

November 3, 2009

Calling Elected Officials

The Humane Society of the United States

As a citizen, you have the right to express your opinion to your elected official. When the phone rings in your legislator's office, they are obligated to answer. When many calls come in regarding a specific issue, the elected official is compelled to notice and hopefully take action. Legislators work to serve the people. They cannot do their jobs effectively if they do not hear the opinions and the interests of the people, especially the citizens of their districts. The following are some recommendations for making phone calls to your elected officials:

Prepare. Have an outline or a mini-script of what you intend to discuss with the legislator. If necessary, do research so that you know the subject and its relevancy to current legislation.

Identify yourself by giving your name and address.

Relax. If you are nervous, relax and treat the phone call like a normal telephone conversation. Do not read verbatim from a prepared script, but speak coherently and slowly.

Be brief. Clearly and concisely state your position and make your point. Limit your call to one issue. Make separate phone calls for other issues.

Identify the legislation. Make sure you identify the legislation you are discussing by name and number, or by its sponsors. If the legislator or staff person is not familiar with the legislation, provide him or her with a brief summary.

Ask for a viewpoint and vote. Find out the legislator's views on the legislation, and ask for a commitment to vote for or against the legislation.

Don't argue. It is ineffective to engage in an argument with the legislator or staff person about the issue. You will be more likely to get your message across by keeping your cool, and your conversation clear and succinct. Be courteous, direct and fair.

Don't get discouraged. Don't give up if you get a busy signal. This simply means that others are getting through with a message as well. (You can always send a fax if you can't get through right away). Also, don't be discouraged if you speak with a staff person. Most legislative aides are very reliable in relaying the messages and are knowledgeable about the issues. Conduct the conversation as you would with the legislator.

Follow up. Send a thank you note to the legislator or staff person. Although listening to citizen views is part of their jobs, this is a courtesy and a great opportunity to briefly restate your position in writing.

Be positive. Positive phone calls to your legislator can be very helpful. If your official has a good voting record or has recently supported animal protection legislation, a commendation is always received favorably.