



## Organizing a Letter-Writing Campaign in Your Congregation

Elected leaders need to hear from their constituents. Unfortunately, very few people take the time to meet with, call or write their elected leaders on issues of concern. As a result, those who do make the effort have a significant impact.

One way to multiply your impact is to organize a letter-writing campaign in your congregation. The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) is asking congregations throughout the state to organize letter-writing campaigns in the summer and fall of 2016 that generate personal letters from constituents asking their Delegates and Senators to close the health care coverage gap in Virginia by pulling down federal Medicaid dollars. If each Delegate and Senator heard personally from 200 constituents on the importance of Medicaid Expansion, it could well become a reality in Virginia.

Here's how to organize a letter-writing campaign in your congregation:

**Check with the appropriate leadership.** Talk with your congregation's leadership or the appropriate committee about scheduling a time to organize a letter-writing campaign. Given the religious community's wide-spread support for expanding health coverage in the state, you should be able to arrange a campaign. (See *What Faith Traditions Say about Medicaid Expansion* for background on what most faith traditions say in support of Medicaid Expansion.)

**Set the date, time and place.** Decide what day, time and place will work best for you. For example, you could organize the letter-writing on the third Sunday in September during the coffee hour after service in the parlor.

**Set a goal.** How many personal letters would you like to generate? Set a goal that feels both possible and ambitious. Could you get 10 or 20 or 50? Of course, how many letters you can generate will depend at least in part on the size of your congregation.

**Promote the campaign.** Several weeks before, promote the letter-writing event in the bulletin, newsletter or on the bulletin board. Provide background materials on the issue. Tell people you will help them figure out who their elected leaders are. Many people do not know who their Delegates and Senators are. Given how gerrymandered many of the district lines are, you will need to have district maps or computers available to help people identify who represents them.

**Collect supplies.** You will need:

- Paper (and or assorted notecards)
- Envelopes
- Pens
- Stamps
- Background factsheets on Medicaid Expansion (that you can download from VICPP)

- VICPP sign-up sheets (downloadable)
- Maps of the Delegate and Senate districts in your area
- A computer with internet access to check people's representatives (<http://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov>)
- Sample letters (download from VICPP)
- Basket for collecting the letters.

**Figure out the set-up.** You will need tables and chairs in order for people to take a few minutes to write a personal letter. Figure out where you can set up in the room assigned. Will you need a banner or sign to get people's attention?

**Recruit a few volunteers.** Ask a few people to help on the day you will conduct the letter-writing. Make sure the volunteers write their own letters first so they feel comfortable assisting others. The volunteers can recruit people to stop by the table if you are not attracting people.

**Plan ways to make it fun.** Is there a way to make the process extra fun? Could you set up computer stations with printers and have young people assist in typing up letters as people dictate them? Could you give out treats to those who write a letter? Could you have balloons at your letter-writing table to draw people to it?

**Connect with the worship service, if possible.** Could you have a minute for missions about Medicaid Expansion during the service before the letter-writing time? Could the rabbi, imam or minister preach about caring for the sick? Could the prayer time include special prayers for those without health coverage? Is there someone who falls in the coverage gap who is willing to share his or her experience with the congregation?

**Take pictures.** Be sure to take pictures of people writing letters for promotion in your congregation's communication vehicles and send a copy to [Neill@viriniainterfaithcenter.org](mailto:Neill@viriniainterfaithcenter.org).

**Mail the letters.** Mail the letters. Don't rely on others to mail them. Some advocates like to mail one or two at a time and have them received over a period of a few weeks.

**Evaluate.** Ask the volunteers to evaluate what worked and what didn't. Did you reach your goals? If not, what could have been done differently next time?

**Review the responses.** What do the Delegates and Senators say in response to your letters? Feel free to respond to them by mail or by setting up a follow-up meeting to discuss issues raised. Talk with VICPP's health care expert, Karen Cameron, to get assistance. Email her at [Karen@viriniaconsumervoices.org](mailto:Karen@viriniaconsumervoices.org) to schedule a call.