. There is a difference between being principled and being anti-social. Do not argue. Agree to disagree.

### **6. Thou shalt not threaten.**

The next election is the elephant in the room. Everyone knows it. If you ask for

a vote on a bill and the answer is no, don't threaten revenge. If the answer is yes, pledge to thank the legislator and support the vote back in the district.

### **7. Thou shalt not exceed 5 minutes.**

But you drove four hours? They know. It's about the effort you took, not the length of the visit.

*\*Exception to this commandment: if the staffer is talking, then stay put and listen... before you leave, get a picture of yourself with the staffer and tweet it!*

### **8. Thou shalt not forget to fill out a legislative visit evaluation form.**

Democracy is a team effort. Your grassroots group's lobby team needs and appreciates the information.

### **9. Thou shalt not forget a thank you note.**

This lost art is not only an important courtesy—it reinforces your visit by reminding the office who you are.

### **10. Thou shalt not be "one & done."**

Democracy is a way of life. Vote every November...and in the primaries. Make district visits in the interim. Join civic organizations, and teach other folks how to develop their civic skills. Now who's the advocacy pro? (You, that's who!)

## Building a Social Justice Ministry in Your Congregation

### Learn Your Faith's Teachings About Social Justice And Build These Into Your Worship

Become familiar with the social justice teachings of your denomination or faith group. This will enable you to speak with more authority about why people of faith want to be active in social justice, and what is of most concern from a faith perspective.

The theological aspects of these teachings can be incorporated into the worship experience of the congregation, through sermons, readings, prayers, etc. Texas Impact's website ([www.texasimpact.org](http://www.texasimpact.org)) has links to a number of faith teachings on social justice.

### Create A Process For Learning About And Reflecting On Issues

- Develop programs for study and reflection to build a full understanding of social justice issues. Programs might include congregational meetings, study groups, regular forums, educational presentations, classes, etc. Study materials can often be obtained from your national denomination or faith community, or from national advocacy organizations if you are careful to get a balanced perspective.
- Make sure that time for inner reflection or prayer is included in the study process. For example, participants could be invited at the end of every class or presentation to spend a few minutes in silent reflection on what they have learned and what they feel guided to do by their faith as a result.
- From a faith perspective, the goals of study and reflection are understanding, sharing information and experiences to grasp deeper truths, and opening oneself to divine guidance. It is not about seeking to be on the 'right' side, or to win a debate.

### Build Agreement On What Should Be Done

Often the national levels of faith communities already have social justice recommendations that can be used as the basis for advocacy. At other times, the congregation may develop its own positions on issues. In either case, there may be differing views as to what advocacy positions best reflect one's faith.

Several faith communities have developed guidelines for study, discussion, and prayerful discernment on issues. Some models for handling controversial issues, for example, involve having a period of silent reflection after each viewpoint is shared, in which participants seek to find common ground, to appreciate aspects of truth on the opposing side, and to seek divine

*Charity is a matter of personal attributes; justice, a matter of public policy.*

*Charity seeks to eliminate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it. Charity in no way affects the status quo, while justice leads inevitably to political confrontation. —The Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr.*

guidance in discerning the deeper truth that brings all sides together. These processes reduce the tendency for people to become polarized and antagonistic in their views, and to maximize the sense of a shared search for truth and respect for those whose views differ from our own.

### **Organize Advocacy Initiatives**

Once there is clarity about advocacy goals, a variety of activities can be undertaken. The following are some suggestions for building effective programs.

***Create a variety of action options for people with different interests and skills.*** For example, a congregation might pick homelessness as a social justice priority issue, with action options including: packing up meals for the homeless, working at shelters and food banks, helping to organize community programs, or lobbying for legislation to address the causes of homelessness. Including community service in a social justice program is helpful as a way to give people first-hand experience that can increase their awareness and motivation to make a difference in that area.

***Hold action events that a large portion of the congregation can participate in.*** Make them fun and social wherever possible, to increase their appeal – for example, an evening of letter-writing combined with a potluck dinner, or a meeting with a legislator on an issue combined with refreshments and time to socialize.





***Participate with Texas Impact and other coalitions in contacting legislators and meeting with them on particular issues of concern.*** Working in coalitions makes it easier, since much of the organizing work is done by coalition staff. It also makes the advocacy more effective as a larger number of people are involved – legislators are naturally more affected by input from a large coalition than from small organizations.

It's helpful to build a regular cycle of social justice activities, so that the congregation comes to expect them. For example, congregations can hold a monthly social action forum on some key topic, or hold an annual congregational meeting to review social action goals. The congregation could link planning with the Texas Legislature's cycle, for example providing educational programs on key legislative issues relating to the congregation's social justice program at the beginning of each legislative session.

**Building Congregational Support For Policy Engagement**

Consider developing a comprehensive program and/or decision-making process that involves the whole congregation.

The congregations that are most effective in public policy involve the whole congregation, and see advocacy as an aspect of all church activities. There may not be sufficient support within a congregation to move in this direction, but it is an option worth considering.

Some congregations have a Social Justice Council, or Faith in Action Council, which includes some Board members, that meets several times a year to oversee the work by a variety of social justice task forces. The Council coordinates one or more congregational meetings a year to focus on social action programs. For example, the different task forces might present their activities or at quarterly congregational meetings over potluck dinners.

Some congregations have an annual meeting at which the whole congregation votes on what social action projects should be given the highest priority. Each option is presented by a group of congregation members who are informed and enthusiastic about that action area. Congregation members then vote on which social action goals should become churchwide projects.

***Develop Positive And Mutually Supportive Relations***

It's important to build strong support within your governing board and other church leaders. Give presentations to the board, talk individually with congregation leaders and clergy and try to understand and address their concerns. Keep them 'in the loop' on social justice activities, sending them regular updates by email or copying them on minutes of social justice meetings.



***Support What Other Committees In The Congregation Are Doing And Encourage Them To Incorporate Advocacy In Their Work***

For example, the committee dealing with facilities could consider finding environmentally beneficial ways to reduce energy use and waste of materials. (This is a justice issue as environmental problems usually impact the poor more heavily than the wealthy.)

***Recruit, Develop, And Sustain Leaders***

Provide regular training opportunities on issues and skills relating to advocacy (such as public speaking, and writing effective letters to the editor)

Use 'one-on-one' conversations to get to know other church members and explore how they might be interested in being involved in social justice. One-on-ones are a tool used in community organizing to explore what is of most concern to the other person, get to know their interests, and share what motivates you to work on social justice. It creates a connection that helps build community and shared purpose, and often draws people into active involvement.

Continually recognize and express appreciation for the contribution of leaders at meetings, in church publications, etc.

Make activities fun and social wherever possible! Combine them with food, socializing, being outdoors, whatever people might enjoy. People will be more likely to participate and have enthusiasm to keep participating!







## Worksheets, Templates, and Project Plans

- ✓ Know Your Community
- ✓ Know Your Legislator
- ✓ Legislative Visit Evaluation Form
- ✓ Storytelling Template
- ✓ Policy Communication “Recipe”
- ✓ Issue Forum Models

## **Know Your Community: Questions to Identify Systemic Needs**



### **Employment**

The employment situation in your community impacts issues far beyond its economic sustainability—especially health and mental health.

- What is the local unemployment rate of your community?
- Who are the major employers in your community?
- Are jobs accessible to workers with diverse skill sets or backgrounds?

### **Public Benefits**

There are about one million Texans who qualify for benefit programs administered by the state such as Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, and TANF, but who are not enrolled. Many of these low-income Texas families are living in your community. It could be that they do not know that they are eligible, or they might not know how to sign up.

- Is there a public benefits office in your community?
- What are the ways someone can sign up for benefits?

### **Healthcare**

Texas has the highest uninsured rate in the United States and it is one of the last states to refuse to expand Medicaid, costing Texas to lose out on Federal dollars. Texas also has some of the highest rates of infant and maternal mortality, and one in four women don't have access to affordable healthcare.

- Are there affordable clinics and emergency services in your community?
- What support services are available to those who don't have insurance?

### **Mental Health**

Mental health conditions affect everyone: grandparents, children, neighbors, community leaders, and the people with whom we worship. An estimated fifty percent of all people will meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental health condition at some point within their lifetime. In 2009, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) gave Texas' mental health services a "D" grade and the Texas Department of State Health Services acknowledged that Texas' mentally ill population was not receiving adequate mental health care.

- What mental health services are available in your community? Are they accessible to those with low income or without health insurance?
- Are there any criteria for qualifying for mental health assistance? Who do those criteria exclude?

**Food**

Only half of Texans eligible for food assistance are receiving it, causing the state of Texas to leave almost \$4 billion in federal SNAP benefits unused each year. These dollars could improve the quality of life for low-income families and lessen the strain on local food pantries. Providing individuals with such resources would have a positive economic impact on your local community while also helping those who need it most.

- Are there grocery stores that are easily accessible in your community? Do they accept SNAP benefits?
- What local organizations or congregations provide food assistance or food items to families or individuals in need?

**Affordable Housing**

Stable housing is foundational for an individual's or a family's success. Having safe, reliable shelter is essential for all families, but many are not able to access quality, affordable housing. The U.S. government classifies affordable housing as housing that is 30% or less of family income.

- If in a family of four, both parents are working 30 hours per week earning the federal minimum wage, or one parent works full-time and the other roughly half-time, then that family would be designated as "poor" under current federal guidelines. Could this family of four find quality, affordable housing in your community.

**Homelessness**

When we think of homelessness, we tend to think of a person huddled under blankets sleeping on the steps of a church. It is important to recognize that alongside this more visible form of homelessness, there are many other individuals and families experiencing homelessness that we do not see.

- Where is your local homeless shelter? What additional services do they provide?
- Are there shelters for other vulnerable populations; i.e. victims of family violence, immigrants or asylum seekers, the mentally or physically disabled, those addicted to drugs or alcohol, those just leaving prison?

**Race and Culture**

Texas is composed of a diverse population of people from all around the world. It is important that we celebrate our differences and understand the positive impact that immigrants have on our community.

- What is the racial and ethnic makeup of your community?
- Where in your community can diverse populations participate in their cultural practices?

**Criminal Justice**

One in every 27 adults in Texas is in prison or on probation/parole. It is important to understand the mental health, socio-economic, education, and racial disparity issues that often contribute to an individual's involvement with the criminal justice system.

- What kind of courts are located in your community?
- Do people have access to lawyers if they can't afford to pay?
- What issues or trends do jail staff encounter on a daily basis?
- Are there places in your community that offer jobs or housing for felons?

### **Environment**

We are all connected to the environment through the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Protecting the health of our local environment is directly connected to protecting the health of our families - especially children and the elderly. At the same time, the ways our lives and communities are structured (for example: urban sprawl, electricity generated by burning fossil fuels, and a consumer based economy) depend upon industries that have environmental impacts.

- What sources of energy are utilized in your community?
- What are major sources of pollution in your area?
- Where does your water come from? Where is it treated?
- Where does your trash go after it gets picked up?

### **Education**

Quality public education can be a great equalizing force in our society. The resources and elected officials of a community contribute to the operation of schools, state laws, and policies that affect students, the hiring and supervision of professional teaching staff, and how revenue is raised to fund public education (usually through property taxes plus special bond issues).

- How many students are enrolled in your local school district? What percent of them are from low-income families?
- Do most students enrolled in your school district graduate on time from high school? Does the graduation rate vary by high school? By neighborhood?
- What is the average teacher salary in your district?

### **Public Transportation**

Many families in Texas are unable to afford their own personal transportation and rely on public transportation. Public transportation has the added benefit of being good for the environment.

- Are buses easily accessible? Are stops shaded or covered?
- Is taking the bus affordable?
- How early and late do the buses run? Could someone working an atypical schedule get to or from work? Are there different schedules for weekdays or weekends?

### **Local Leaders**

While most news coverage focuses on policy issues of state and national significance, local leaders shape many of the decisions that impact us on a daily basis. It is important to build relationships with local elected officials, both to impact short-term local legislation and to prepare for the possibility of their becoming state or national elected officials.

- Who are your local City Council members? When is the next City Council meeting?
- When and where are town hall meetings held?
- Who is the mayor and where do they stand on the issues important to your community?

### **Utility Assistance**

Regardless of whether a family is working or not, money can be tight and families might not be able to cover the cost of utilities. Often families who are trying to keep the lights on or the heat running will turn to faith communities for help.

- What sources of utility assistance exist in your community? How can people apply for assistance?

# LAWMAKER INFORMATION SHEET

Your Congressman \_\_\_\_\_

Your State Senator \_\_\_\_\_

Your State Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Texas House

Texas Senate

Congressional Rep.

<i>Party</i>			
<i>Hometown</i>			
<i>Committee Memberships</i>			
<i>Leadership positions</i>			
<i>Career</i>			
<i>Family Status</i>			
<i>Alma maters</i>			
<i>Previous elected offices</i>			
<i>Faith Tradition</i>			
<i>Congregation</i>			
<i>Community Organizations</i>			
<i>Other notable information</i>			



# Legislative Visit Evaluation Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Event: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Legislative Office Visited: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Participants:	Advocates	Legislator and/or Staff
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

Additional Participants: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Issues Discussed: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Specific Requests from the Office, if any: \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up Promised by You, if any? \_\_\_\_\_

Any Follow-up Required from Texas Impact staff? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did you get what you came for? (Usually the answer will be ‘not exactly, but...’)  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Not sure, and here’s why: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What did you talk about in the meeting? Any highlights? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Based on your visit, should Texas Impact try to engage the person you met with in any way, and if so what would that engagement be? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Any additional comment? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE GUIDE

Once you have identified your story, you will want to shape it for sharing in a public context. The Harvard scholar Marshall Ganz breaks down the method of preparing a narrative as the **Story of Self**, the **Story of Us**, and the **Story of Now**. The worksheet below will help guide you.

What is the issue at the heart of your story?

---

How are you **personally** connected to the issue through your story? (Story of Self)

Why is this issue important in your **community**? (Story of Us)

What is your **call to action**? (Story of Now)

Now that you have the building blocks of your story, think about your **hook**. What will grab people's attention right from the beginning? Think about emotion, the five senses, time and place.

---

What is your **core message**? Put it in one sentence.

---

What **three things** are most important for you to share from this story?

---

# *Texas Impact's Foolproof Policy Communication Recipe*

*This all-purpose policy communication formula is a good starting point for letters to legislators, one-pagers for your club or group, testimony before a committee, and letters to the editor.*

## **PRO TIP:**

**Highlighting the first sentence of each paragraph makes it much easier on the reader.** It forces you to order your thoughts clearly. If you can't get the gist of your letter just by reading the first sentence of each paragraph, try to rewrite those sentences to make them clearer.

*Dear Whoever,* [IF THIS IS A LETTER, RATHER THAN A FLYER OR ARTICLE]

My name is Dana Doe, and I live in [YOUR DISTRICT OR TOWN NAME].

[IF THIS IS A LETTER TO A LAWMAKER, HERE IS WHERE YOU THANK THEM FOR THEIR SERVICE, OR FOR SOME SPECIFIC ACTION THEY'VE TAKEN.]

**I am very concerned about the new state policy** that says elementary school children have to have 120 minutes of guided physical education a week. This policy has caused our school to change the daily schedule so that the kids only get a real recess on days when they have an actual phys ed. period in school. On other days, they have to run laps or do push-ups during their recess time.

**Failing to have unstructured recess time is not healthy for children.** If the kids don't have real recess, my son and other children are not able to learn as well in class because:

1. They don't have the opportunity to make friends with other kids in a relaxed setting, making group activities in class uncomfortable.
2. They don't get a chance to "blow off steam" by being silly and loud outdoors, so they are more likely to disrupt class.
3. They don't have any period available to finish class work they may be struggling with.

**I'm concerned about this issue for my own family and also the wider community.** As a mom, I am concerned about how this new policy will affect my son. As a taxpayer, I am worried it will make our education system less effective for more disadvantaged kids.

**I encourage you to take action to address this issue.** Please let me know what your plans are and how I can help. You can contact me at the address and phone number below.

[IF THIS IS A LETTER TO A LAWMAKER, THANK THEM AGAIN FOR THEIR WORK.]

*Sincerely,*

*Your Name*

Your Contact Info

[IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF A GRASSROOTS GROUP, YOU CAN PUT THEIR INFO HERE, TOO.]

# Three Basic Issue Forum Models

## **Model #1: One Main Speaker With Respondents**

In this model, ask one primary speaker to explain the policy issue and lay out possible solutions to it. Then a panel of 3-5 respondents takes turns commenting on the primary speaker's information. The audience can ask questions of either just the primary speaker or both the primary speaker and all the respondents.

### **Keys:**

- Make sure the primary speaker really has the knowledge to deliver all the information they need to, and make sure they are an entertaining speaker!
- Make sure the respondent panel includes a good balance. In particular, make sure the respondents include individuals from a different political party than the main speaker and individuals who have specific professional knowledge on the topic at hand.

**Pros:** If you have access to a really good primary speaker, this is the easiest forum to put together.

**Cons:** Because the respondents are commenting on what they've just heard the main speaker say, you don't have as much control over the points they plan to make.

## **Model #2: Panel Of Experts With Moderator**

In this model, a panel of 2-4 experts lay out the issue as well as offer a range of solutions. Make sure this panel is politically diverse and has differing perspectives on the topics at hand. A moderator introduces the event and helps place the issue in context, both in terms of religious social concern and timeliness.

### **Keys:**

- All the experts need to be of equal gravitas—it's probably not fair to have a senator, a hospital CEO and a convenience store clerk (although of course it would depend on the clerk!)
- Unlike with the panel of respondents in the "primary speaker" model, each of the panelists in this model should be an expert on the policy issue and an expert in the range of solutions.
- At least a couple of the panelists and/or the moderator need to be well-known enough to draw a crowd.

**Pros:** There's less pressure for any one speaker to be really engaging or a "one-man band."

**Cons:** If one of your experts falls through at the last minute, your panel can become seriously unbalanced. It's best to have a couple of back-ups in mind.

## **Model #3: Multi-session Series Of Presentations**

In this model, the forum is expanded to take up more than one session. Each session features a speaker with expertise on a particular aspect of the policy issue who may or may not have any ideas about possible solutions. Typically the final session features either a speaker who can discuss possible solutions, or else is a pure discussion session in which the audience suggests and evaluates possible solutions with a moderator.

### **Keys:**

- It's imperative that each of the speakers be an expert in a different aspect of the issue—if the sessions get repetitive, the audience will stop attending.
- Scheduling is especially important for this model, because you don't want to run into a conflict part-way through the series.
- The planning committee must maintain ownership of the series from beginning to end.

**Pros:** This model gives you the best opportunity to examine all the angles of the issue. Also, this model builds community because the audience gets to know each other over the course of several sessions.

**Cons:** It's harder for people to commit to multiple sessions, so the audience may be smaller.

# Sample Issue Forum Template

Here is a sample issue forum to help you get started planning yours.

## FORUM TEMPLATE #1

### A Multi-Week Series On Healthcare Issues

Brief description: Use Texas Impact's study guide ***Do This and You Shall Live*** in conjunction with speakers and experiential learning to understand challenges facing Texas' health care system.

Outcome: Participants will understand more about health care costs, the uninsured, challenges in their local health care system, and policy alternatives for addressing health care issues. Congregations will deepen their relationships with local health care leaders and providers.

*Consider using the United Methodist "Wesleyan Quadrilateral", the Catholic "JustFaith" model or another denominational system of discernment to guide your study.*

### Outline

#### **Week One: Overview Of The Healthcare Finance System**

Some possible speakers: local hospital district or public hospital CEO or CFO; local university or community college professor with expertise in health care economy; chamber of commerce speaker's bureau; legislator

What the speaker/s should talk about: the healthcare system in your local area; local healthcare costs; public finance pressures from and on the local healthcare system; socioeconomic information about your local area; notable changes or patterns in your local healthcare system or healthcare economy

#### **Week Two: The Uninsured**

Some possible speakers: doctor or caseworker from local clinic for the uninsured; health care advocate from a local nonprofit; an uninsured person

Optional field trip: visit a local public clinic that receives support from the local religious community

What the speaker/s should talk about: numbers and characteristics of the uninsured in your community; costs to the healthcare system of the uninsured; local programs to serve the uninsured; cost estimates of uninsurance for individuals and the community; cost estimates of insuring the currently uninsured

#### **Week Three: Policy Options in Healthcare**

Some possible speakers: advocates for different policy initiatives; interest group spokespersons from groups such as AARP, local medical association, disability advocacy group, children's services advocacy group or local public clinic

What the speaker/s should talk about: their groups' positions with respect to various healthcare reform ideas; the pros and cons of different reform ideas

#### **Week Four (optional): Drawing Our Own Conclusions**

Moderated discussion/answer questions about what are most important aspects of HC system. The facilitator could be the same individual who has been moderating the entire series, or could be a trained facilitator.

What you would discuss: what information from the series has been the most helpful; any changes individual participants have experienced in their perceptions about any aspect of the healthcare system

# Be our partner in public witness



## Support Texas Impact and amplify the voices of mainstream faith communities.

For more than four decades, Texas Impact has ensured that social concerns of mainstream faith communities are heard in the Texas Capitol. The political discourse in Texas needs voices of faith now more than ever—and we depend on member support to provide robust public witness around our shared values.

Texas Impact lobbies the Legislature, so membership dues are not tax-deductible...but we need them to ensure we can maintain a robust presence of mainstream faith voices in the Texas Capitol.

Looking for a tax-deductible way to support our work? Designate your donation for our foundation, the Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy, in the donation menu below. Donations to the Interfaith Center support our policy analysis and engagement activities throughout the year—even when the Legislature is not in session.

We especially encourage you to consider a recurring donation. A small recurring payment is easy on your budget. It's safe and secure—and if, at any time, you'd like to update or change your donation, just email us.

No matter how you structure your donation, we are grateful for your generosity!

*visit [texasimpact.org/join](https://www.texasimpact.org/join) to find out more*

Follow Texas Impact on Facebook and on Twitter to learn about current policy and legislative activity.



<https://www.facebook.com/texasimpact/>



<https://twitter.com/TXImpact>

*people of faith working for justice*

## WHO WE ARE

Texas Impact is the state's oldest and largest interfaith legislative network, representing more than 5 million Texans. Our membership includes denominational bodies, social action networks, local congregations, ministerial alliances, and individuals.

Our members are more civically engaged and less partisan than other Texas voters. Our individual membership is evenly split in party affiliation, and our individual members are four times more likely to vote in primary elections than the average Texas registered voter.

Texas Impact's board of directors is appointed by our member denominational and social justice organizations. The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy is Texas Impact's foundation arm.

## WHAT WE DO

Texas Impact exists to advance state public policies that are consistent with universally held social principles of mainstream faith traditions.

We bring the voices of mainstream religious groups and their public policy concerns to the Texas Legislature.

Texas Impact's board of directors sets the organization's legislative agenda every two years reflecting the consensus positions of our member denominations and faith traditions. The Interfaith Center board works to ensure a stable, sustainable future for our important work.

**Whether you are Methodist or Muslim,  
Baptist or Buddhist, Jewish or Jain, Texas  
Impact is your voice at the Capitol.**

**We represent the religious values of justice,  
freedom, and opportunity for all people.  
Texas Impact helps you work for a strong,  
proud, diverse Texas that reflects the values  
we all share.**

**LEARN, ACT, AND DONATE ONLINE AT [TEXASIMPACT.ORG](http://TEXASIMPACT.ORG)**



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Detail from "The Feeding of the Five Thousand" on page 14 courtesy of Lynn Bridge.*



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