

I. STUDY BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand the reach and efficacy of communications between nonprofit members and state legislators, HRC conducted 77 phone interviews with legislative offices in ten states. Based on The ASPCA's recent history of sending out legislative alerts, five "high-presence" and five "low-presence" states were chosen to provide representation of the entire U.S. The high-presence states included California, Illinois, Louisiana, New Jersey, and New York, while the low-presence states included Iowa, Maine, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and South Carolina. Within each state HRC attempted to complete quotas of at least four democrats, four republicans, four urban legislators, and four rural legislators. See below for a summary of complete interviews conducted by state.

	TOTAL	DEMS	REP	URBAN	RURAL	MIXED
HIGH-PRESENCE STATES						
CALIFORNIA	8	4	4	3	3	2
ILLINOIS	8	4	4	3	1	4
LOUISIANA	10	5	5	2	2	6
NEW JERSEY	8	4	4	2	1	5
NEW YORK	8	4	4	3	3	2
LOW-PRESENCE STATES						
IOWA	8	4	4	3	4	1
MAINE	8	4	4	4	4	0
OKLAHOMA	8	4	4	3	3	2
RHODE ISLAND	4	2	2	1	1	2
SOUTH CAROLINA	7	4	3	2	1	4
TOTAL	77	39	38	26	23	28

Within each state, the legislators were selected in random order, with up to three call-backs for each legislator or staff member. Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, and about two-thirds of all interviews were conducted with staffers rather than the legislators themselves. Most staff interviews were conducted with either senior legislative aides, directors of communications, or chiefs of staff. Interviews directly with legislators occurred more frequently in the low-presence states, where they were less likely to be in session or were less likely to have support staffs. All interviews were conducted by research consultants with the Humane Research Council, who identified themselves as such when asked by the interviewees. The ASPCA was not mentioned as a sponsor of the study.

Note that data obtained from these interviews are not projectable to any larger population, and the analysis provided here may not be representative of the entire country. However, where we find consistencies in the results, as we did in numerous cases, we can be reasonably confident that these results would hold true in other states as well. Furthermore, the high-presence states represent those to which The ASPCA frequently sends messages, and results from those states may actually be more relevant than results representing low-presence states or the country as a whole. The discussion and analysis below identifies both the consistencies and the differences where they are significant and relevant to The ASPCA's efforts.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY POINTS

- The vast majority of legislative offices say they receive at least a moderate volume of incoming messages from constituents and non-constituents, including all contact methods – emails, faxes, phone calls, and letters. Emails and letters are received most often, with phone calls a distant third in terms of volume. Faxes and personal visits were received much less frequently.
- Overall, legislators and their staffers say that they prefer to receive emails and letters more than other contact methods, for various reasons. Phone calls are much less preferred because they are disruptive and because people are rarely succinct. Faxes are viewed much the same as letters, although high-volume faxes are considered very annoying. The tolerance for different contact methods depends in part on the budget and staff sizes of different states and legislative offices.
- The impact of various contact methods appears to deviate from the legislators' preferences, however. While emails and letters are most preferred, an overwhelming majority of interviewees said these methods have less impact overall than phone calls or personal visits. Letters seem to have slightly more impact than emails overall because they are viewed as more substantive. Some interviewees suggested trying all contact methods or at least several to make sure the messages reach the decision-maker.
- The vast majority of interviewees expressed significant annoyance with form letters, form emails, and blast faxes. However, in a surprising number of cases these messages were counted and weighed equally to personal messages, as long as they came from constituents. A form letter received from a constituent clearly has much more impact than a personal message from someone outside of the legislator's district.
- Legislators clearly place the highest priority on messages from constituents. However, in a surprising number of cases (primarily senators and legislative leaders) they will still read and reply to messages from outside of their district, as long as the person is still coming from within their state.
- Legislators were very mixed regarding whether or not they maintain a tally of incoming messages to help support their decisions. Roughly half of states say they do keep tallies, but probably the majority of offices overall say they only do so for major issues or bills. Some legislators never keep tallies.
- The impact of these types of messages on legislators' opinions seems to vary significantly and overall can be characterized as moderate. The relative impact between legislators in different states is largely dependent on whether or not animal (or environmental) issues have recently been a focus. There is a clear relationship between overall volume of messages and impact on legislators' opinions.
- As mentioned above, messages from constituents have a much greater impact than messages from people outside of the district (or state). In many legislative offices, but not the majority, communications from non-constituents are immediately discarded. Also noted above, the impact of personal messages is much greater than form letters, form emails, and especially blast faxes.
- Overall, legislators in most states say they do not receive a high volume of animal-related communications, with most saying they get them only "rarely" or "sometimes." Of course, this is highly dependent on whether or not recent animal-related issues have been a focus in those states, and legislators in some states like California, New York, and Iowa seemed to get more messages.
- There are seemingly no major differences between democrats and republicans. Rural legislators in general seem to have slightly greater preference for phone calls and personal visits. Many low-presence states are dominated by rural areas, and many high-presence states by urban areas, so there are similar dynamics for these splits. Overall, party affiliation is much less a determinant of volume and impact of messages than high- vs. low-presence or rural vs. urban areas.

III. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS – ALL STATES

VOLUME AND HANDLING OF INCOMING COMMUNICATIONS BY CONTACT METHOD

- ⇒ Overall, legislative offices in most states say they receive a high to moderate volume of incoming messages, suggesting that the ASPCA alerts have a lot of competition. As we would expect, the volume is not as high in the low-presence states, with Iowa, Maine, and Rhode Island appearing to receive the least amount of incoming messages of all types.
- ⇒ In all states, the majority of incoming messages are in the form of emails or letters, although phone calls are also received with some frequency in most states. Faxes are received much less frequently than all other methods, although like emails and letters the volume of faxes can spike at times. There is significant variability in volume overall due to issue- or bill-related spikes. As we would expect, the fewest number of people visit the legislators in person.
- ⇒ In almost all states, the legislators themselves or the staffs maintain files on upcoming bills or key issues. In the low-presence states, where legislatures are typically part-time and/or legislative budgets are smaller, the legislators handle much of the communication themselves. As we would expect, senate offices are typically better-staffed than are house or assembly offices.
- ⇒ Regarding whether or not they maintain tallies or counts of incoming messages, there is significant variability between states, with high-presence states generally keeping better logs of incoming messages than low-presence states. Overall, it seems that for most day-to-day issues the legislative offices just keep a general sense of the volume of messages on each side of an issue. However, tallies are maintained consistently in some states and on key issues in most others.
- ⇒ The offices are also very mixed – both within and between states – regarding whether or not they keep or count messages from non-constituents. Overall, however, a surprising number of offices in both high- and low-presence states do in fact maintain non-constituent messages on file; but when tallies are kept on bills or issues, non-constituents are frequently not counted.
- ⇒ Despite the fact that many legislative offices keep and count non-constituent messages, there is a very clear priority placed on those coming from within the legislators' districts. Many of the legislators and aides we spoke with requested that nonprofits do a better job targeting so that they do not have to spend time sorting out non-constituent communications, which in some cases account for the majority of messages received.

MOST AND LEAST PREFERRED CONTACT METHODS

- ⇒ Considering all states, email was mentioned most frequently as the preferred contact method. Letters were also mentioned frequently, and phone calls seemed to be the preference in a handful of states. There was significant variability between states, with high-presence states generally having stronger preferences overall and for email in particular.
- ⇒ Regarding emails, they were the overall preference indicated by most legislative offices. Emails are quick to scan, sort and respond to, which makes it easy for legislators and their staffs to handle. For the same reason, however, emails tend to carry less weight than most other contact types. Some offices treat them the same, but most do not, and in some cases email is outright discouraged. Many legislators noted that emails often come without contact information, or that they are blasted to all legislators in their states. In these cases email is not only ineffective, but can be an annoyance.

- ⇒ Letters are close to emails in terms of overall volume and seem somewhat less prone to annoying the recipients, in part due to the lower volume of junk mail than junk email. Postal letters are preferred in some cases because they show that the person took time and effort to contact their legislator, and because contact information is provided automatically by the postmark. In a few cases the interviewee was concerned about the volume of postal mail the office receives, but overall there was very little resistance to even high volumes of postal letters.
- ⇒ Faxes, while low in volume except for occasional spikes, are comparable in most ways to postal letters; there is a paper trail and in most cases contact information is included. However, unlike postal letters, there was at least a moderate amount of annoyance with faxes because the machines get bogged down with high volumes. Some staff members expressed significant annoyance at this occurrence, and some said they turn off the fax machine when it happens.
- ⇒ Phone calls are least preferred by legislators and their staffs overall, although a number of states admit that calls can sometimes have the greatest impact. The resistance to phone calls is primarily from states where legislative offices receive high a volume of messages, have small staffs, or both. In those cases most interviewees said that phone calls are okay if the person is succinct, but that generally callers “say basically the same thing.” A majority of respondents said that phone calls are most disruptive and therefore least preferred of all the contact methods.
- ⇒ Additionally, a number of interviewees made specific suggestions for each type of contact method. See Appendix A for a chart of some of the most useful of these suggestions, as well as key advantages and disadvantages by contact method.
- ⇒ The vast majority of offices in most states expressed annoyance with receiving and handling form letters and form emails. However, while some said that form letters “go straight to the bottom of the pile” or “don’t do a bit of good,” a surprising number of offices nonetheless treat those messages like any others. Some said that form letters are “not the most effective” or that they “don’t really tell me anything,” but oftentimes while also saying they count form letters when making decisions. In offices where tallies are kept, form letters/emails are often counted and weighed the same.
- ⇒ Nonetheless, form letters are weighed less heavily than personal messages in all states, and are not counted at all in a small but significant number of states. There was clearly much more annoyance with untargeted (“blast”) emails and letters than with form letters received from constituents. Some suggested that petitions, with multiple signatures agreeing to one standard letter, could be used instead of large numbers of form emails or letters.
- ⇒ However, when asked which contact methods have the most impact, the primary answer was clearly any contact method with a personal touch, including in-person visits and phone calls. Regarding impact, it also seems that letters win over emails due to the extra effort required on the part of the sender, and because letters are not as easily discarded. This is not the case for every state, however, and a number of states treat email in the same manner that they treat postal mail.
- ⇒ Overall, personal contact is recommended as having the most impact, although phone calls and in-person visits can become burdensome for the legislators and their staffs. Many interviewees strongly recommended that personal calls or visits only be carried out by people who are well-versed on the issues and articulate. Furthermore, many suggested that people establish a personal relationship with the legislator prior to coming to them with requests or complaints.

IMPACT OF INCOMING COMMUNICATIONS ON LEGISLATORS' POSITIONS

- ⇒ All interviewees were asked to what extent incoming messages (from constituents as well as non-constituents) impact the legislators' positions, both generally and with respect to animal issues. It should be noted that the response to this question may be somewhat overstated, as many interviewees seemed eager to say that their office listens closely to their constituents. When staffers were interviewed, some of them declined to say what the impact on the legislator might be.
- ⇒ Overall, the incoming messages seem to have a moderate impact on legislators' positions, although this is highly dependent on the issue. In a few cases such as one legislator in New York, messages from constituents "tipped the scales" on a rural environmental issue. Generally speaking, messages relating to animal issues seem to have a slightly greater impact in high-presence states and urban areas, although this may be due to the volume of messages received in those areas on some recent animal bills. It may also reflect more entrenched attitudes among legislators in rural areas, many of which include animal agriculture states.
- ⇒ As indicated above, the impact of communications from legislators' constituents is much greater than for non-constituents. Essentially all of the interviewees seemed to show genuine interest in hearing from people in their district. Non-constituent messages seem to have relatively little impact overall. Even though a surprising number of legislators do consider outside messages, only a small number of them actually grant equal weight to non-constituent messages.
- ⇒ It was very clear in every state that personal messages of any sort are preferred to form letters, form emails, blast faxes, etc. This is not to say that the high volume is bad; in most cases the form letters are at worst an annoyance and many legislative offices weigh them equally (as long as they're from constituents). But personal messages, such as handwritten letters, seem to have much more impact.
- ⇒ Interviewees in some states suggested that messages based on fact have a much greater impact than emotional appeals. There seemed to be some experience with high volumes of emotion-based messages among aides and legislators, particularly relating to animal and environmental issues. People who contact them and clearly do not understand the issue are a turn-off.
- ⇒ There is variability among all states, but some – notably New York and Illinois – take very seriously the messages that come in from constituents. When asked if the messages have much impact, one aide from Illinois said, "That's why we take the time to do the position papers," referring to tally sheets for messages from constituents. Many of these offices have developed databases and a set of standard processes to take messages and manage responses from those in their districts. To some extent this may reflect the legislative budgets in those states rather than those legislators having a greater interest in hearing from people.

ANIMAL- (AND ENVIRONMENTAL-) RELATED COMMUNICATIONS

- ⇒ Generally, animal-related issues do not seem to be at the top of anyone's list. The volume of animal-related communications is highly variable, depending largely on specific issues. For instance, there were numerous mentions of foie gras in California, horse slaughter in Illinois, cockfighting in Louisiana and Oklahoma, and the bear hunts in New Jersey and Maine. There was also some mention of animal issues in Iowa, one of the leading animal agriculture states in the country.
- ⇒ Due to these issues, legislators in some states had received a high volume of animal-related messages, but generally these were the exception. In those cases, people had clear and usually positive opinions of animal advocates, saying that "people who feel strongly about animal issues are

vocal.” Overall the interviewees did not feel they had received very many messages from animal people or groups, relative to the total number of incoming emails, letters, faxes, and phone calls.

- ⇒ Some noteworthy exceptions to this include New York and California, and to a lesser extent Iowa. In New York the cause seems in part to be The ASPCA’s presence, with two legislators mentioning the group by name. Assemblywoman Amy Paulin (D-NY) mentioned having worked with The ASPCA to sponsor pro-animal legislation; her experience was a good one, although she was unclear if the ASPCA used form letters, to which she is vehemently opposed. In California, foie gras has been a recent issue because of the bill banning its sales and production. In Iowa it seems the catalyst for most animal-related messages is the state’s intense animal agriculture industry, and the environmental issues that it creates.
- ⇒ It is difficult to gauge the impact of the animal-related communications received by legislators. Overall, the impact seems moderate to low, but in states where a major animal issue was recently raised, the impact appears to increase. Also, many interviewees said that these larger animal issues elicited a significant number of form emails and form letters as well as messages from non-constituents, all of which have less impact, as discussed.

OTHER PREFERENCES AND SUGGESTIONS

- ⇒ As indicated previously, many states have only part-time legislatures and shared staffs, which generally indicates less tolerance for a high volume of messages. Interviewees in these states were disinclined to want to receive phone calls, instead preferring the timeliness of processing emails and to a lesser extent letters. Some suggested having a petition, with one copy of the letter and all accompanying signatures, would be less interruptive and have as much impact.
- ⇒ Although this seems like it would not be a problem in The ASPCA’s case, there is substantial concern about “blast” emails and faxes and generally a lack of targeting. Legislators in several states mentioned being on the receiving end of messages sent by individuals to all legislators in their state. The lack of targeting was viewed as both unprofessional and having significantly less impact because most non-constituent messages are not considered.
- ⇒ In some states the legislators deal directly with incoming messages, but in most states this seems not to be the case. Some offices will have a single legislative assistant, while others will have a dozen staffers, some assigned to specific issues like animal and environmental. In either situation as well as those in between, it seems the legislative aides and other staff members are important gatekeepers. Oftentimes they filter out many of the messages sent to the legislators, and for those people it is critical to craft messages that are clear, succinct, and that provide contact information.
- ⇒ Some interviewees seemed incredibly tolerant of even high volumes of incoming messages, and several suggested that using several different contact methods would be a good approach. Statements like “the squeaky wheel gets the grease” and “volume gets you heard” were not uncommon. There is a strong indication that personal messages from multiple contacts using different methods would have a greater impact than form letters or emails.
- ⇒ It is worth noting that there is a reasonable amount of variability for all factors by type of office. For instance, senators tend to have bigger staffs and a greater sense of statewide responsibility, so they are more likely to consider messages from non-constituents. Similarly, legislative leaders have a statewide perspective so are more tolerant of non-constituent messages as long as they are from within the state. The overall impact of these messages, however, appears to be similar for senators, representatives, leaders, and non-leaders alike.

- ⇒ For most state legislators, it is acceptable to contact them at both their district (legislative) and capitol offices. In most cases, both offices are open year-round, although in several of the smaller states they do not have official district offices. In larger states with bigger legislative staffs, the district office is often staffed full-time and frequently is the primary point of contact all year.

COMPARISON OF HIGH-PRESENCE AND LOW-PRESENCE STATES

- ⇒ As we would expect, legislators in the high-presence states receive a much greater volume of all types of communications from people both inside and outside their districts. This seems largely attributable to the fact that these are more populous states and therefore they have more active legislatures.
- ⇒ Similarly, legislators in high-presence states generally receive a larger volume of animal-related communications than low-presence states, but as mentioned the volume seems primarily issue-driven. The high-presence states, somewhat by definition, have had several recent animal issues fall onto the radars of most legislators. However, there was also some volume in low-presence states where a specific animal issue had elicited a significant response during a recent session.
- ⇒ The majority of high-presence states seemed to have sophisticated logging systems for all communications, with the possible exceptions of California and to a lesser extent New York State. Among low-presence states, where the support infrastructures are weaker, most legislative offices do not keep tallies, although in some states they do so for key issues. Keeping tallies is more common for high-presence states, although this does not necessarily result in a greater impact.
- ⇒ Legislator (and their staffers) in high-presence states tend to have stronger contact preferences than legislators in low-presence states. Legislators in busier states have a greater capability to handle common contact methods like emails and letters, but seem somewhat less tolerant of phone calls. Legislators in low-presence states, which are also generally more rural, seem to have less preference overall and less aversion specifically to phone calls and personal visits.
- ⇒ The impact of incoming messages, including those relating to animal issues, appears not to differ significantly between high- and low-presence states. There is perhaps a slightly greater emphasis placed on constituents in the high-presence states, but it is difficult to determine how much of this is attributable to having bigger budgets and staffs. The impact overall seems modest in both high- and low-presence states.
- ⇒ In almost all cases, the capitol office can be used as the point of contact year-round. However, in many high-presence states the district office is identified as the primary contact point both in and out of session. For the low-presence states, the capitol office is more regularly identified as the primary point of contact simply because many legislators do not have district offices.

COMPARISON OF RURAL / URBAN AND DEMOCRAT / REPUBLICAN LEGISLATORS

- ⇒ HRC interviewed an equal number of democrats and republicans and found that there was a high degree of variability on these issues within each party. Overall, it is clear that party affiliation is less of a determinant of how legislators handle and weigh messages than are other factors, including the splits between high- and low-presence states and urban vs. rural areas. For instance, republicans in the high-presence states generally seem to behave more like democrats in those states and less like their party colleagues from the low-presence states.
- ⇒ Counting all states, we interviewed slightly more legislators representing urban areas than rural districts, and a roughly equal number of mixed districts. Reflecting voting patterns overall, we

interviewed more urban democrats than urban republicans; the republicans were more likely to be located in rural or mixed rural/urban areas. Generally, the high-presence states are more likely to be dominated by urban areas, and vice versa.

- ⇒ When placing interview calls, both democratic and republican offices were equally receptive, although we were able to fill the quotas for republicans more quickly. Republicans seemed slightly more responsive and organized, and we spoke directly with more republican than democratic legislators. Part of this may be explained by the seemingly greater approachability for rural legislative offices rather than party affiliation.
- ⇒ Regarding overall volume of incoming messages, there seems to be no difference between democrats and republicans. There also appear to be no major differences between parties with respect to volume of animal-related messages and the impact of those messages. These issues are driven by the differences in high- and low-presence states as well as the presence of specific animal-related bills, and not by party affiliation or even urban/rural differences.
- ⇒ There is some indication that republicans have a slightly greater interest in receiving phone calls and emails than do democrats, although this may only apply to a couple of states (notably Iowa and California). Overall, it seems that republicans have somewhat clearer preferences regarding contact methods than do democrats, but as mentioned the differences in desired contact method seem to be much more sensitive to urban/rural splits than party affiliation.
- ⇒ Most urban legislators seem to be more straightforward and organized than their rural counterparts, and many prefer emails and letters. While that holds true overall, a greater number of rural legislators seem to prefer to receive phone calls and personal visits, and they generally appear to place greater importance on individualized messages than their urban counterparts.

IV. APPENDIX A – REFERENCE CHART FOR DIFFERENT CONTACT METHODS

	EMAILS	LETTERS & FAXES	PHONE CALLS	PERSONAL VISITS
OVERALL PREFERENCE & IMPACT	- Preferred by the majority of legislators, but does not have most impact overall - Most say impact is nearly equal to letters, but less than personal contact	- Second to email in terms of preference overall, but slightly greater impact than email because they are taken more seriously - Still less impact overall than personal contact	- Seems to have a greater impact than either emails or letters - However, impact mitigated somewhat by lack of ability to handle many calls, particularly among shared staff	- Most legislators say personal visits have the greatest impact overall - However, must be balanced with availability of legislators and visitors must be very articulate
KEY ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES	- Very quick and easy to tally, respond, and file - Form emails are easily disposed of and typically not given any weight - Can most easily get lost in the shuffle	- Many offices prefer to have a paper trail - Contact information automatically included as postmark or fax number - High-volume faxes can be especially burdensome	- Personal calls allow constituents to give opinion in their own words - High-volume calls can be taxing for some offices with shared staff or few phone lines	- Personal visits seem to be taken more seriously than any other contact method - For many legislators and especially leaders, it is difficult to get any face time with them
SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS	- Subject line should include the sender's position on the issue - Address with zip code should be listed at top or otherwise easy to find - Form emails should include the sender's personal message at top - Form emails should be targeted; avoid "blast" emails to all legislators	- Address with zip code should be listed at top or otherwise easy to find - Form letters should not be sent to all legislators; avoid postcard blasts, etc. - Blast faxes should be avoided because there is low tolerance for faxes in high volume	- Overall, calls are not preferred in most states due to time constraints - When calls are made, they should be for quick up/down comments, not "life stories" - Call during off-session times to establish a relationship and more likely reach legislators	- Send only well-versed and articulate representatives for the issue - Bring factual information along to leave with the legislators or their staffs - Visit during off-session times to establish a relationship and more likely reach legislators

V. APPENDIX B – LEGISLATORS INTERVIEWED, BY STATE AND HOUSE

HIGH-PRESENCE STATES	
CALIFORNIA	House: Fran Pavley; Alan Nakanishi; Bob Dutton; Carol Liu; Doug La Malfa Senate: Bob Margett; Byron Sher; Dean Florez
ILLINOIS	House: Brent Hassert; Jack McGuire; Lovana Jones; Patricia Reid Lindner; William Black; Mary Flowers Senate: Christine Radogno; Lawrence Walsh
LOUISIANA	House: Beverly Bruce; Charles Lancaster; Willie Hunter; Daniel Martiny; Glenn Ansardi; Israel Curtis; Ernie Alexander; Carla Blanchard Dartez Senate: Craig Romero; Gerald Theunissen
NEW JERSEY	House: Albio Sires; Alex DeCroce; Alison Little-McHose; Bill Baroni Senate: Bernard Kenny; Ellen Karcher; Andrew Ciesla; Bob Smith
NEW YORK	House: Adam Bradley; Amy Paulin; Anthony Seminerio; David Townsend; James Bacalles Senate: Carl Marcellino; Byron Brown; George Maziarz
LOW-PRESENCE STATES	
IOWA	House: Jim Van Fossen; Effie Lee Boggess; Dwayne Alons; Marcella Frevert Senate: Joe Seng; Dick Dearden; Neil Schuerer; Michael Gronstal
MAINE	House: Joan Bryant-DeShane; Herbert Adams Senate: Stephen Stanley; Lynn Bromley; Carol Weston; Margaret Rotundo; Richard Kneeland; Kenneth Lemont
OKLAHOMA	House: Jari Askins; Sue Tibbs; Bill Nations; John Nance Senate: James Dunlap; Scott Pruitt; Jeff Rabon; Kenneth Corn
RHODE ISLAND	House: Kenneth Carter Senate: Dennis Algiere; Kevin Breene
SOUTH CAROLINA	House: N/A Senate: Thomas Moore; William Mescher; John Land; Bradley Hutto; Michael Fair; John Drummond; John Courson