

# ADVOCACY BASICS:

## ONE-PAGERS ON LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY FROM CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA

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*The following is a list of one-pagers available to readers. You can always access via the CCUSA website the full policy manual from which these one-pagers are taken.*

- No. 01: [What is advocacy?](#)
- No. 02: [What is Catholic Social Teaching?](#)
- No. 03: [Are you ready for advocacy?](#)
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# ADVOCACY BASICS:

ONE-PAGERS ON LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY FROM CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA

## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 1: What is advocacy?

**Defending or supporting a cause or action consistent with justice and the common good**

\*The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society...is proper to the lay faithful. Deus caritas est, No. 29

**Justice is giving God and one's neighbor their due, to love God above all else and love our neighbor in such a way that his or her fundamental rights are respected with due regard for the common good.**

**Defending or supporting a cause or action consistent with justice and the common good**

\*Prioritize the needs of people suffering from poverty and other social ills (homelessness, food insecurity, racism, lack of health care, disenfranchisement, etc.).

\*Catholic Charities is a voice for the voiceless, bringing their concerns to policymakers to change the structures and policies that perpetuate poverty and injustice.

**Empowering others to become self-advocates**

\*Empower individuals and groups with the tools and resources to advocate for issues that are important to them.

\*Helping individuals to speak on their own behalf and to realize their value as a member of the community.

**Why is Advocacy important to Catholic Charities ministries?**

- As Catholics, it is our responsibility to strive for just social structures
- As a people, our right to share our concerns with our public officials is protected by the Constitution.
- As service providers, we are uniquely positioned to speak up for the people we serve.

[Download](#) our complete advocacy manual - **Faith, Action, Justice: A Manual for Legislative Advocacy.**



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 2: How Catholic Social Teaching informs advocacy

Catholic Social Teaching (“CST”) is a body of knowledge and doctrine drawn from the faith and teachings of the Catholic Church that addresses the application of love and justice in human relationships at all levels of society. CST is the basis for the Church’s work for justice, human dignity, and the common good for all in the public arena.

Deus caritas est No. 28

### Sources of Catholic Social Teaching:

1. Jesus – The gospels relate Jesus’ love and concern for those who are poor and sick. In his ministry and teaching, Jesus would go to the margins of society to offer his love to the vulnerable and outcast.
2. Church life – The way the Church lived, which we witness in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St. Paul, emphasized both the dignity of every human being and the common good.
3. Magisterium – The Church’s Magisterium (or teaching office) reflects on the person of Jesus, the Scriptures, Sacred Tradition, and the natural law in order to pass on/clarify to the present generation (in language appropriate for the times) the truth of God.

### Central Themes of Catholic Social Teaching\*

1. The life and dignity of the human person
2. Every person has the right to life and to have their basic needs met. We all have the responsibility to fulfill these rights for each other.
3. The call to family, community, and participation
4. Preferential option for the poor, reflected in Matthew 25, asks us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.
5. The common good, presuming the social nature of persons, is the “sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #164).
6. We must defend the dignity of work and the rights of workers to ensure the well-being of all.
7. Standing in Solidarity with our brothers and sisters regardless of our differences is important to promoting the common good.
8. Care for God’s creation

- The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church offers 4 principles (human dignity, common good, subsidiarity and solidarity) and 4 values (truth, freedom, justice and love) as a means of articulating fundamental themes (Compendium, Section VIII, paragraphs 197-208).

**Resources:**

Podcasts on the bishops' seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching:

<https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/media-center/podcast/>

Good introduction: Kevin E. McKenna "A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching"

<https://www.amazon.com/Concise-Guide-Catholic-Social-Teaching/dp/0877939799>

Includes questions for discussion at end of chapters; penance service; list of popes and their encyclicals; timeline in history of CST; glossary of terms; suggestions for further reading)

Academic essays: Edited by Gerard Bradley and Christian Brugger, "Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays"

List of CST documents: <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/foundational-documents>



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 3: Are you ready for advocacy?

### Convene your team

**Step 1:** Pray/discern where to direct your advocacy efforts (community needs, agency's know-how)

**Step 2:** Consider/decide how team members will participate (direct advocacy, support, research)

**Step 3:** Tap existing resources (staff expertise, important contacts, volunteers)

### Create your strategy

**Step 1:** Connect with existing advocacy efforts: What's happening locally, statewide, nationally, internationally? What are other Catholic organizations doing?

**Step 2:** Identify your issue: Consult with clients and staff to understand the greatest need

**Step 3:** Research and document the issue

**Step 4:** Decide how to act: Call for a new law, change an existing law, go to the courts

**Step 5:** Know what's been done before: How has the issue been handled, who supported it, who opposed it?

**Step 6:** Identify your goals: What's your vision?

**Step 7:** Create plan of action: Break it down into steps, make a timeline, identify collaborators

### Main parts of an advocacy strategy

**EDUCATE:** Tell community, elected officials about your issue

**CONVENE:** Bring people and organizations together to discuss strategies and solutions

**ADVOCATE:** Write, call, visit your elected officials

**COLLABORATE:** Work with organizations, individuals who support your cause

**PUBLICIZE:** When spreading the word is appropriate, use the various forms of media



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 4: Frame your issue

### Important questions to ask when considering how to frame you issue:

- Why is the issue important to you and/or your organization?
- How should people see your issue?
- What is the best perspective/messaging to shed light on the issue?
- Who is most affected and how?

### Step 1: Do your homework

- Consider your agency's experience and data. What does this information suggest about the issue?
- How do other Catholic advocacy groups view the issue?
- What is/are? the media saying?

### Step 2: Define your core values

- Which of the CST principles are central to your vision?
- What values will resonate with those you seek to influence?
- How will the change your advocate for impact your community?

### Step 3: Communicate within your framework

- List and share your values with your team.
- Make all your messages consistent.
- Messages can highlight a specific part of the issue.
- Say why the issue is important.
- Always state what should be done.



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 5: Engaging with elected officials

### Why should I cultivate relationships with elected officials?

Participation in the political process is a duty we have as citizens and Catholics. Each of us has important experiences and perspectives to share that can guide public officials' decisions towards the common good. Elected officials have to address many issues, and they cannot be experts on every issue. They rely on staff, experts, and constituents for input on programs and policies.

### How to begin?

Determine who has already established contact with the legislator (including other Catholic groups). If establishing a new relationship, be mindful that it's for the long-term in order to become a trusted resource that outlasts immediate needs. Look up your legislator's main interests, voting history, and the connections he or she may have to your issue area.

Ask the legislator's staff how they prefer to receive communications (email, letter, etc.), or schedule an in-person meeting with the legislator and members of their staff. Be sure to keep a record with whom you met, when, and the topics that were discussed.

Inviting your legislator for agency site visits and major events are other ways to showcase your work in the community. When appropriate, encourage news media to visit, too.

After your meeting, ALWAYS thank your legislators and their staff for taking time to engage with you.

### What if other Catholic organizations have already contacted the legislators?

Even if other groups have contacted your legislator's office about the same issues, you should keep in touch with that office to ensure that your agency's position are clearly defined from others. Periodically update the legislator's staff and other advocacy groups about your continued work and interests in the issues. Newsletters or reports are good options for providing updates to everyone.

### Ways to communicate

Personal messages from constituents, especially those directly impacted by proposed laws or policy, can be very effective. Letters and emails from leaders of your organization are a common way to express the organization's position or concern about a specific issue. Your agency could also issue action alerts, ready-made electronic messages sent to elected officials by organizations and their supporters urging a specific action. To receive and participate in CCUSA's action alerts, text "CCUSA" to 855-564-3197.

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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 6: Tips for writing effective letters

1. Use the proper address and salutation to begin your letter. Find contact information for your federal legislators by zip code here: [www.congress.gov/contact-us](http://www.congress.gov/contact-us). When writing to local or state policymakers, visit your local or state government's website for up-to-date contact information.

2. We recommend the following formats when writing to your federal legislators:

- The Honorable [Full Name of Senator]  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator [Last Name of Senator]:

- The Honorable [Full Name of Representative]  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative [Last Name]:

3. Be succinct. Stick to one page and one specific issue, communicate just the key facts.
4. Be courteous. You want to build a relationship and become a trusted future resource.
5. Identify yourself and your reason for writing.
6. Identify the issue. Give details, providing facts and experiences from your unique perspective

Identify the bill by name and/or number. When writing to your federal legislators, use the chamber's convention for naming bills. For House bills H.R. \_\_\_\_, for Senate bills S.\_\_\_\_.

Propose a solution, and explain why you're in support of or in opposition to a proposal. Make sure your solution is in keeping with other Catholic advocacy efforts.

Ask your legislator to take a specific action.

Request a specific response and follow up.

Thank your legislator for past action and for their attention to your issue.

Include your full contact information on letterhead or after your signature, in case the legislator or staff members have questions.



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 7: Sample letter to members of U.S. Congress

May 9, 2022

The Honorable [Full Name of Senator, Representative]  
United States Senate [House of Representatives]  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative [Last Name]:

As the House moves into a new year and toward a vote on the Senate-approved budget reconciliation conference report, I am writing on behalf of Catholic Charities of Anytown, one of Anytown's largest agencies, to urge you and your colleagues to oppose a budget that will compromise the health and well-being of some the poorest and most vulnerable in our nation.

The Senate-approved bill attempts to exercise fiscal discipline by cutting programs crucial to the well-being of low-income children, vulnerable families, the elderly and persons with disabilities. The bill cuts back funding for child support enforcement, adds new provisions to Medicaid that will harm low-income recipients, raises TANF work requirements that put additional burdens on states and cuts kinship foster care.

Every day in our community, we witness the struggle that low-income families and individuals must go through to make ends meet. The funding and program changes proposed in this budget conference agreement will only serve to push low-income families and individuals further behind.

On behalf of Catholic Charities of Anytown, I strongly urge you to oppose a budget that will hurt the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities. Our Catholic tradition teaches that society, acting through government, has a special obligation to consider first the needs of those who are poor and vulnerable, yet the proposed budget cuts put a disproportionate burden on those who can least afford it.

Sincerely yours,

Your Name  
Title  
Agency/Organization  
Address and other contact information

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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 8: Tips for composing effective emails and action alerts

### Emails

Email has made it possible to communicate with your legislators right up until they vote on your issue. Many offices prefer to receive communication electronically, and most have developed procedures for how to receive email and respond to it. On the federal level, advocates have become savvy at using mass email campaigns at strategic points to pressure members of Congress to vote for or against legislation.

### Keep these tips in mind when crafting an email:

1. **Use a clear subject line**, which may make an impact even if the email is not opened. For example, writing "Vote NO on H.R. 7777" in the subject line sends a clear message.
2. **Keep it brief.** Limit your correspondence to a few paragraphs and use bullets or numbers where you can.
3. **Include your postal mailing address** to confirm that you are a constituent.
4. **Follow up!** Your legislator will very likely respond to your correspondence. If he or she did what you asked, respond immediately to say thank you for his or her support. If the response is vague or does not say directly what the legislator has done about the issue, write again and ask for clarification. You will develop a relationship and credibility with your legislator as a trusted source of information on the issue.
5. **Share** any meaningful interaction with or responses from your legislator with your agency leadership and other Catholic organizations.

### Action Alerts

Digital advocacy tools, such as legislative action alerts, allow multiple organizations and their supporters to send a targeted message to decision-makers. Action alerts inform supporters about an important and timely issue, and encourage supporters to contact their elected officials. The alert usually includes a headline, a brief explanation and a clear call to action: *"Tell your representative to vote in favor of H.R. 58."*

The online action alert tool can also offer a ready-made electronic message that the supporter can then send to his or her elected official.

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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 9: Tips for making effective phone calls

Calling your legislator allows you to communicate your views quickly and impact an issue almost immediately. To reach your federal legislator's office, call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your legislator by name. Calling the switchboard is just as fast as dialing the office directly. To reach your state legislator's office, visit your state government's website for up-to-date contact information. Find your member of Congress here: <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>

### Before the Call

1. **Know the issue.** Decide which one or two points you want to make before you call and know what other Catholic groups have said on the issue.
2. **Create an outline or script and practice it.** Practicing will boost your confidence and improve how you deliver your message.

### During the Call

1. **Ask for the staff member who handles your issue.** If that person is not available, speak with the staff member who answers the phone, as that person will pass on your message.
2. **Be brief.** Offer your key information in a few short minutes.
3. **Identify yourself.** Give your full name, your location and your role in your agency.
4. **Identify your issue,** or a bill by name if you can.
5. **Give specific examples** of how the legislation would affect you or make a positive or negative impact in your community.
6. **Ask for your legislator's position,** and then urge him or her to support your position.
7. **Offer further information** to support your position. This can help build your relationship with the office and establish you as a trusted resource on your issue.
8. **Thank your legislator** for considering your point of view, even if he or she does not agree.
9. If no one answers, **leave a message** identifying who you are, where you live and whether you would like your legislator to support or oppose a bill. Staff members will listen to and count the number of calls received for or against a bill.

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### After the Call

1. **Write down** the name of the person with whom you spoke, your legislator's position, what you asked your legislator to do and any other important information from the call.
2. **Follow-up steps** If your legislator takes your position on a bill or issue, make sure to **send a thank you note**. If you promised to send more information, follow through. If your legislator did not vote as you would have liked, continue to call and write about the issue. Explain politely but clearly that you are unhappy with the position and **reiterate why you believe yours is important**.



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 10: A sample script for a phone call

**Greeting:** "Good morning \_\_\_\_\_"

**Introduction:** "My name is Jane Smith, and I am calling as both a registered voter in Anytown and an employee of Catholic Charities of Anytown."

**Purpose of Call:** "First, I'd like to thank you for your support of affordable housing for low-income families and your vote last May for increased funding under the 'Bill Name.'

"The program has given 120 families in Anytown a new start in safer neighborhoods while creating 24 new construction jobs for local workers as the units were built.

"I urge you to continue to champion affordable housing and vote 'yes' for a \$48 million funding increase to the program in the bill, 'S. ##' that will be debated on the floor this week. Please urge your colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee to do the same."

**Thanks:** "Thank you very much, \_\_\_\_\_" for your time and for considering my concerns and request. Please contact me at 444-444-4444 if I can provide more information about the need for this program or its impact in our community."



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 11: Tips for making a face-to-face visit with your elected official

Visiting your elected official's district, state or federal office is an effective way to deliver your message about an important issue. Your team must prepare and practice for the visit.

### Before the Visit

1. **Request a visit:** Contact your legislator's office, give your name and agency, how much time you would like, the names of team members joining you, and the issue you wish to discuss.
2. **Do your homework:** Learn about your legislator's priorities and their connections to your issue.
3. **Create a one-page fact sheet** of your issue and why it is important to your agency and community. Please refer to the complete advocacy manual for tips on a Creating an effective fact sheet. Using local data and outcomes regarding your services or programs is an important aspect of engagement.
4. **Practice delivering the message.** Think of counterarguments to your position and how you will respond to them.
5. **Call the office the day before your visit to confirm.** If on the day of the visit you are running late, let them know. The busy staff will appreciate the notice.

### During the Visit

1. **Arrive early.** If you have multiple visits in one day, allow time between them to account for long appointments and time needed to find the next office.
2. **Be polite but clear** when you interact with your legislator or staff member.
3. **Introduce yourself and your issue.** State the purpose of your visit, the agency you represent and what you want to talk about.
4. **Use examples from your personal experience** and work in your agency and community to bring a human face to the issue.
5. **Be prepared to answer questions.** If you do not know an answer, be honest and promise to get back to the legislator and staff - and do so!
6. **Ask what position your legislator takes on the issue,** even if you think you already know. Then, make a specific request for an action that you would like your legislator to take.
7. **Determine who on your team will follow up with certain action steps** after the visit. Leave your full contact information.

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### After the Visit

1. **Send a thank you note** soon after your visit. Thank the legislator's staff, if you met with them, as they often go un-thanked.
2. If you promised to **answer a question or send more information**, do it! Establish yourself as a valuable resource.
3. **Take notes during your visit** and record them to use for the next time you visit the same office.
4. If you learned something in your visit that calls for a **letter campaign, media strategy or grassroots effort**, do it. If your visit was particularly positive, inform the media and help your member look good in the press.
5. **Be patient and persistent.** It can take numerous repeated visits to an office before you can get an agreement to act from your legislator.



# ADVOCACY BASICS:

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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 12: Tips for writing effective letters to the editor

1. Consult the publication's submission requirements and read already published letters to gauge style.
2. **Be concise** and check if the paper has a specific word limit.
3. **Be quick**. Publications often publish letters responding to articles, editorials or other letters the day after they appear. **Use email**.
4. Your letter is more likely to be published if you respond to another article or letter. Be sure to reference the article or letter in your response, citing what upset or pleased you about it.
5. Capture the reader's attention with a **strong first sentence**. Use active verbs and avoid using many adjectives.
6. Limit your letter to one topic.
7. Connect readers to your issue by including how it will impact the local community. Personal stories can be effective.
8. **Check your quotes and facts**. Be persuasive, but never resort to personal attacks.
9. Include your name, agency name, address and telephone number(s). The publication will likely want to verify that the sender actually wrote the letter.
10. Follow up published letters with a thank you to the editor.
11. Keep other Catholic organizations and advocacy groups informed.





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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 13: Sample letter to the editor

To the Editor:

Ten years ago, this month, sweeping changes were made to our nation's welfare laws. Now, as we approach the anniversary of this landmark legislation, new changes made to those welfare laws could sabotage the success millions of families have made to become self-sufficient while also limiting opportunities for those still on welfare. The new law significantly narrows the ability of states and their community partners, such as Catholic Charities of Anytown, to help low-income families transition to self-sufficiency.

If we are going to help all families become independent, government must provide them with ample opportunities to gain the necessary skills to do so. Unfortunately, the new welfare changes restrict the ability of hard-working, low-income people to move forward to better jobs by limiting education and training opportunities.

Also, as a result of the new changes, thousands of children are at risk of losing their welfare benefits if their parents fail to meet unrealistic work requirements. Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the importance of work as a means of participating in society. However, it is not appropriate to teach this work ethic by bargaining with the well-being and safety of children and families.

We are calling on the administration to support policies that provide better opportunities for vulnerable families to develop the skills necessary to be independent.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Title

Agency/Organization

Address and other contact information



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 14: Tips on how to write an Op-Ed

1. Read the publication's op-ed section often to see typical length and format. Find out the submission guidelines.
2. Create a draft of your op-ed using "ADVOCACY BASICS No. 12: Tips for writing effective letters to the editor."
3. Send a letter to "pitch" the importance of your op-ed to the publication and attach a draft.
4. Submit your pitch letter and draft as early as possible so that you can make requested changes before the deadline.
5. Respect exclusivity. Some publications require that an op-ed be submitted and published exclusively by them.
6. Be sure to thank editors for published op-eds.
7. Keep Catholic organizations and advocacy groups informed.



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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 15: Sample Op-Ed

### Opinion: Making the Right Repairs to a Broken Immigration System

Our nation's immigration system is broken: bureaucratic backlogs separate families, approximately 11 million undocumented workers live in the shadows and those who are seeking to build a new life in America are subject to undue hardship. How our nation's leaders fix this system will say a great deal about who we are and what we value as a nation.

To make the comprehensive repairs that are necessary, Congress needs a better set of plans, a different set of tools and stronger political will. America's immigration policy should promote the dignity of individuals and support families as the most important unit of society.

The Catholic Church's position on immigration reform is based on more than 100 years of experience in aiding and employing immigrants in the United States. Each year, Catholic Charities agencies help more than half a million immigrants and refugees with legal services, language instruction, job training and placement, and social services. As church, we witness the incredible capacity for hard work and the strong family life of newcomers who are looking to succeed in their adopted country. At the same time, each day we observe the unjust and counterproductive effects of U.S. immigration policies that separate families and undermine workplace fairness.

Catholic Social Teaching instructs us to recognize the natural rights of every human being, including the right to migrate. And our experience reminds us of our nation's history as a welcoming home for people in search of a better life. As the U.S. Senate moves forward on immigration reform legislation, I strongly encourage senators to seek comprehensive reform that protects U.S. security, puts undocumented laborers and their families on the path to lawful permanent residence and citizenship, and creates more and better legal avenues for necessary workers to enter this country.

It's shameful that our government policies keep families apart when we should be seeking to keep families intact. Currently, 1 million applications are pending for family members to become lawful permanent residents, and the average processing time is more than one year. Families are the cornerstone of a strong society, and more visas should be made available to ensure family unity.



Make no mistake, we agree that immigration reform should include improved security to protect our nation from terrorists and criminals who are seeking entry. We believe that effective enforcement requires smart inspections and screening processes, fair proceedings and efficient processing, as well as strategies for cracking down on smugglers. These broad reforms will better integrate and promote the success of newcomers to our nation while also improving the economic prospects, health, labor protections and stability of all U.S. residents.

Human dignity represents the precondition and ultimate end of a just society. The opportunity to reform our nation’s immigration system is also an opportunity to advance this cause. We must not waste it.



[Download](#) our complete advocacy manual - Faith, Action, Justice:  
A Manual for Legislative Advocacy.



# ADVOCACY BASICS:

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## ADVOCACY BASICS No. 16: Creating an effective fact sheet

Fact sheets are one-page documents that educate about your issue and communicate your position and solutions.

Fact sheets should be altered to fit each specific audience, when possible. The tips below will help you structure an effective fact sheet for any audience.

### Plan before you write

1. **Choose one topic.** If you have more than one subject to cover, make separate fact sheets.
2. **Know your audience** and what they already know about your topic.
3. **Consider your goals:** What do you want your readers to understand? What action do you want them to take?
4. **Include facts, not opinions.** Use data that you have gathered from your staff, your diocese and national Catholic advocacy groups working on your issue. **Create charts or graphs** for data where possible.
5. If you refer to research or reports on your issue, **cite the sources of the information.**

### Design a user-friendly fact sheet

1. **Identify your agency clearly** on the fact sheet; use a logo if possible.
2. **Limit the fact sheet to one page.**
3. **Develop a clear message** and use simple language to communicate that message.
4. **Use bullets, question-and-answer or subheadings** to break up information into smaller portions.
5. **Use data points.** If using numbers, try to put them in graph, chart or picture form so they are easy to understand.

### Make it easy to act

1. **Provide contact information** - a name, telephone number, email address and website address -for those who want to learn more.
2. **Provide other sources** or links for further information.
3. **Be clear about the specific action** you want readers to take and give them the tools to do so (phone numbers, event dates, talking points, etc.).

# ADVOCACY BASICS:

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ADVOCACY BASICS No. 17: A brief, visual guide to the legislative process

## Basics of Legislative Process

