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PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

What is the best way to contact branch for action alerts? Circle one:  o Fax  o Email  o Mail

Name (Please print legibly) ____________________________________________________________

Title ____________________________________________________________

Address or P.O. Box ____________________________________________________________

City __________________________ State _________ Zip Code _______________________

Telephone_____ / _______ - __________ Fax _______ / _______ - __________

Do you have internet access? Yes _____ No _____

E-mail ____________________________________________________________

Branch Name __________________________ Branch President Name __________________

Branch Address __________________________ Branch Phone _____ / _______ - _______

Name of Congressional Representative ____________________________________________

Congressional District __________________________________________________________

Do you have a Political Action Chair? Yes _____ No _____

Name of Political Action Chair _________________________________________________

NAME OF FAX ACTION ALERT POINT PERSON ______________________________________

Address ____________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Phone __________________________________________________________

Fax __________________________________________________________

Email __________________________________________________________

(please use back of page for additional comments if necessary)
HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

A bill is introduced in either the House or the Senate. Any member of Congress can introduce legislation on almost any subject if Congress is in session. The legislation will be recorded as having one original sponsor and an unlimited number of co-sponsors.

Number and Referral
The legislation is given a number and is referred to the appropriate committee or committees, which may then refer the legislation to a subcommittee for consideration.

For definitions of the different kinds of bills, please see the back.

Hearings may be held on the legislation. The first step is usually a public hearing, in which members of the committee hear differing views on the proposal. Bills may then be scheduled for a "mark-up," in which they may be amended and then sent to the full committee, where the hearing process may begin all over again. The legislation may again be amended during the full committee mark-up. A final vote is then taken on the legislation, and members of the committee may vote to defeat the legislation or move it forward.

President Action: The bill is then sent to the President for his signature or veto. If he vetos the bill, Congress may still decide to make the bill law if two-thirds of both chambers vote to override the veto. If the President does not sign the bill within 10 days (a "pocket veto") and Congress is in session, it becomes law without his signature.

Floor consideration
Upon committee approval, legislation can be scheduled for consideration by the full House or Senate. This can be a very simple or very complex process in both the House and the Senate. Once the bill has been debated and possibly amended, a final vote is taken.

Sent to the other body
Once a bill has passed either the House or the Senate, it must then go to the other body for consideration. This usually means the same process: committee hearings, mark-ups, and then consideration by the full body. The final product may look similar to that which was passed by the other body, but oftentimes is very different.

A conference committee is formed of select Members from the House and the Senate who are charged with hammering out the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill.

The final version of the bill asdeveloped by the Conference Committee must then be approved of again by the full House and Senate.
A very small number of bills introduced actually become law.
In the 107th Congress, which ran from 2001 to 2002, 8948 bills were introduced in the US House and Senate. Of these, 377 laws were enacted. This means that just over 4% of the bills introduced in the 107th Congress actually became law.

There are four types of proposals that can be introduced in either the House or the Senate; a bill, a joint resolution, a concurrent resolution or a simple resolution.

A BILL is the type used in most legislation; in order to become law, a bill must go through the entire legislative process and be signed by the President to become law. Upon introduction in the House, a bill is given a number with the letters “H.R.” in front, which stand for “House of Representatives” (i.e., H.R. 4040). In the Senate, a bill is given a number with the letter “S.” in front to signify that it is a Senate bill (i.e., S. 4040).

JOINT RESOLUTIONS may originate in either the House or the Senate; they are very similar to bills in that they are subject to the same legislative process, with the exception of a joint resolution that proposes an amendment to the Constitution. Joint Resolutions to amend the Constitution that receive approval by two thirds of the House and Senate are then sent to individual states for ratification; Joint Resolutions that become laws must be signed by the President. A Joint Resolution originating in the House of Representatives is designated “H.J.Res.” followed by its individual number; in the Senate it is designated “S.J.Res.” followed by its individual number.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTIONS usually deal with matters affecting the operations of both the House and the Senate. While concurrent resolutions need to be passed by both the House and the Senate, they do not require the President’s signature. A concurrent resolution originating in the House of Representatives is designated “H.Con.Res.” followed by its individual number; in the Senate it is designated “S.Con.Res.” followed by its individual number.

SIMPLE RESOLUTIONS relate to matters of the House or the Senate, need to be passed by only one body, and do not require the President’s signature. Simple resolutions deal with matters related only to the House or Senate, such as expressing the sense of the House or Senate that someone should be congratulated for a specific achievement, etc. Simple resolutions in the House are designated “H.Res.” followed by its individual number; simple resolutions in the Senate are designated “S.Res.” followed by its individual number.

A proposal can become law either as a stand-alone bill or as an amendment to a larger piece of legislation.
THE PATH TO A FEDERAL BUDGET...
Constructing the federal budget is a lengthy process involving the US. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and the President. While there are laws with formal deadlines, in reality the process tends to be much looser, in which slippage and overlaps frequently occur.

THE PRESIDENT SUBMITS HIS BUDGET TO CONGRESS
The president's budget is not binding and is considered the President's proposal and request. Generally submitted the first Monday in February, this document provides good insight into an Administration's priorities.

HOUSE BUDGET COMMITTEE DEVELOPES A BUDGET RESOLUTION
The House and Senate both develop and vote on their own budget resolutions, which do not have the power of law. Once both chambers have acted, a conference committee hammers out the differences between the two versions and the final version must again be approved by both the House and the Senate.

SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE DEVELOPES A BUDGET RESOLUTION

A CONCURRENT BUDGET RESOLUTION IS AGREED TO BY BOTH THE HOUSE AND THE SENATE
The final product is a concurrent budget resolution, agreed to by both chambers, which is not formally a law and does not require the President's signature. However, both the House and the Senate have enforcement procedures to ensure that the directives in the budget resolution are followed.

House Authorizing Committees propose changes to law to comply with final budget resolution

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEES propose spending measures to comply with the final budget resolution

A CONCURRENT BUDGET RESOLUTION IS AGREED TO BY BOTH THE HOUSE AND THE SENATE

APPROPRIATIONS BILLS ARE ENACTED
There are 13 appropriations bills which together determine how all discretionary funds will be spent by the US government. These bills do not address mandated, or entitlement programs such as Social Security or Medicare. The bills first pass the House, then the Senate, then a conference committee hammers out the differences between the House and Senate versions. Both the House and the Senate must then again pass the final versions of the bills, which the President then must sign or veto. If an appropriations bill is not signed into law by October 1, and temporary legislation (known as a "continuing resolution") has not been enacted, all nonessential activities in government are shut down until appropriations for them are enacted.

House Appropriations Committees propose spending measures to comply with the final budget resolution

Senate Appropriations Committees propose spending measures to comply with the final budget resolution

Senate Authorizing Committees propose changes to law to comply with final budget resolution

A RECONCILIATION BILL IS ENACTED
The authorizing committees draft provisions to make changes in various laws affecting taxes, entitlement programs (such as Social Security, Medicare) and other mandatory spending programs to comply with the budget resolution. Like the appropriations bills, the reconciliation bill starts in the House, then goes to the Senate. A conference committee hammers out the differences between the two bills and comes up with a final version, which must be approved of again by a majority of both the House and the Senate. The bill then goes to the President for his signature or veto. Reconciliation bills are sometimes called "budget bills," although they do not address discretionary funding, which is done in appropriations bills.

Timeline...

FEBRUARY  MARCH  APRIL  MAY THROUGH SEPTEMBER

See the other side for a glossary of budget terms...
GLOSSARY OF BUDGET TERMS

**APPROPRIATIONS:** The process by which Congress spends money on discretionary programs (those not mandated, such as Social Security, Medicare, or Veterans' benefits). There are usually 13 appropriations bills, although several can often be rolled together into one or there is, occasionally, a “supplemental” appropriations bill and can occur at any point in the process which spends money on needs that had not been anticipated. The 13 appropriations bills are: Agriculture and related agencies, Departments of Commerce, Justice and State and the Judiciary, Department of Defense, District of Columbia, Energy and Water Development, foreign Operations (which includes almost all foreign assistance), the Department of Interior, the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education, the Legislative Branch, Military Construction, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Treasury and General Government (including the Postal Service), and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies (such as NASA).

**AUTHORIZATIONS:** Laws that affect policy, such as who qualifies for Social Security, hate crime prevention, housing issues and which missiles the Pentagon should buy.

**BUDGET RESOLUTION:** An agreement between the US House and the US Senate that sets general revenue, spending and other budgetary targets but is not formally a law and does not require the President’s signature or even his agreement. However, the House and Senate both have enforcement procedures to ensure that the directives of the budget resolution are met. The budget resolution sets into motion the enactment of legislation that, once signed by the President, does have the power of law.

**CONFERENCE COMMITTEE:** Selected Members of the House and Senate who are named by the leadership of the two houses to get together to hammer out the differences between bills that passed the House and the Senate that address the same subject. Once a final version is developed by the conference committee, it must again pass both the House and the Senate before it can be sent to the President for his signature or considered completed.

**CONTINUING RESOLUTION:** Legislation, usually temporary, that provides funding for non-essential federal government services so that they may continue to operate if the relevant appropriations bill has not been signed into law prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year.

**DISCRETIONARY SPENDING:** Money that is spent on federal government programs subject to legislation developed by the Congress and signed into law by the President. Programs that fall into this area are subject to refunding every year, and are thus dependent upon the approval of Congress and the President.

**ENTITLEMENTS:** Programs where the government is legally required to make payments to all eligible recipients. Laws defining eligibility and setting or changing the rate of payment must be approved by Congress and signed into law by the President. Entitlement programs include Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment benefits, food stamps and federal and veterans’ benefits. These are also called mandatory spending programs.

**FISCAL YEAR:** The budget year that runs from October 1 through September 30 of the following year (i.e., fiscal year 2003 begins October 1, 2002 and ends September 30, 2003).

**RECONCILIATION:** The process by which authorizing committees make changes to existing laws governing taxes and entitlement programs to meet the requirements established in the budget resolution.

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NAACP WASHINGTON BUREAU FACT SHEET:
What happens to bills when the Congress ends?

In the United States, a “Congress” or congressional term lasts two years. Most recently, the 108th Congress began on January 7, 2003, and will adjourn before the end of 2004. Each Congress is comprised of two sessions; the first session, which encompasses the first year, and the second session, which is comprised of the second year.

At any point when Congress is in session, a sitting member of Congress may introduce legislation: members of the House of Representatives introduce bills in the House and Senators introduce bills in the Senate. This legislation can cover almost any issue conceivable. Once a bill has been introduced, it is alive and may be considered at any time during the Congress.

Once a Congress adjourns, however, at the end of its two-year cycle, all bills that have been introduced in either the House or the Senate that have not made it through the entire legislative process and signed into law are dead. This includes bills that may have passed both the House and the Senate but were never finalized and sent to the President for his signature; bills that passed one house (either the House or the Senate) but not the other; bills that were the subject of committee or subcommittee hearings but were never considered by either house; and bills that never got more action after being introduced.

Many bills that are not signed into law during a Congress are often reintroduced the following Congress. They are almost always given new numbers; sometimes the content or title of a bill might be changed when they are reintroduced. It is not uncommon for a bill to be reintroduced in four or five different Congresses (over a period of 8-10 years) before any action is taken on it. Oftentimes, bills are reintroduced and reintroduced until the main sponsor leaves Congress, when it may just die or be taken up by someone else.

A very small number of bills introduced actually become law. In the 107th Congress, which ran from 2001 to 2002, 8948 bills were introduced in the US House and Senate. Of these, 377 laws were enacted. This means that just over 4% of the bills introduced in the 107th Congress actually became law.
AUTHORIZATIONS VS. APPROPRIATIONS

Or, “They talk the talk, but do they walk the walk?”

INTRODUCTION
In order for a federal program to become a reality, there are usually two important steps involved, the “authorization” and the “appropriation.” In some cases, programs may be “authorized” but not “appropriated,” which allows politicians to get credit for supporting a particular program even though that program may not actually be funded or become a reality.

AUTHORIZATION
Federal authorization laws establish policy; for example, they say that the United States government believes that public schools in America should make after-school care available to all children. In addition to establishing policy, authorizing bills also often establish programs to implement these policies (i.e., the No Child Left Behind Act, which was signed into law on January 8, 2002, establishes “21st Century Community Learning Centers,” a grant program that provides federal money for urban and rural after-school programs). Authorizing legislation also sets federal guidelines for these programs as well as spending guides for the programs; using the same example, in the No Child Left Behind Act, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is slated to receive $1.75 billion in fiscal year 2004. Thus, in January, 2002, lawmakers received tremendous credit for their commitment to spend $1.75 billion in federal monies in 2004 on after-school programs.

APPROPRIATION
Once a program has been authorized, the appropriations come into play. It is through the 13 “appropriations bills” that must pass the House and Senate and be signed into law by the President each year that the Federal government spends money on discretionary programs (programs not mandated, such as Social Security, Medicare, or Veterans’ benefits). In other words, the appropriations bills determine how much money will be spent each year, and where that money will go. The appropriations process is often long and complicated, with trade-offs being made in light of the budgetary constraints under which the federal government may find itself. Going back again to our example, then, even though Congress and the President agreed that they should spend $1.75 billion on after-school programs, the appropriators may determine that in light of cost of the war in Iraq and the continuing bad economy, that they only have $600 million (or less than 35% of the amount committed) to spend on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers in 2004.

SUMMARY
Thus, you need both an authorization and an appropriation for most federal programs to become reality. Some programs skip the authorizing step, but that is rare since legislators do not like to enter into the sometimes contentious debates surrounding program details during consideration of an appropriations bill.

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ADVOCATING YOUR CONCERNS TO CONGRESS

There are many ways in which you, as a member of the electorate, can contact your federally elected representatives to let them know of your concerns, priorities, needs and desires. Regardless of which method you choose to contact them, always remember to be polite, make a cogent and assertive (yet respectful) argument, and always ask for a reply or response. It also helps to always transmit something in writing, so that they have a record of your interests and ask for a written response in return so you have an indisputable record of their positions and promises.

PERSONAL VISIT
For most members of the House and Senate, the best way to communicate with them is a personal visit. A face-to-face meeting may be the most effective way to communicate your concerns to legislators. You can visit alone, but because it's more enjoyable and effective to visit with others, the description below assumes that you're visiting with one or more other people.

How Frequently Should You Visit?
Once or twice a year is probably as much as a Member of Congress will see you. State legislators are more accessible. If you represent an active group of voters, all legislators are more likely to see you than if you go alone. It is more effective to help other people to visit than to try to go frequently yourself.

How Many People Should Go On a Visit?
You can go alone, although two to five people will fit comfortably in most D.C. and local offices. Fewer people allow more discussion; large groups tend to allow the legislator to dominate and give speeches.

How To Visit
Five steps to remember when planning your visit are: make the appointment, prepare, visit, de-brief, follow-up.
STEP 1: MAKE THE APPOINTMENT

Call the legislator's office and make an appointment: Get the local office number from the telephone book (look under the legislator's name). Get a Member of Congress' D.C. number by calling the Capitol Switchboard in D.C. (202/224-3121).

Ask to speak to the appointment secretary. Ask for a meeting. State the issue you want to discuss, how many people will be coming, whether you represent a group, preferred dates for visiting, and how long you want to speak with the Member. Most Members of Congress will also ask that a letter be faxed or mailed to their office with the same information, so you may want to have that letter prepared in advance.

THE EARLIER YOU CALL, THE MORE LIKELY YOU ARE TO GET A DATE YOU WANT. It often takes weeks to get an appointment with a Member of Congress.

Most visits run between 10 and 30 minutes, but don't hesitate to ask for more, especially if you're visiting the legislator during a work day in their office. Write down the appointment secretary's name for future use.

You may be told that the legislator cannot meet with you, or cannot see you for months. Just repeat your request. Say, "That seems like a very long time. Could you please arrange an earlier date?" They may say they'll call you back. Call back in a week if you haven't heard from them. If after several calls you still didn't have an appointment, find several community leaders, such as clergy, business or labor leaders, or professionals, to join you. Invite other groups (another congregation's social concerns committee or a community organization) to join you. Have them call or write using letterhead to request a meeting.

If this doesn't work, ask to speak to the Administrative Assistant (the Legislator's right-hand staff person). Be polite, no matter how abrupt or rude staff are. In fact, their rudeness increases your leverage: they've done you wrong, and owe it to you to give you some time. As a last resort, write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper to draw attention to the legislator's inaccessibility for
average voters. (Be cautious; this could antagonize the legislator. Just state the facts and express your dismay that the legislator will not make time to see constituents who advocate for the public good.)

You can visit legislators either in Washington, D.C. or in a local office. The legislator may be more available back home, and more people can participate. However, there's nothing like a visit to the capital to de-mystify the legislature and help people overcome their fear of advocacy. Furthermore, staff who work on the issues are at the legislature, and building a relationship with them may be a key to success.

If a trip to Washington is not in your future, you can try to meet with your Congressperson at home: many members go home for most weekends, and there are traditional “district work periods” around most holidays (i.e., Memorial Day, Labor Day and the Fourth of July) in the early spring and for the month of August. Many members can also be found in their home districts after Congress adjourns for the year, usually in October or November. Many members also hold “town meetings” in their districts throughout the year; you can call their district offices to ask if one is planned for your area, and if so when it will be.

**STEP 2: PREPARE**

1. **ESTABLISH A PROFILE OF THE MEMBER YOU ARE GOING TO MEET.** Review the legislator’s voting record, look up the committees and subcommittees the legislator serves on. If you have access to the Internet, look up his or her website (www.house.gov or www.senate.gov) and review the past press releases. The press releases will give you a sense of what he or she has been doing to date; the committee and subcommittee assignments should give you insight into the issues the legislator tends to be more involved in. Can you relate your concerns to the committee assignments?
2. **DECIDE WHAT YOUR MESSAGE WILL BE.**
Choose no more than two issues. Make a list of “key points” and include ways that constituents are affected.

3. **DECIDE WHO WILL SAY WHAT.**
Who will start the meeting to say why you've come?
Who will state each key point?
Who will ask which questions?
Who will ask the legislator to take specific action?
Who will thank the legislator at the end of the visit?

People don't have to talk in order to go on the visit, but it's better to share the communicating -- it shows the Member that everyone thinks for themselves. Be prepared to explain (in one sentence) any bills you refer to; the Member may not be familiar with the bill or when it is scheduled for a vote.

Do a dry run, with each person briefly stating their part of the message. You'll discover where there is confusion and overlap of points.

Visits may be cut short. Be prepared to state your message and make your request in a few minutes.

4. **PREPARE RESPONSES.**

How do you expect the legislator to respond?
Prepare answers.

5. **TAKE A FACT SHEET, NEWSPAPER ARTICLE OR ANY SUPPORTING INFORMATION THAT SUPPORTS YOUR VIEW.**

Give it to the legislator at the end of the meeting.

6. **DECIDE WHAT SPECIFIC ACTION YOU WANT.**

**STEP 3: VISIT**

1. **TAKE THE INITIATIVE.** Say why you're there. Everyone introduce themselves. Mention your profession, background, and any experience on the issue. Mention organizations that you belong to.
2. **THANK THE LEGISLATOR FOR SOMETHING** -- a vote, a speech, an electoral promise or their willingness to hear constituents' views.

3. **MENTION A PAST VOTE ON YOUR ISSUE.** This shows that you follow how they vote and know that votes count, not promises! If no vote has been taken, try to determine if the legislator has ever taken a position on your issue (such as co-sponsoring legislation, etc.)

4. **STATE YOUR MESSAGE BRIEFLY AND SUCCINCTLY.**
State your view, your reasons for having that view ("key points"), and other constituents who share your view (including organizations).
[Lobbyists use a single page of "talking points" to help them state key points briefly.]

5. **ASK FOR A SPECIFIC ACTION.** Be sure to ask how they plan to vote. If they say that the bill is being rewritten or amended, ask for the legislator's position on the bill as originally written. **KEEP ASKING UNTIL YOU GET SOME ANSWER.** If they don't have a position, ask how they plan to decide.

6. **If time, ASK FOR INFORMATION.** (See "Sample Questions").

### Sample Questions
When you visit a legislator, try to learn about their attitudes and who is lobbying them.

1. Are you hearing from people who disagree with our position? Who? What are their arguments? How much pressure are they putting on you?

2. What do you consider when deciding how to vote on this issue. What sources of information do you rely on?

3. We have found the following sources of information useful. Do you see them as credible? If not, why?

4. What would lead you to change your mind on this issue?

5. Would you take leadership on this issue if you had more support from constituents?
VISITORS TO D.C.: ASK TO MEET STAFF WHO WORK ON ISSUES YOU FOLLOW. Use time waiting for the Member to get to know issue staff. If the Member is unable to meet with you, carry on the meeting with the staff person. They are worth your time! They help the Member decide how to vote.

STEP 4: DE-BRIEF

Learn from the visit and decide what to do next. If you visited as a group, go to a place where you can sit together and talk. (Do it now while everything is fresh).

1. Quick Impressions: Each person takes a turn filling in the sentence, "I feel _________ about the meeting because _________." If some people dominate, say, "You're saying important things, but let's hear from everyone quickly."

2. What went well? Make a list together. No negative comments!

3. How did the Legislator or staff person respond to the group? Non-committal, bored, interested, hostile, encouraging, defensive, uncomfortable. . . ? How can you tell? (Body language? Words? Tone of voice? Short meeting?)

4. What did you learn about the legislator? Any insights into their "world view," motivation to be in politics, feelings about your issues, feelings about you as constituents, reliance on staff for information, or methods for handling meetings with constituents? [If you met with staff, did she/he give you insights about the legislator? Did staff tell you about the legislator's views or voting behavior?]

5. What should the next step be? (Letters? Media? Another visit?)

6. Who will send a follow-up letter to the legislator or staff to thank them for the meeting and restate key points?

STEP 5: FOLLOW-UP

1. Write a letter to the legislator or staff person, thanking them for the meeting, briefly restating key points and reminding them of commitments they made.
2. If you promised to do something, do it. It's important to your credibility.

3. Report on the visit to your organization, congregation, or other interested group. Ask people to write a letter (mentioning that you briefed them). Bring paper, envelopes, stamps, and pens.

4. Call local media groups to report what happened in your visit.

If a meeting with a legislator is not in your future, there are other ways to contact your elected representatives:

WRITE A LETTER
Because office visits are sometimes difficult to schedule, especially in a timely manner, letter writing is usually the next best option. There are several ways of communicating through the mail with your elected representative; a hand written letter, a form letter, a post card or a petition. Hand written (or personalized typed / computer written) letters are usually the best, since they convey to your elected representative that this issue is important enough to you that you took the time to write a personal letter. Short of that, a form letter is also effective. Postcards and petitions can also be useful in making a point, especially if you have large numbers of people sending in the same postcards or signing the petition.

When writing to your Representative, you should address the letter to:

The Honorable __________________
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

NOTE: when writing to members of the House of Representatives in Washington, all you need is their name and the zip code “20515.” Room numbers and street addresses are not that useful, as the mail sorters do not use them since Members tend to move offices frequently.
When writing to your Senators, you should address the letter to:

The Honorable ______________________
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

NOTE: when writing to members of the US Senate in Washington, all you need is their name and the zip code “20510.” Room numbers and street addresses are not that useful, as the mail sorters do not use them since Members tend to move offices frequently.

For all your written correspondence it is usually a good idea to put a reference line (i.e., RE: SUPPORT FOR HATE CRIMES PREVENTION LEGISLATION) near the top of your letter (above the salutation), so the subject of your letter is never in doubt. Also, you should always ask for a response near the end of your letter indicating the member’s position on the issue, and what he/she intends to do.

ON ALL WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE, YOU SHOULD ALSO ALWAYS BE SURE TO INCLUDE A SIGNATURE AND PRINT YOUR NAME LEGIBLY, AS WELL AS YOUR ADDRESS SO THAT YOU CAN RECEIVE A RESPONSE.

Unfortunately, in these days of anthrax and other types of terrorism, it can take up to two weeks for letters to reach members of Congress, since each letter must first be irradiated and cleared. Thus, if you are writing about an urgent matter, it might be a good idea to also fax your letter, make a phone call, or send an e-mail as well.

MAKE A PHONE CALL
To contact your Representatives / Senators in their district offices, you can begin by looking up their phone number in the phone book, usually in the blue section under “US Government Offices.” You can also look on the internet at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.

To contact your Representatives / Senators in their Washington, DC office, you can dial the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be patched through to your Senators / Representative.
In every case, when you call your Representative or Senators, you should always be polite, speak clearly, and leave your name and address and ask for a response.

**SEND AN E-MAIL**
While not all Representatives / Senators have e-mail addresses, and some still do not consider e-mails an important form of constituent correspondence, many are becoming more and more responsive to e-mails and their constituents who use them.

To find out if your Representative has an e-mail address go to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and click on either “Member offices” at the top of the page or “Contact your Representative” at the bottom. This will also help you identify your representative if you are in doubt.

To send an e-mail to your Senators, go to [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and click on Senators. This will allow you to go to your Senators web site either alphabetically or by state, so it is easy to identify both your Senators.

You can also use the websites listed above to look up your Representative’s and Senators’ district office addresses and phone numbers, their biographies, and see their press releases and statements to get a better understanding of what they are working on in Congress.

**SEND A FAX**
To send a fax, see the “write a letter” section above. After you have written a letter, you can contact your Representative, Senators or the President via phone (see the “make a phone call” section above) or over the internet (see the “send an e-mail” section above) for their fax numbers. While not all members and senators list their fax numbers publicly, almost all will give them out to constituents if you call and ask for them.
CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE VISIT REPORT FORM

Date: ______________

Senator or Representative: ___________________________ State: ___________________________

Office Visited: ☐ Washington, DC ☐ District Office: ___________________________ (city)

Did you meet with the Senator / Representative personally or with a staff person?
☐ Senator / Representative ☐ Staff person: ___________________________ (name of staff person)

Length of Time of meeting: ___________________________

Visit Conducted By: ___________________________

Issues Discussed:

Did Member / staff person appear knowledgeable about the issues? ______________

Legislator's Position:

Rank on issue (circle):  1  2  3  4  5
(with us)              (against us)

General Observations:

Who or what influences this member?

Follow-up needed in Washington:

Follow-up need at grassroots:

Is it worth visiting this Member of Congress / staff person again?

Signed: ___________________________

(Please use the back if you need more space)
FEDERAL JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS: A PRIMER
or, "Everything you want to know about the Federal Judicial system but were afraid to ask"

1. WHAT IS A FEDERAL COURT?

There are two types of court systems in this country — the federal court system and the state court system (the state court system includes municipal and local courts). The U.S. Constitution, Article III, establishes the federal court system with the U.S. Supreme Court and permits Congress to create lower federal courts, namely circuit and district courts. Federal courts decide disputes involving the U.S. Constitution, federal laws, disputes between states and disputes involving more than $75,000 between residents of different states.

At both the federal and state levels there are two kinds of courts: the trial court and the appellate court. The trial court’s basic work is to resolve disputes by determining the facts and applying legal principles to decide who is right. The appellate court’s work is to decide whether the law was applied correctly in the trial court, and in some cases, whether the law is Constitutional.

Within the federal system, there are three primary types of federal courts: 94 District Courts (trial courts), 13 Courts of Appeals (intermediate appellate courts) and the United States' Supreme Court (the court of final review). The District Courts, which are spread out throughout the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands, are the federal trial courts. It is in the district courts that federal cases are tried, witnesses testify, and juries serve.

Cases decided in District court can be appealed to the Court of Appeals that serves your state. There are twelve regional circuits and a US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. The Courts of Appeals determine if the laws were applied properly in the trial court.

The U.S. Supreme Court, the highest court in the United States, is located in Washington, DC. There are currently nine Supreme Court Justices. The Supreme Court usually hears cases that have already gone through the federal Court of Appeals system, and sometimes state Supreme Courts. Unlike the Courts of Appeals, the Supreme Court is not required to hear every case that is submitted to it; in fact, the Supreme Court hears only a very small percentage of the cases it is asked to review. If a Supreme Court does not hear a case, the decision of the Court of Appeals is retained. In 2001, although the circuit courts decided over 57,000 cases, the Supreme Court actually heard and decided less than 90.
The work of the federal courts often affects many people besides those involved in a specific lawsuit. For example, the Supreme Court’s decision in the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education affected many more people than the plaintiff, Linda Brown. As a result of the decision, African American children throughout the country were allowed to attend previously all-white public schools.

2. HOW ARE FEDERAL JUDGES APPOINTED?

Under Article III of the US Constitution, the President nominates men and women to serve on the federal District Courts, the Courts of Appeals, and the US Supreme Court. The President sends the nominations to the US Senate, which provides "advice and consent." Normally, an individual may not serve on the court to which he or she has been nominated without being confirmed by the U.S. Senate (the President has the power to make temporary "recess" appointments when the Senate is not in session).

3. WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR BECOMING A FEDERAL JUDGE?

Although the Constitution sets forth no specific requirements for who may or may not serve as a federal judge, there are several informal, unwritten qualifications if an individual expects to be approved by the Senate. First, he or she must clearly exhibit a knowledge of the law and the Constitution. Attorneys, state or lower court judges, or law professors are most commonly tapped to serve.

4. HOW ARE FEDERAL JUDICIAL NOMINEES SELECTED?

Members of the U.S. Senate and sometimes Members of the House of Representatives who are in the same political party as the President or those whose ideology is in line with the President’s, make recommendations to fill federal judicial vacancies within their state or for the Court of Appeals that serves their state. These recommendations are then reviewed by the Department of Justice and the White House General Counsel’s office, which makes recommendations to the President. The President, however, sends the final decision to the Senate.

5. WHAT IS THE SENATE CONFIRMATION PROCESS?

After the President has submitted an individual’s name to serve on a federal court to the US Senate, the nomination is referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The committee can either take no action on the nomination (in which case the nomination eventually dies when the Congress adjourns); the committee can approve the nomination and send it to the floor of the Senate for a vote; or the committee can disapprove a nomination, in which case the nomination is usually dead (although in some extraordinary cases a nomination can be brought before the full Senate for a vote even though the majority of the Senators on the Judiciary Committee felt the candidate was not qualified.)

If the confirmation goes before the full Senate, then the nomination is once again voted on. If a simple majority (50% or more) of the Senators present vote in favor of
the nominee, then he or she is confirmed and may then take his or her position on the federal bench for life.

In both the Judiciary Committee and the full Senate, votes may pass or fail by a recorded (roll call) vote or by voice vote.

6. DO MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES EVER VOTE ON A NOMINEE?

No.

7. HOW LONG CAN A FEDERAL JUDGE SERVE?

Under Article III of the U.S. Constitution, once confirmed a federal judge may serve a lifetime appointment, or until he or she retires. Furthermore, Article III also guarantees that the judges’ salaries cannot be reduced. These provisions were put in place to ensure that judges were not afraid to make unpopular decisions.

Congress can remove a sitting judge through a very lengthy process known as impeachment and conviction, although it has only chosen to do this a few times in the history of our country.

8. WHAT IS A RECESS APPOINTMENT?

Under Article II of the U.S. Constitution, the President has the power to fill vacancies that may exist when the Senate is in recess. These appointments are only temporary, however, as they expire at the end of the Congressional session.

As a rule, the President does not make wholesale recess appointments as it may antagonize Members of the Senate and may result in some Senators refusing to consider the nominees for a permanent position or voting against other nominations in retaliation.

9. WHY ARE FEDERAL JUDGES SO IMPORTANT IN THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS?

The federal courts, from the district courts and up to the U.S. Supreme Court, have the final say on issues that have an effect on the lives of every American, including basic civil rights, religious freedoms, voting rights, affirmative action, and in some cases life or death. Furthermore, the Courts have historically been one of the main avenues we have for promoting and protecting our civil rights. It is for this reason that we must ensure that the men and women who are appointed and confirmed to lifetime appointments to the federal bench are fair minded and not interested in promoting an extremist, right-wing agenda.

We should pay close attention to all judicial nominations. In recent years, a concentrated attempt has been made to pack the district and circuit courts with extreme, right-wing judges. Given the large number of cases whose ultimate determination is made at the District or Court of Appeals level (over 90%), and the fact that these people are put on the bench for life, we cannot afford to be complacent.
# U.S. COURTS OF APPEALS AND THEIR JURISDICTIONS

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NAACP
PRESS AND MEDIA ADVOCACY
STRATEGIES AND PROCEDURES

Media Coverage

Use newspapers, television, radio, the Internet and organizational publications to educate and alert other voters of the need to advocate. Since elected officials monitor the media's coverage of them, you also draw the attention of the official when you use the media to cover your concerns. Media coverage of an issue changes the political climate. It is one of the most important means of policy change at your disposal.

Write a Letter to the Editor

Your legislator is much more likely to read your thoughts on an issue if you get a letter published in a local newspaper than if you send a letter to their office! Mention their name, and they're sure to see it. Why? Because legislators are very concerned about what voters think of them. They monitor local papers closely to see what reputation they have among constituents. Here are tips for writing letters to newspapers and magazines:

♦ Keep it short.
♦ Be accurate. If you're not sure about a fact, and can't verify it, leave it out.
♦ Think about the biases of readers. How can you present your concern in a way that they will understand and respond positively? Thus, avoid sarcasm and ridicule.
♦ Urge readers to take some action -- to read a report or book, view a film, write to legislators, etc.

Encourage Other People to Write Letters to the Editor
You might ask a group of branch presidents or ministers to sign a joint letter, or ask members of other organizations to each write a letter.

Organize a Large Forum Or Cultural Event On A Topic
Invite groups to join you in putting it together and financing it, and call media groups before the event to urge them to cover it and interview
key speakers. Send the elected official any publicity or news coverage you get or pictures you took of the event.

**Ask Editors or Reporters To Write Editorials and Articles**
(or write it for them)
Most reporters and editors are over-worked, underpaid, and under pressure. By providing them with information on issues, local angles to issues, and votes cast by legislators, you can become a resource person to media persons. You can make their job easier, educate the public, and send a message to legislators that your issues are of concern to constituents. Just call editors or reporters of local newspapers and ask to meet them. Concisely state your concern. Describe how local citizens are affected. (They need a "local angle." Help them find it.) Share written information from reputable sources. Even better, offer to write an editorial or news article for them.

**Ask Media Groups to Print How Legislators Vote**
Offer to regularly provide this information on issues that concern you. Ask who at newspaper, radio, and TV stations should receive your calls. Join action alert networks of advocacy organizations like the NAACP. Also utilize the web sight at www.NAACP.org.

**Call-In Talk Shows**
Call radio and TV stations regularly to find out when issues you care about will be discussed or when there will be "open phones" for people to call in and say what's on their mind. Hosts of talk shows, particularly radio hosts, want to have interesting discussions; they often welcome controversial issues. Even if they disagree with you, they will want to make it sound like they are open. Some tips:

- Be polite. Nasty or rude comments only make you sound like an unpleasant person. Pretend that you are talking to a friend over dinner.
- Keep sentences short.
- Use simple language.
- Speak clearly, and calmly.
- Turn off your radio or TV.
- Think about the attitudes of people who listen or watch the show. Can you show how they are affected by your issue? Tell stories of how you reached your opinion.
- Tell how legislators in your area voted on the issue.
- Thank the host.
"Editorial Reply Time" - Reply to Opinions Expressed On TV & Radio

Monitor broadcasts. Reply to editorials by telephoning the program manager. Identify yourself and your position on the issue. Ask for a slot to respond to specific editorial comments. Follow with letter and background info.

Steps For A Media Campaign

1. COMPILE A PRESS LIST. List media in the area (print, radio, TV) and a contact person for each. Use the yellow pages. Call to ask who to send press releases to. Ask the names of reporters and editors who cover your issues and call them to meet for coffee with a small group of you. Reporters often appreciate information because they have so many issues to cover.

2. DEFINE YOUR NEWS. What do you want people to know? Focus. You can't make every point. Find a "local angle." Do something surprising: with messages inside, getting labor, business, and religious groups together, etc.

3. SELECT THE APPROPRIATE MEDIA. Different news is suited to different departments. For example, an announcement of a candidate forum might go to the person who compiles the community calendar as well as to the news editor and/or the reporter. It might fit as a public service announcement.

4. PREPARE A PRESS RELEASE. Form:
   A. Logo, preferably letterhead, or heading.
   B. Date of issue.
   C. Release date ("immediate," or "AM"s and "PM"s, Tuesday, March 6th).
   D. Contact name and phone number -- always office and home.
   E. Headline -- succinct and informative.
   F. Indent paragraphs five spaces.
   G. Double space.
   H. 1 ½ inch margin.
   I. When a release runs more than one page, head each page with a shortened version for the headline.
   J. For a release running more than one page, use the word "more" at the bottom of each page.
   K. Type --30-- at the bottom of the press release. This is the media's code version of "The End."
Content: Who, What, Where, When and Why:

A. The lead (first) paragraph must single out the answer to at least two of the five W's.
B. The second paragraph should answer all the others.
C. It helps to have a quotable first paragraph. Pick your priorities carefully. Your lead should tell the reporters what they need to know in order to convince them and the editor that their story should be covered. If they aren't hooked by the lead, they won't read your release.
D. Releases can be long if you have a long story to tell. But follow the law of diminishing importance, so that the editor can cut from the tail up.
E. Always include the title or description of the person you are writing about (Mary Smith, legislative assistant to Rep. John Doe). Include the names of all note-worthy participants and, if for local press, include addresses of local residents.
F. Statements of opinion must be enclosed in quotation marks and attributed to a person ("In making the announcement, candidate X stated"). NEVER EDITORIALIZE IN A NEWS RELEASE.
G. Closing: Have a standard closing paragraph, stating succinctly the purpose of your group or campaign.

Prepare a Public Service Announcement
A public service announcement (PSA) is like a press release, but shorter. Because PSAs are heard, not read, they must be interesting, clear and brief. All the information must be provided in 30-60 seconds.

PSAs can be used to announce upcoming events; announce projects, explain why the faith communities have chosen to be involved in politics; identify issues, etc.

Allow more advance time for a PSA than for a press release. Be sure to follow up with phone calls.

Other Methods
Here are other methods for communicating your concerns to legislators:

Speak Up At A Town Meeting
Legislators, particularly Members of Congress, often schedule public meetings to update constituents and monitor constituent opinion. These meetings are a good place to raise your concerns, ask for action, and increase your knowledge of a legislator's thinking and approach.
Call the legislator's local office and ask for dates and locations of public appearances or meetings for the next few months. (Media groups are likely to know about meetings, too.)

Be first to raise your hand. Sit near the front so the legislator will see you immediately.

Say something nice (for example, you appreciate the legislator organizing town meetings or you were glad to see that the legislator voted for or against a particular bill).

Describe your concern: tell how our values and well-being is threatened. Make your comment brief. Use short sentences. Ask a specific question; ask for action.

If your question is not answered, be assertive and ask it again, in a polite tone.

**Increase Your Impact - Ask Others to Attend Town Meetings**

♦ Take friends with you. Ask them to stand up with you.
♦ Ask a community leader to speak at a town meeting.
♦ "Bird-dog." Ask people to attend different public meetings and raise the issue each time. Show the legislator that there is broad constituent concern about an issue.
♦ Contact the media. Appearances by legislators are usually media events. Call your local newspaper and tell them about your issue and how local people are affected. Tell the reporter that a group of you hope to get an answer from the legislator about how he or she plans to vote. Ask to meet reporters after the town meeting to give them a short, written summary of your position and tell them what you thought of the legislator's response.

**Circulate a Petition**

A petition drive is useful if your goal is to get the attention of the legislator or if you are trying to educate voters and encourage them to begin communicating their opinion to legislators. Petitions are most successful if you can get media coverage.

Bring groups together to write a petition and circulate it for signatures. Get press coverage for the signature-gathering (once you have several hundred names). Set up a public meeting with the legislator to present the petition and invite the media.

**Talk to Them at Party Events**

If you are a member of their political party, attend a political fund-raiser where they are present and introduce yourself. Don't expect a long chat: say something pleasant and get to the point. Ask for a longer
meeting to discuss the issue. Mention that other people are also concerned.

Organize a Public Hearing: How to Organize a Public Policy Hearing

Visiting legislators is great, but how about asking them to visit you? Well, not just you, but you and a lot of other constituents who would like to hear your Representative's position on a specific issue.

Because elected officials attach so much importance to the opinions of constituents, they are often responsive to such an invitation. Hearings are also a good way to let the Congressperson learn the views of constituents. Hearings also help you identify like-minded persons, share information, and involve more people in advocacy.

1. Select a specific topic for discussion, preferably a pending bill or current issue.

2. Contact your Congressperson's home office to find out when she/he would be available for a local meeting. Establish a mutually agreeable date and time.

3. Assuming the meeting is to be held in your church, clear the date with the proper people, and reserve a room.

4. Advertise widely. Spread the word through your religious group's regional office, send invitations to all the nearby churches. Ask your council of churches to assist you in getting the word around. Use posters, newspapers, church bulletins. Get as wide an audience as possible.

5. Arrange for a panel of three or four persons to ask the Congressperson questions. Plan questions in advance.

6. Stick to the announced subject.

7. Allow questions from the audience after each panel member has had a chance to ask three questions.

8. Do not allow the session to become argumentative. Select an experienced moderator who can keep the discussion on target.

9. Even though the hearing is sponsored by your group, remember that having invited the public, there will be many
points of view represented. Allow diversity of opinion to be expressed.

Follow-up -- After the hearing, letters should be written to thank the Congressperson, and also the panelists and the moderator. Any others who helped (provided refreshments, etc.) should also be thanked.

More importantly, the issue must be kept alive before the voters in the district. If a Congressional vote occurs, the Congressperson should be contacted both before and after the vote -- to remind him/her of the reasons for voting a certain way, and finally to express appreciation for the vote.

Field Trip
Invite the legislator to visit people affected by policy decisions. For example:

♦ Arrange a tour of a local food pantry or homeless shelter to have the legislator to meet people living in poverty.
♦ Arrange a meeting with refugees to raise awareness of human rights violations in a country the U.S. government supports.
♦ Invite the press! Brief the press to ask the legislator what action he or she will take to address the problem.

Ask State or Local Politicians to Contact Legislators
Leon Russell of the Miami Dade Branch of the NAACP tells the story of how they were able to change Senator Graham's position on the Civil Rights Restoration Act. Graham did not support the restoration of civil rights, and the vote was at hand. Letters and calls by citizens had not changed his mind. The NAACP called several state legislators and told them about Graham's stance on the issue, suggesting that they contact Graham and ask him what was going on. The legislators scheduled a press conference to inform voters of Graham's position -- and Graham changed his mind.

Ask Someone Close to the Legislator to Raise Your Concern
"Legislators make decisions in pretty much the same manner we do," says Reverend Wendell Anthony, President of the Detroit Branch of the NAACP. "Friends, family, colleagues, and impressions of the 'opposition' influence their choices. To influence them, we must develop relationships of trust." Meeting with people who know the legislator or have professional, social or recreational interests in common with the legislator is a good way to try to get your message across. Check the legislator's background to get ideas of who to
contact, watch the social column of newspapers, work on the legislators re-election campaign, talk to friendly staff or talk to party members.

**Ask Campaign Contributors to Contact the Legislator**
Legislators pay attention to the views of people who give them money for re-election. The names of contributors must be filed with the Federal Election Commission, and these records are open to the public. You can order a copy of the computer print-out of contributors by calling the FEC's toll-free number: (800) 424-9530.

Once you get the list, review it. Do you know any of these people? Do you have any economic, social, political, or professional relationship to them? Identify people that you or someone you know could write or call to ask them to write or call the legislator. Then, go to the library and ask the reference librarian to help you get phone numbers. Or, call the phone company. Or, write a letter to each person.

**Demonstrate at the Legislator's Office**
This approach could hurt you more than help unless done with a sense of humor. If you can be creative and positive, and if you can get favorable media coverage, this technique could persuade the legislator to meet with you. The more people involved, the better. Time your event to avoid major political events, holidays, and end of session chaos in the legislature.

1. Test your idea with friends or acquaintances. How would they react? Can you create a humorous, dramatic or touching way of getting your point across?

2. Notify the legislator's office well in advance, and tell them in writing what your goal is: what specific action do you want the legislator to take? Be polite, considerate, and give the office telephone numbers and an organizational address where they can reach you.


4. Write a press release. Call newspapers, radio, and TV.

5. Print up leaflets or signs and post "interpreters" on the edge of your protest so that people passing by will learn about your concern. Interpreters should be neatly dressed, smiling people.
NAACP NEWS

www.naacp.org

Kweisi Mfume
President and Chief Executive Officer

Julian Bond
Chairman, Board of Directors

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 27, 2003

MEDIA ADVISORY

Women In The NAACP Hosts "Put Baby Back to Sleep Summit"
African American Infants at Greater Risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

WHO: Women In The NAACP (WIN) in collaboration with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

WHAT: The "Put Baby Back to Sleep Summit" will conduct seminars, training and outreach activities to equip parents with educational techniques, strategies, and print materials essential in reducing SIDS and infant mortality.

WHEN: Friday, March 14 - Saturday, March 15, 2003

WHERE: Hyatt Regency at Macy's Plaza, 711 South Hope Street
Los Angeles, CA 90017

WHY: To reduce infant mortality, particularly SIDS among African American infants. Extensive research indicates that placing infants on their back to sleep reduces the risk of SIDS.

NOTE: Pre-Registration is encouraged by calling 1.866.876.1664

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its half-million adult and youth members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities and monitor equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

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CONTACT: NAACP Office of Communications 410.580.5125

4805 Mt. Hope Drive Baltimore, MD 21215
NAACP SUPPORTS S. 874 / H.R. 1736,
THE SICKLE CELL DISEASE TREATMENT ACT

Hilary Shelton, Director of the NAACP Washington bureau, today expressed his organization's support for S. 874 / H.R. 1736, The Sickle Cell Disease Treatment Act. "The NAACP is proud to support this legislation and, as always, pleased to see Sickle Cell Disease get the attention we feel it deserves," said Shelton at a press conference earlier today.

"Sickle Cell Anemia can be an incredibly painful, mean-spirited and debilitating disease that can also often times be fatal. In this country, it affects approximately 72,000 people each year, many of whose ancestors came from Africa. The disease occurs in approximately 1 in every 300 African-American births and 1 in every 1,000 to 1,400 Hispanic American births. Because African Americans are disproportionately affected, this disease is of special concern to our communities and the NAACP."

"Although the genetic defect that causes sickle cell disease was identified more than 40 years ago, until very recently research into the advancement of treatments for the disease was hampered. In recent times we have seen new hope and important advancements in the search for an effective treatment and eventual cure for sickle cell disease. The NAACP is hopeful that the United States government will begin to take a more robust and comprehensive approach to help the thousands of men, women and children who suffer from sickle cell disease."

Shelton concluded his remarks saying, "It is the deeply held vision of the NAACP that one day we will move from sample treatment to the complete elimination of this disease. The NAACP is pleased to be part of the national grassroots campaign to push for the enactment of S. 874 and H.R. 1736."

Founded in 1909, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its half-million adult and youth members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

Contact: NAACP Washington Bureau at (202) 638-2269
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STATEMENT OF HILARY O. SHELTON
DIRECTOR, NAACP WASHINGTON BUREAU
ON THE DENIAL OF FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID UNDER THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT BASED ON PAST DRUG OFFENSES

Thank you very much. My name is Hilary Shelton, and I am the Director of the NAACP’s Washington Bureau, the federal legislative and national public policy division of our nation’s oldest, largest and most widely recognized grassroots based civil rights organization. The NAACP has consistently and vociferously been opposed to any automatic delay or denial of federal financial educational assistance to students or prospective students with past drug offenses on their record.

As such, we would like to thank Congressman Barney Frank and the other dedicated members of the US House of Representatives for working to correct this misguided and injurious provision in the Higher Education Act. The introduction of the “Removing Impediments to Student’s Education”, or RISE Act, is an important first step in our battle.

Since this policy was first signed into law in 1998, the NAACP has consistently expressed concerns about the practical impact it would have. And, due to our predictions, the result of this policy has been that a disproportionate number of the 160,000 students who have had their financial assistance denied are also have been racial or ethnic minority Americans. How did we know this would happen? First, due to the continued economic segregation of our nation, more African American and Hispanic American students are dependent on financial assistance to attain their college diploma. In 1998, 31% of African American college students, 69% of Hispanic college students and 54% of White college students were dependent on financial aid.

And, despite the fact that national surveys indicate that the rate of drug use is nearly identical among Caucasian and ethnic minority youths, African American males under the age of 18 are thirty times more likely to be arrested for, convicted of, and confined in a state facility for a drug offense. By basing an individual’s access to higher education on a criminal justice system that continues, in the twenty first century, to operate in such a racially disparate manner, the United States Congress has made it even more difficult for the most vulnerable of Americans to ever have a real chance. These young people have been denied financial assistance despite the fact that their conviction may be for a non-violent offense as minor as possession of one marijuana cigarette and despite the fact that they have paid their debt to society.

Contact: NAACP Washington Bureau
(202) 463-2940
HOW TO CREATE A CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

The NAACP has a long history of being non-partisan yet highly political. As such, we can and should demand that our elected officials let us know of their positions on issues that are important to us.

In preparation for the 2000 federal elections in which people were asked to select from candidates for President, the House of Representatives, and in some cases the US Senate, the NAACP Washington Bureau prepared a federal candidate questionnaire and distributed it to our members. Attached is a guide to creating a candidate questionnaire for state and local elected officials, as well as a small selection of questions for federal candidates for the November, 2002 congressional elections.

Should you have any questions about how to create your own questionnaire, or about the attached federal candidate questionnaire, please do not hesitate to contact the NAACP Washington Bureau at (202) 638-2269. Specifically, you may ask for either Hilary Shelton the Bureau Director, or Carol Kaplan, the Congressional Analyst.
1. **ESTABLISH YOUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

In conjunction with your NAACP branch or state president and political action chair, you should establish your legislative priorities, either state-wide or within your local municipality.

To do this, you should make sure you are familiar with the issues that are dealt with at the different levels. For example, Social Security is a federal program; therefore, asking Presidential or Congressional candidates what changes, if any, they intend to make to the Social Security program is appropriate; asking local mayoral candidates what changes they propose to make to Social Security is not. Many issues, however, (including such NAACP staples as public school reform, police accountability and eliminating predatory lending) transcend all levels of government. It is not only appropriate, but probably a good idea, to craft questions regarding these issues for your state and local candidates, assuming your branch or state conference has established policy on the issue.

You should also be certain to include any issues that are particular to your local municipality or state, again assuming that your branch or state conference has established policy. For example, if your local city council may, in the next year, consider a development that your branch has come out in favor of or opposed to, it would be a good idea to include a question about that development on your questionnaire. Similarly, if the state legislature is likely to have a bill before it in the next session (particularly one that was defeated or vetoed in the previous session) that your state conference supported or opposed, it would be a good idea to include a question about that legislation on your questionnaire.

In short, you will want to translate the unresolved legislative issues that your branch or state conference took an established, written position on into questions for the individuals who wish to represent you.
2. CREATE A DOCUMENT THAT IS EASY TO FOLLOW, LISTING YOUR BRANCH / STATE CONFERENCE POSITION ON THE ISSUES AND ASKING FOR A SPECIFIC ANSWER FROM THE CANDIDATES.

This document should be as clear as possible. In it, you will want to:

(1) Present the established position of your state conference or local branch (this makes the document as much a learning tool for the candidates as it is an election tool for you);

(2) Ask for the candidate’s position, and leave as little room for ambiguity as possible. One such way to eliminate ambiguity is to say “do you support or oppose X?”, and provide a space for the candidates to check, specifically, “support” or “oppose”. You may then provide a space for them to elaborate, by either saying “please elaborate on your position”, or “if elected, what specific actions would you take?”

➢ If you provide candidates with an area to elaborate, you may ask them to keep it to a maximum number of words (i.e., in 50 words or less). This will enable you to compile results for the other branch/state conference members without having to edit the responses.

(3) At the end of the document, ask the candidate to sign and date the questionnaire, so that there can be no doubt as to who said what, and when.

1. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The NAACP, recognizing the important role equal opportunity programs such as affirmative action have played in strengthening the families, schools and businesses within our communities, has consistently opposed any attempts to weaken or eliminate current affirmative action laws and programs.

➢ Do you oppose or support any attempts to weaken or eliminate equal opportunity programs such as affirmative action in the areas of education, employment and contracting? (check one) □ support □ oppose

➢ If elected, what specific actions will you take regarding equal opportunity programs?
DISTRIBUTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

There are several ways in which you can ask candidates questions that are important to your branch or state conference. These include:

- **Mailing** them to the candidates: you should be certain to send them to all candidates for an elected position, including third (or fourth) party candidates who are still in the running (you do not need to send them to people who have already dropped out of the race or who have declared themselves no longer candidates). If you mail the questionnaires, you should mail them to the candidates’ campaign office and include a cover letter (preferable from the branch or state conference president or political action chair) asking that the questionnaire be returned by a date specific. You should also follow up (via phone) to make sure the candidate received the questionnaire, and that s/he is aware of the deadline.

- **Taking them to candidate forums**: If there is going to be an open debate, in which candidates entertain questions from the audience, you may want to have several of your branch / state conference members in attendance and prepared to ask a few key questions. Since you probably will not be able to address all of your issues in a forum such as this, you may want to establish ahead of time which questions are more important to your branch / state conference. Be sure to have the people asking the questions make it clear that they are representing the local NAACP branch / state conference, and make sure that they are as concise as possible, and that they ask as specific a question as possible, again eliminating room for ambiguity in the answers they receive.

If you do ask verbal questions at a candidates’ forum, you should try to bring a tape recorder along so that you can transcribe the responses verbatim, so there is no need for paraphrasing on your part.
3. **Distribute the Responses You Receive**

Make sure to let your branch or state conference members know of the responses you received, regardless of how you obtained them. Be as true to the candidates' replies as possible (in other words, don't paraphrase or edit their comments whenever possible). You can do this through a branch or state conference mailing, by including it in a newsletter, or by making copies of the responses you received and distributing them at NAACP events or meetings.

By distributing the candidates' stated positions while they were running for office to the maximum number of people, you will be in a better position to hold them accountable if and when they are elected. In the event that the candidate who is elected disagrees with the NAACP position, you will have alerted your members to be vigilant on a particular issue, which in turn may place you in a better position to enact a preemptive strike.
CIVIL RIGHTS QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR FEDERAL CANDIDATES

Fall, 2002

SECTION I: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

1. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
The NAACP, recognizing the important role equal opportunity programs such as affirmative action have played in strengthening the families, schools and businesses within our communities, has consistently opposed any attempts to weaken or eliminate current affirmative action laws and programs.

➢ Do you oppose or support any attempts to weaken or eliminate equal opportunity programs such as affirmative action in the areas of education, employment and contracting?
   (check one) ☐ support ☐ oppose

➢ If elected, what specific actions will you take regarding equal opportunity programs?

________________________________________________________________________
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# Political Activities: A Guide for Non-Profit Organizations

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Legislative Voting Records</td>
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<td>• This record must contain a variety of votes, not just votes that track a particular agenda (i.e.: only affirmative action votes).</td>
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<td>• Sponsor a voter registration drive;</td>
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<td>• Write letters in support or in opposition to an issue.</td>
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NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS: PARTICIPATING IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Tax-exempt organizations, charities, and houses of worship are absolutely prohibited from intervening in political campaigns by endorsing or opposing political parties or candidates for public office under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). There is no non-profit or charitable organization exception allowed under First Amendment, Free Speech law. The bar on political activities applies uniformly to 501(c)(3) organizations and to churches. 501(c)(3) organizations, employees and persons acting in an official organizational capacity may not endorse or oppose candidates or political parties. The prohibition on political activities applies to all elections, whether federal, state or local.

The IRS does allow charities and churches to engage in voter education activities. These educational activities include:

- Issue Briefings
- Legislative Scorecards
- Voting Records
- Candidate Questionnaires
- Hosting Candidate Forums
- Voter Registration
- Get Out The Vote (GOTV)

Use caution when using materials that aren’t specifically prepared by your members or other 501(c)(3) organizations that you trust. Organizations have been held responsible for engaging in political activities for distributing materials even when the materials were prepared by another organization. Many of the organizations preparing election materials are 501(c)(4) organizations – though these are not-for-profit organizations, they are allowed greater latitude in the use and distribution of election materials — and as such are not restricted by the rules for 501(c)(3) charities and churches. The primary distinction between a 501(c)(3) and a 501(c)(4) is that donations to a 501(c)(3) are tax-deductible; donations to a 501(c)(4) are NOT tax-deductible; both are, however, non-profit organizations. If an organization distributes materials prepared by an outside group, which are determined to be partisan in character, the IRS has the legal authority to penalize the organization even though it did not produce the materials.

Prohibited activities include:

- Letters of endorsement or opposition printed on organizational letterhead;
- Organizational sponsored distribution of campaign literature;
- Posters advising staff or members to vote for or against candidates;
- Campaign signs on the organization’s property;
- Other activities that could be potentially seen as endorsing or opposing a candidate.

All materials must be fair, unbiased, and presented in a non-partisan manner. Don’t summarize, editorialize, or compare candidates or parties’ positions with the organization’s positions. The IRS views any materials that exhibit bias (even unintentionally) in favor of or against any party or candidate as prohibited political activity, even if you have a written disclaimer of any intent to make endorsements.

Penalties for violating the prohibition against electioneering include loss of tax-exempt status or financial penalties that can be imposed on your organization’s Board and officials. Currently, there are several organizations in jeopardy of losing their tax-exempt status. One Election 2000 case involves a prominent minister. While introducing a candidate visiting his church, he stated the following: "Although I’m not allowed to endorse candidates, we all know this is the future Senator for our state." Also, in 1999, a prominent national organization lost its tax-exempt status for handing out voting materials that advocated for specific candidates. The organization is currently appealing this decision in federal court.

It is important to be actively involved in the political issues that are important to the communities that we live in, but we must also be careful how we participate as non-profit organizations.

This guide is for federal elections; state election rules vary. When in doubt, seek clarification from your organization’s legal counsel.
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This guide is for reference only. Contact your legal counsel prior to planning an event.
RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS: PARTICIPATING IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Most houses of worship, faith groups and religious institutions are classified under the Internal Revenue code 501(c)(3). As tax-exempt organizations, churches and charities are absolutely prohibited from intervening in political campaigns by endorsing or opposing political parties or candidates for public office. Contrary to popular belief, there is no church exception allowed under First Amendment, Religious Freedom law. The bar on political activities applies uniformly to charity organizations and to churches. **Churches, pastors and persons acting in an official church capacity may not endorse or oppose candidates or political parties, and may not advise congregations to vote for or against specific candidates or parties.**

The IRS does allow charities and churches to engage in voter education activities. These educational activities include:

- Issue Briefings
- Legislative Scorecards
- Voting Records
- Candidate Questionnaires
- Hosting Candidate Forums
- Voter Registration;
- Get Out The Vote (GOTV)

Use caution when using materials that aren’t specifically prepared by your members or other 501(c)(3) organizations that you trust. Churches have been held responsible for engaging in political activities for distributing materials even when the materials were prepared by another organization. Many of the organizations preparing election materials are 501(c)(4) organizations — though these are not-for-profit organizations, they are allowed greater latitude in the use and distribution of election materials — and as such are not restricted by the rules for 501(c)(3) charities and churches. **If a church distributes materials prepared by an outside group, which are determined to be partisan in character, the IRS has the legal authority to penalize the church even though it did not produce the materials.**

Prohibited activities include:

- Letters of endorsement or opposition printed on church letterhead or in church bulletins;
- Church sponsored distribution of partisan or candidate campaign literature;
- Posters advising congregants to vote for or against candidates;
- Candidate campaign signs on church property;
- Other activities that could be potentially seen as endorsing or opposing a candidate.

All materials must be fair, unbiased, and presented in a non-partisan manner. **Don’t summarize, editorialize, or compare candidates or parties positions with church positions. The IRS views any materials that exhibit bias (even unintentionally) in favor of or against any party or candidate as prohibited political activity, even if you have a written disclaimer of any intent to make endorsements.**

Penalties for violating the prohibition against electioneering include loss of tax-exempt status or financial penalties that can be imposed on the church and church officials. Currently there are several faith groups in jeopardy of losing their tax-exempt status. One Election 2000 case involves a prominent minister. While introducing a candidate visiting his church he stated the following: “Although I’m not allowed to endorse candidates, we all know this is the future Senator for our state.” Also, in 1995, a church lost its tax-exempt status for publishing an advertisement, which advised people that the behavior of a particular candidate was sinful. The church sued in federal court to regain its tax-exempt status but recently lost their case and the ensuing appeal.

It is important to be actively involved in the political issues that are important to the communities that we live in, but we must also be careful how we participate as charities and religious institutions. **This guide is for federal elections; state election rules vary. When in doubt, seek clarification from your church’s legal counsel.**