

# Tips for Repeal Advocates

NM Coalition to Repeal the Death Penalty,  
Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry-NM

## Communicating with Legislators

In the 2001 and 2003 legislative sessions, a bill to repeal New Mexico's death penalty was introduced with increasing support and co-sponsorship. We are counting our votes and are within one or two votes in both the House and Senate for the upcoming session. We remain hopeful for the successful repeal of the death penalty in the 2005, but we need your help! Contacting your Representative and Senator really does have an effect. Your legislators represent you; they appreciate hearing from their constituents and value their input and perspectives. It is sometimes asked whether contacting legislators makes any difference. The answer is a definite YES!

### Communication Basics:

- Be sure to mention if you are a constituent.
- Be courteous, respectful, friendly and positive.
- Don't insult the motives of the legislator or of those who oppose repeal.
- Be brief and stick to the one issue in hand: the death penalty.
- Be accurate. Don't use exaggeration, and do cite statistics and sources if possible.
- Thank your legislator for listening to your case.
- Keep the Coalition informed about what you learn!

### Forms of Communication with Legislators:

Personal visits, letter writing, telephone calls, committee hearings.

**Note: you can find out who your representative and senator are at our website [www.nmrepeal.org](http://www.nmrepeal.org) or by calling your county clerk.**

### Personal Visits:

If you are willing to become a 'Legislative Champion' for the Coalition by having a face-to-face meeting with your legislator, please contact us at (505) 986-9536 to let us know and for further advice and materials. However, here are some basic tips:

- Do not directly ask the legislator whether or not he or she supports repeal. Instead, find out his/her beliefs and concerns about the issue and respond to these.
- If you are unable to answer a question accurately, don't worry. Just offer to find out and let him/her know in a follow-up letter.
- Ask what else you can do. Does the legislator want more information on a specific topic, or to hear from an individual who brings a particular perspective (a family member of a murder victim, a religious leader, etc.)?
- Leave written materials that he or she can refer to in the future. After the meeting, send a thank you note. Include follow-up materials addressing any concerns or questions the legislator had.

### **Letter Writing:**

A well-written letter can be the most powerful means of communicating with your lawmaker. Only a small percentage of people have ever written to a legislator. Legislators believe that for every one letter sent, a lot more people feel the same way but haven't taken the time to write.

- Use the proper form of address: 'The Honorable' + first name + last name on the address on both the envelope & the heading; 'Dear Representative' or 'Dear Senator' + last name at the start of the letter.
- Put your return address on the letter as well as on the envelope.
- Neatly handwrite or type your letter.

### **Telephone Calls:**

When you call a legislator outside of the legislative session, you may reach them directly or reach an answering machine. Follow the 'Communication Basics', and be sure to leave your name and number.

During legislative sessions, secretaries answer most of the legislator's calls. Be sure to leave your name and number, and, if possible, a specific bill number.

### **Committee Hearings:**

Anyone may attend committee hearings and anyone may testify at a hearing. Usually the committee chair will ask if anyone would like to speak either in favor of or opposed to the bill that is being considered. If you wish to speak as an individual representing your own personal views, stand and identify yourself by name and then very briefly state your position. The proper way to address a legislative committee is to stand when the chair recognizes you and then say: 'Mr. Chairman/Madame Chairman and members of the committee, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and . . . '

### **Letters to the Editor of a Newspaper:**

In order to create a climate in which legislators feel they can vote for repeal, we need to become more visible and to make it apparent that there is public support for repeal. With one short letter, you can impact public opinion, the contents of your newspaper, and the actions of your legislators.

- Keep your letter short- around 200 words. Sign it, and list your name and address.
- Get to the point- state your concerns and what action should be taken.
- Include an interesting fact or perspective that might be new to the reader.
- Be factually accurate.
- Send a copy of the published letter to the Coalition.

**For timely factual info for your letters or meetings, visit [www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)**