**What Is Co-sponsorship?**

The elected official who introduces a bill is referred to as the *sponsor* of the legislation. In order to advance the bill through the legislative process, the bill’s sponsor (or other supporters) appeals to other members to *cosponsor* the measure. These colleagues might agree to add their name to the bill because they agree with its aim, find it politically wise or advantageous, or support the colleague sponsoring the bill.

**Why Does a Bill Need Co-sponsors?**

The number of cosponsors on a bill is a key measure of its support. A bill with more cosponsors tends to garner more attention from relevant committees or chamber leadership, increasing the likelihood of action on the measure. Even more than numbers, politics is a chief consideration. Bipartisan co-sponsorship can signal an important opportunity for both sides of the aisle to work together to see the measure through the entire legislative process.

**What Is Your Role?**

The constituent’s voice is critical in securing cosponsors. Here’s how to do your part:

**1. Do Your Homework**

First, find out where your legislator stands on issues relevant to the bill:

* What is the legislator’s stance, and his or her political party’s stance, on the topic the bill is addressing?
* Is this legislator up for re-election? (If so, he or she may be more likely to offer co-sponsorship on a bill, to demonstrate responsiveness to constituent needs.)
* Is this legislator in a leadership role in the chamber? In his or her party caucus?
* On which committees does this legislator serve, and does he or she have a particular role on the committee—such as chair or ranking member for the full committee or a subcommittee? You should also have a sense of the bill and its sponsor:
* What does the bill do?
* How can it help your district or the state as well as the education profession?
* Is the sponsor of the bill a friend or foe of the legislator?
* What is the political party of the sponsor?
* Has the legislator cosponsored this bill in previous sessions?
* Who else is cosponsoring, and what is their party affiliation?
* What committee has jurisdiction over the bill—and does the legislator sit on that committee?
* How much might the bill cost to implement?

**2. Make “The Ask”**

**TIP:** Before making contact with any officials, consult your faculty/staff handbookfor your institution’s guidelines on conducting advocacy activities in your professional role. Even if you will be contacting a legislator in your capacity as leader of a state affiliate organization, AACTE recommends working with your institution’s government relations office to be sure your advocacy complies with any requirements.

Draft a letter using what you’ve learned from your homework. Be sure to include these key components:

* State that you are a constituent of the legislator.
* Cite the bill’s title, number, and sponsor’s name.
* Mention any positive information you learned in your research to connect the legislator to the bill (e.g., prior co-sponsorship, committee leadership).
* Explain why this bill matters to you as a constituent, to educator preparation, and to the broader field of education.
* List any colleagues or organizations in your state (or national organizations) that also support the bill.
* In your closing, include explicit **“please cosponsor this bill”** language to ensure the legislator has a clear request from you, the constituent. Also offer to be a resource on this matter and other issues related to educator preparation.

To submit your letter, look for an online form on the legislator’s website, although it may limit the length of your communication. E-mail is another good option. Be sure that the legislator’s lead education staffer – or your primary contact in their office – receive a copy of your request.

Numbers count! The more requests your legislator receives from constituents, the better. Consider recruiting your colleagues to make their own requests.

**3. Wait for a Response—and Follow Up If Needed**

Legislators are responsible for replying to constituent correspondence, but it is unrealistic for them to personally respond to each communication. You may receive an impersonal or generic response with little mention of your specific concerns. If several weeks pass with no response, follow up with your staff contact. Whether the legislator has agreed to cosponsor the bill or not, consider following up on his or her response with at least a “thank you” e-mail or social media post.