

2019 Elder Justice Summit – Staying Engaged as We Age
June 21, 2019
Oldemeyer Community Center, Seaside, CA

Make Your Voice Heard

Notes from afternoon break-out session

Panel: Jane Parker, Monterey County Supervisor District 4
Erica Parker, Aide to Assemblymember Mark Stone
Carina Chavez – Deputy District Director for Congressman Jimmy Panetta

Facilitator: Deacon Warren Hoy, Director of Family Life Ministries, Catholic Diocese of Monterey

The importance of contacting local officials as a part of advocacy on issues relevant to each of us. Individual advocacy is considered by many as a part of citizenship responsibility.

Who does what? Elected positions at the local, state, and federal level.

Supervisor Jane Parker spoke about local opportunities for anyone to advocate on an issue. She encouraged all to call, email, and/or drop by her office in Marina. She talked about the public forums she hosts: Public Chat and Town Hall Meetings. Supervisor Parker stressed an important approach for intensive issues that she calls “the power of 3” that includes:

1. The person and community being impacted by an issue;
2. Working with elected officials; and
3. Working with the applicable agency and the staff of that agency responsible for that issue.

Supervisor Parker outlined some of the many services done through local governments. When someone is unsure of “who” to contact around an issue, they may call their local elected official for help in determining how to address concerns.

Erica Parker talked about legislator responsibility. The main focus is on creating laws and contributing throughout the process (some discussion on how a bill becomes a law). Outlined that all California State legislators have several offices: always an office in Sacramento, then 1 or more in the districts they represent.

Carina Chavez encouraged all to contact Panetta’s by email, FAX and mail. Individuals can also request a meeting or attend the hosted town hall meetings. Federal elected officials have offices in Washington D.C. and at least 1 office in

the district they serve. Offices also have staff assigned as “case workers” that help with passports, citizenship, social security, and other Federal issues. Although those elected to the U.S. Congress are involved with sponsoring and supporting Federal legislation (laws), they are also very involved in reviewing and passing budgets that assure vital programs can operate.

Questions from attendees:

Q: Federal Issues – what do I do to get an issue to Washington?

Federal response: Contact a local elected official’s office and staff will research. They will get back to you with ideas and suggestions.

State Response: Petitions with multiple signatures do help to express the local need and extra voices are always good.

Local response: Handled on a case-by-case basis depending on the scope of the issue and then formulate an “Action Plan.”

Q: What about dental services for older adults. Medicare doesn’t cover much.

Local response: Monterey County clinics do offer services on a sliding fee scale.

Q: Prunedale Senior Center has lost funding for seniors. Why the cut?

Local response: Supervisor Parker will look into it further, but the Center did get funded for the next year.

State response: CalFresh has recently expanded services for eligible seniors and disabled individuals. Several other bills are being worked on to increase the food security of seniors.

Federal response: Nutrition programs have been continued.

Q: Social Security 2100 Act has been evolving and has a wide range of impacts. But nothing new in the past 6 months.

Federal response: Congressman Panetta’s office will do some research.

Q: More than 30 years ago there was a state-wide effort to have taxis be wheelchair ready. Although there was a lot of work done years ago, much has been lost in in recent years.

Federal response: Need to research.

Local response: Time to “re-visit” this issue.

Q: What is the best way to “ask” for support on a particular topic?

Everyone’s response: We want to hear about your issues!

Federal response: What is best are “real stories from real people” to advocate on an issue whenever possible. If needed, they will always treat information in a confidential manner when sharing a story.

State response: Hint - gaining support needs your research and details but with a brief approach.

Q: How do I look at pending legislation about “seniors”?

Federal and State response: There are a variety of on-line search tools that allow “keyword” look ups. Also, a good way to track changes as a bill goes through the review/approval process.

Local response: Look to supportive groups including Area Agency on Aging (AAA), AARP, and many others.

Q: What about writing to your offices? Form type letters? Quick emails just as good?

Everyone’s response: They do want to hear from you and made aware.

Federal response: All communications are tracked. More people and details are important.

State response: Hint - always good when you know when an Elected Official is going to vote on something. Timing can mean a lot. Also, know how your Elected Official feels on topics and when a position changes.

Q: Working on issues often feels like nothing really happens.

Local response: Daunting issues at the local level require a majority to get anything accomplished. Remember the discussion about the Power of 3 (community + elected officials + staff).

State response: Most of the time there is an “education” process needed to gain support on an issue. Several years of same issue eventually gain momentum on a topic.

Federal response: Requires a bi-partisan approach to work together in order to make real change.

Q: Can we come to your office to help explain some of the confusing ballots?

Federal response: We do not provide that level of education for constituents. Other organizations do: The League of Women’s Voters and more.

State response: We can help to explain but we do not tell you how to vote.