

**A THEORY OF PROACTIVE CASEWORK AT THE STATE LEVEL AS A
MEANS OF BRIDGING ACCESS GAPS IN THE PROVISION OF
CONSTITUENT SERVICES**

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A thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Political Science in the College of Arts and Sciences.

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ABSTRACT

Megan Rickman Blackwood: A Theory of Proactive Casework at the State
Level as a Means of Bridging Access Gaps in the Provision of Constituent
Services

(Under the direction of Frank Baumgartner)

Constituent service, particularly casework, serves as a key component of representation and accountability by allowing elected officials to provide support and advocacy for constituents who are experiencing problems navigating state bureaucracies. Standing models on the provision of constituent service, which I refer to as the Reactive Casework Model (RCM), rely exclusively on the constituent to act as the first mover by contacting their representative to request services. I propose a Proactive Casework Theory (PCT), arguing that the proactive provision of constituent services, rather than the reactive provision of these same services, has far-reaching implications for the number and characteristics of constituents that receive these vital services. Further, under the PCT, elected officials can increase trust in governmental institutions, decrease polarization and negative affect, and increase participation, thereby reducing disparities that lead to well-established knowledge, efficacy, income, and, racial gaps.

Partnering with the office of Del. Sam Rasoul of Virginia's House of Delegates 38th District, I conducted an exploratory case study to serve as a proving ground for PCT. Initial results comparing results from three months of observations collected under the RCM to three months of observations generated with the PCT trial show that PCT results in a 5474.19 percent increase in contacts, and a 25 percent increase in casework requests that represent marginalized people.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“All Politics is Local”

– Tip O’Neill, Former Speaker of the House, 1994

As early as Plato, the vitality of democratic systems is argued to, almost exclusively, rest upon the attitudes and beliefs of the citizenry. With public support, democracy is legitimate and stable; without such support, democracy is insecure and likely to fail (Diamond, 1999; Easton, 1965). Since 1958 Pew Research Center (Pew), has measured the public’s trust in the government for decades via a question that asks respondents, “How often do you trust the government in Washington to do what is right”. In 1964, 77 percent of respondents chose “just about always” or “most of the time”, by 2023 this number had fallen to just 16 percent (Pew 2023). When considering the bureaucratic agencies tasked with delivering vital public services, the most frequent way average citizens engage with the government, public trust in these agencies is vital for their ability to function smoothly and effectively (Schlesinger, 2001). The success of American democracy is dependent upon the continued, collective belief in a social contract that requires the citizenry to engage in the process by electing representatives that serve as intermediaries between the government and its people, and the elected representatives’ continued commitment to fulfill this sacred duty. These lofty ideals have long epitomized the promise of American democracy, however, in practice, we witness, time and again, a government, and its elected officials, leaving far too many people behind. The natural result is a citizenry who, legitimately, question whether that promise has been kept.

The field has long grappled with ways the government and its elected officials can restore trust amongst the electorate. In our search for answers have prioritized grand theories of institutional change through enhanced audit and oversight processes (Campbell, 2023), by understanding, and perhaps altering, the sources of political knowledge (Prior, 2005), and even vast changes to our electoral systems (Bowler and Donovan, 2016). However, the field has long ignored small, direct

actions elected representatives can take to enhance feelings of trust at the most personal level. One of the most mundane, but understated, powers of an elected official's office to positively impact people's lives, and thereby offer evidence of a functioning government worthy of trust, is through the provision of constituent services. Constituent service is a key component of representation and acts as a way for elected officials to provide support and advocacy for constituents who are experiencing issues with government agencies at all levels (Snyder et al., 2022). Traditional theories of constituent service, which I refer to as the Reactive Casework Model (RCM), rely exclusively on the constituent to act as the first mover. This results in those receiving services being, almost exclusively, citizens with the knowledge, civic skills, efficacy, and trust to navigate the system. The RCM also demands that the constituent have existing access to the representative, but such relationships are often built through donations, fundraisers, primary outreach, and shared networks. Of course, such resources are not available to all. The inevitable outcome of these services being offered through the RCM is that the rich get richer, the knowledgeable become more knowledgeable, the efficacious are given reason to be efficacious, and the trusting are reassured that this trust is not misplaced. So what about all the people this leaves behind?

In my Proactive Casework Theory (PCT), I argue that the proactive provision of constituent services by elected representatives at the state level, rather than the reactive provision of these same services, has the potential to have far-reaching implications for the number of constituents that receive these vital resources. Additionally, under the PCT, those who represent traditionally marginalized groups represent a larger proportion of service requests than under the RCM. Under the PCT, elected officials have the potential to increase trust in governmental institutions, decrease polarization and negative affect, and increase participation by reducing disparities that lead to well-established knowledge, efficacy, income, and racial gaps. While it is beyond the scope of this project to directly test the individual-level effects of this theory through a treatment-based survey experiment, a detailed examination of past literature, analysis of currently available survey data, and initial results collected from administrative data made available through a pilot program conducted alongside Del. Sam Rasoul in Virginia's 38th House District serve as proof of concept.

CHAPTER 2

What is Casework, Why Casework Matters

Casework serves as an important means for representatives to support their constituencies by communicating with government state agencies on behalf of those they are elected to represent. The inner workings of the bureaucracies tasked with implementing policy and providing services to Americans are not a well-known process to many voters, nor is it one that garners particular attention. It is only when a citizen encounters problems with these agencies that they are forced to figure out the best way to navigate a process, often characterized by reams of red tape, and the crucial intervention of their representative becomes necessary. Casework serves as a bridge between elected officials and the public; these services are instrumental in ensuring that the concerns of constituents are not only heard but also translated into meaningful action. In essence, casework enhances the democratic process by creating a tangible and accessible link between elected officials and the communities they serve, fostering a sense of engagement and responsiveness.

Constituents who possess high levels of political and institutional knowledge are aware that they can seek support from their representative to: submit an inquiry with a governmental agency on their behalf, request information or a status report on an inquiry, request that an agency consider or reconsider a case, or help them obtain basic information from governmental agencies. Other important types of casework can include the petitioning of representatives to write letters on the constituent's behalf. These often take the form of recommendations for college applications, grants, or the issuing of commendations. Particularly knowledgeable primary school students or parents of students can also appeal to their representative for sponsorship in chamber page programs, where valuable first-hand experience and connections can serve to secure a successful future. From helping constituents navigate the Medicaid application process to helping them navigate the halls of the State Capitol, casework is an invaluable opportunity for the representative to foster relationships with members of their district and offer evidence of a responsive and accountable government by directly addressing the concerns and needs of citizens.

While far from extensive, standing scholarship has offered some baseline findings regarding these effects. Previous studies centered on benefits to the representative have found that casework can increase the potential for reelection by generating support from constituents who may have previously not been supportive (Cover and Brumberg, 1982; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1987; Ashworth and Mesquita, 2006), creating a sub-constituency amongst the minority in the district (Bishin, 2009). Provision of casework can also position the representative as an expert, as noted by Fenno, “to the extent possible – even if it requires a bit of imagination – members will picture themselves as effective users of inside power” when meeting with constituents (1978, 137). Requests for casework additionally play a role in the representative’s oversight of governmental agencies, serving as an indicator of the quality of service offered by agencies and alerting the representative of additional funding needs (Bone, 2014). As argued in the fire-alarms oversight model presented by McCubbins and Schwartz (1984), constituents alerting representatives to problems with agencies can drastically reduce the informational costs to the representative for providing effective oversight.

Casework has also been found to be a potential tool for representatives to reach across partisan lines and increase support among out-party members of the district (Dancey, Henderson, and Sheagley, 2023). It should be noted that the majority of standing work finds that, in general, representatives are more likely to advocate on behalf of co-partisans (Butler and Dynes, 2016) and with those constituents with whom they share descriptive characteristics (Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach, 2019).

Despite proven disparities in which type of constituents receive these vital services, some representatives may sincerely feel that casework is a part of their duty as elected officials (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1987). Certain types of representatives have been shown to be more responsive: those in electorally unsafe districts (Epstein and Frankovic, 1982; Freeman and Richardson, 1996), less senior members (Adler, Gent, and Overmeyer, 1998), Democrats (Snyder, Judge-Lord, Powell, and Grimmer, 2022), and women (Thomsen and Sanders, 2019), have all been found to focus more on constituent services than their counterparts.

While much work has focused on the types of elected officials that conduct casework and the potential electoral benefits, significantly less scholarly attention has been paid to the type of constituent that seeks out these services. Even less has focused on discovering the potential benefits

for the constituent, or, how this type of representation impacts trust in governmental institutions. PCT aims to fill this gap.

CHAPTER 3

Establishing Expectations About Types of Participators Under the RCM

3.1 Political Knowledge and the Socioeconomic Status Resource Model

Research centered on understanding political participation has long been a focus of the field. The classic definition is taken from Verba, Brady, and Kim; “By political participation, we refer to those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take” (1978, 1). Theories developed to determine predictors of participation prove to be relatively durable over time. The most prominent of which is the Socioeconomic Status (SES) model which finds stable participatory determinants to be education, income, and occupation (Conway, 1991).

Scholars broadly agree that educational attainment serves as one of the best predictors of participation through multiple mechanisms: developing cognitive skills and information obtainment (Campbell et al., 1960; Delli, Carpini, and Keeter, 1996; Rosenberg, 1988), the development of civic skills that encourage engagement (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995), and the exposure necessary to cultivate interest in participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). Advancement through college and post-graduate work is also believed to facilitate access to politically oriented networks that encourage participation (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry, 1996) and results in benefits from the political social capital within these networks (Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998). Educational attainment as the primary mechanism driving participation is relatively uncontested in the field.

Income has also held relatively steady over time, in short, the upper-class participate in politics more than the poor (Blais, 2006; Rosenstone, 1982; Verba, Brady and Schlozman, 2012; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Occupation, long used as an instrumental variable to determine a person’s social class and has previously been theorized to be a major mechanism for developing political behavior (Wright, 1980; Goldthorpe, 2001). Since the development of the SES model, occupation has begun to falter as a stable indicator. While political participation is still high among

those under union contracts (Leighley and Nagler, 2007), there is also evidence that working-class Americans participation in politics has been dwindling for decades (Vanneman and Cannon, 1987; Hout et al., 1995).

3.2 Internal and External Efficacy

There are two types of political efficacy: internal, which refers to one’s belief about their ability to participate in government and make a change; and external, which refers to one’s perceptions that political officials and governments are responsive to one’s interests and needs (Kahne and Westheimer, 2006). We can make assumptions about who would possess the internal efficacy needed to request services under the RCM given the above findings on political knowledge, as extensive knowledge about politics is presumed to increase feelings of internal efficacy and encourage participation (Galston, 2001). Formally stated high levels of efficacy translates to “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce outcomes” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). If you are knowledgeable enough to understand how the system works, you are more confident in your ability to navigate it when needed.

External efficacy is intrinsically linked to a person’s feelings of trust in the government and their representatives. In studies on perceptions of corruption, researchers have found that perceived or actual scandals can decrease levels of trust in political institutions (Martin et al., 2020; Morris and Klesner, 2010), perceptions of system support (Bowler and Karp, 2004), and overall interest in politics (Bauhr and Grimes, 2014). When constituents lose trust in their representatives and institutions it can lead to decreased external efficacy and general feelings that the political system is rigged or unfair (Ares and Hernandez, 2017). In research on procedural justice, respondents who are exposed to evidence that fair processes have been followed tend to have higher levels of acceptance of authority figures’ decisions (Tyler and Blader, 2003). In short, exposure to media that either exposes instances of corruption or reinforces the just processes within governmental systems plays a crucial role in shaping individuals’ trust in government and its representatives, which in turn influences their levels of external efficacy and perceptions of the political system’s fairness and legitimacy.

3.3 Extensions on the SES Model to Include Resources and Motivation

While the SES model continues to hold relatively well, scholars have worked to extend our original understanding of political participation by including additional considerations regarding access to

resources like civic skills and time (Brady, Verba and Scholzman, 1995). Motivation-based studies have also expanded our understanding of participation. Models have been introduced that theorize private pain and loss events (Jennings, 1999), and, direct contact with ineffectual government services (Michener, 2018) result in increased levels of activism and contact with elected officials.

By better understanding who we expect to participate through particularized contact we can use standing findings from several surveys to test these assumptions.

CHAPTER 4

Initial Support for Expected Participators Assumptions under the RCM

4.1 Socioeconomic Status and Efficacy Models

Table 4.1 shows responses to the question “Have you ever contacted an elected official” from Pew Research Center: American Trends Panel Wave 31, conducted in January 2018 on a nationally representative panel of randomly selected US adults with a sample size of 4656. This has been included to display results for the income level assumptions under RCM.

Table 4.1: Income Range and Reported Contact with Elected Official

Income Range	No (%)	Yes (%)
Less than \$10,000	64.29	35.71
\$10,000 to less than \$20,000	58.54	41.46
\$20,000 to less than \$30,000	51.93	48.07
\$30,000 to less than \$40,000	47.50	52.50
\$40,000 to less than \$50,000	40.06	59.94
\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	46.32	53.68
\$75,000 to less than \$100,000	41.55	58.45
\$100,000 to less than \$150,000	35.73	64.27
\$150,000 or more	37.91	62.09

Table 4.2 shows responses to same question from Pew Research Center: American Trends Panel Wave 31, testing the assumptions about contact by education level under the RCM.

Table 4.2: Education Level Contact with Elected Official

Education Level	No (%)	Yes (%)
Associate’s degree	45.85	54.15
College graduate/some postgrad	42.06	57.94
High school graduate	63.55	36.45
Less than high school	71.38	28.62
Postgraduate	32.53	67.47
Some college, no degree	47.45	52.55

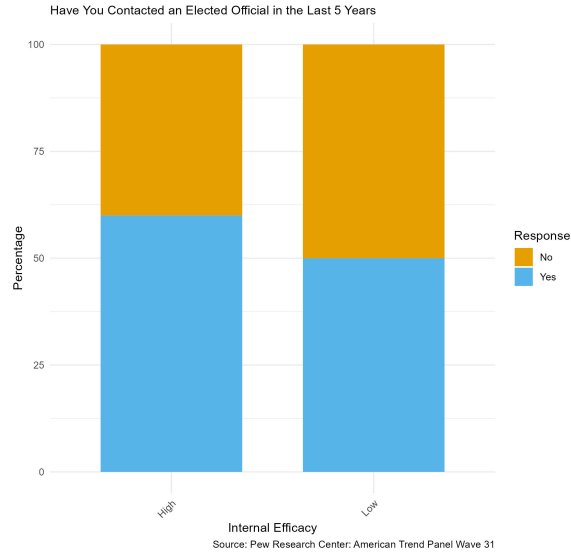
The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press survey, conducted in January 2004 on a nationally representative panel of randomly selected US adults with a sample size of 1,506 asked respondents the same question on contact and additionally included a question on union membership. This has been included to display results for the occupation assumption under RCM in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Have you Contacted an Elected Official in the Last 5 Years

	Union Membership	No (%)	Yes (%)
Yes. Spouse, Self, or Both	59	41	
No	69	31	

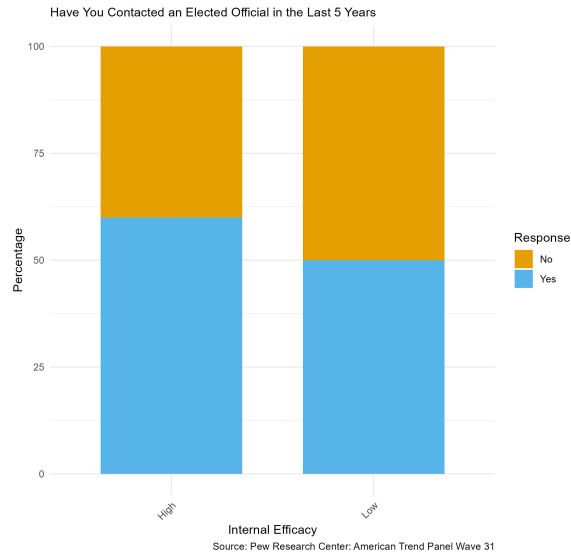
Figure 4.1 shows responses to the same contact question using the respondent’s internal efficacy level to examine reported contact rates. To create a measure for internal efficacy, the following question from the Pew Research Center: American Trends Panel Wave 31 was used: “Which statement comes closer to your views, even if neither is exactly right?”. The respondent was coded to possess high internal efficacy if they answered “Ordinary citizens can do a lot to influence the government in Washington if they are willing to make the effort” and coded to possess low internal efficacy if they answered, “There’s not much ordinary citizens can do to influence the government in Washington”.

Figure 4.1: Percentage of Contact by Internal Efficacy



To create a measure for external efficacy the following question from the Pew Research Center: American Trends Panel Wave 31 was used “Suppose you contacted your member of the U.S. House of Representatives with a problem. How likely do you think it is that they would help you address it?”, with response categories; “Very likely”, “Somewhat likely”, “Not very likely”, “Not likely at all”. All response categories have been included in the graph for Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Percentage of Contact by External Efficacy



Important Note About Standing Survey Results Regarding Contact:

Standing work on political participation often centers on traditional modes of participation, mainly; voting, donating, and volunteering for campaigns (Brady, 1999). A significant subset of the studies have attempted to measure levels of citizen-initiated contact with elected officials, however, the reason for contact is rarely defined. This fails to account for the difference in contact with an official to issue a complaint or offer a preference on a policy position, and, contact that is specific to request for services, which Verba and Nie (1972) refer to as “particularized contact.” This specification proves particularly important when assessing existing literature under the PCT Model.

In their seminal work, *Participation in America*, Verba and Nie find that among the 2,549 respondents, 20 percent report contacting a local government official, and 18 percent report contacting a state or national government official in regards to “some issue or problem” (1972, 31). When narrowing the responses to the citizen-initiated contact question to differentiate particularized contact, 65 percent stated it was contact related to “broader social issues”, while only one-third initiated contact for the purpose of requesting services related to casework (1972, 67). While the figures above indicate relatively high contact among the expected demographics under the RCM model, none of the questions asked in the associated surveys specified or measured particularized contact. While the prior figures can begin to show evidence of who is likely to contact a representative,

without the specification of “particularize contact” it is hard to determine which of these contacts was specific to casework, and which were issue-based.

4.2 Motivation Models

We can also use survey findings to test the assumptions about the motivation for particularized contact.

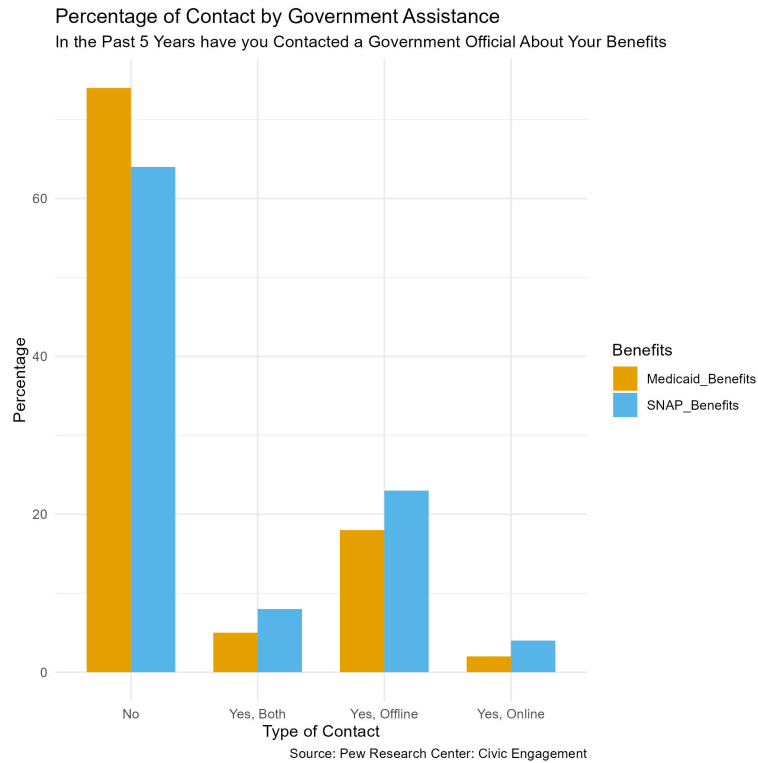
Table 4.4 shows responses to the question “In the past 12 months have you contacted a government official” from a 2018 Family History of Incarceration Study conducted by Roper Center at Cornell University amongst 1960 respondents with family incarceration experience. This is by far the largest demographic that responded yes to a question about contact showing support for the pain and loss motivational factor, as theorized by Jennings, for contact under the RCM.

Table 4.4: In the past 12 months, have you contacted a government official?

Among those with Family Incarceration Experience	
No (%)	22
Yes (%)	78

Figure 4.3 shows responses to the elected official contact question from the PEW American Life and Civic Engagement Poll specific to respondents who indicated they received Medicaid or SNAP benefits. These results speak directly to the Michener direct contact with ineffectual government services assumption under the RCM.

Figure 4.3: Percentage of Contact by Benefit Recipients



Overall, the findings from the referenced surveys are encouraging for the participator assumptions made under the RCM. Among respondents who make 150k+ a year 55 percent reported contacting an elected official while those respondents making less than 10k a year only reported contact at about 24 percent. The assumption regarding participation based on education level also performed as expected with 67 percent of respondents with graduate degrees reporting contact, while only 29 percent of those with less than high school reported contact. The developed measures of efficacy also show that those with high external efficacy report contact at a much higher rate. For the motivation assumptions, those who experience the pain and loss of separation from family members through incarceration report contact at a significantly higher rate.

Out of the 4656 respondents in the PEW survey, 2564, or roughly 55 percent reported contact in the last five years. If we use Verba and Nie's baseline for particularized contact at one-third of all contact, we can assume that the overall baseline for contacts directly related to requesting assistance from an elected official is roughly 18 percent of all respondents. Given what we now know about the types of constituents that make contact and the assumptions we can make given Verba and Nie's

findings, the RCM model is failing to reach constituents who would be in most need of the vital services provided by representatives through casework.

CHAPTER 5

Identifying Access Gaps Under the RCM

With a better understanding of who we can expect to participate in the RCM, a bit more can be said about who the model is assumed to leave behind.

When considering the civic knowledge necessary to request services from a representative in the RCM, survey results indicate many constituents are unprepared to participate. Americans identify less strongly with and know less about politics in their states and local communities (Hopkins, 2018). In an extensive exploratory analysis Steven Rogers (2023) finds that, compared to their knowledge of federal actors and systems, the average American possesses little knowledge about who represents them in their state legislature, or, the state agencies meant to serve them on the most local level.

Knowledge of bureaucratic systems that deliver key goods reveals deeper disparities. In a Kaiser study from 2023, when asked; “If you wanted to contact a government agency for help dealing with your health insurance, do you know who you would call?” only 24 percent of respondents indicated they would. While it is argued that there is little need to update this information once it is acquired as these types of facts are expected to remain constant over time (Jerit et al., 2006), constituents must first know these vital services are available to utilize in the RCM. In a review of the official websites of all 100 Virginia House of Delegates members serving in the 2022-2023 legislative session, 25 percent mentioned constituent services on their website, with only 8 percent specific information on how constituents could file a request for casework. See Appendix A for the full list.

When considering traditionally marginalized demographics extensive disparities persist. Knowledge gaps emerge when assessing respondents’ political knowledge using the SES measures; these persist even after controlling for differences in resources (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Blacks and Latinos are over-represented in the subset of the least politically informed (Delli, Carpini, and Keeter, 1996; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995) reflecting persistent and systematic knowledge gaps between whites and nonwhites (Abrajano and Alvarez, 2010; Haynes, and Ramakrishnan, 2016; Tate, 2003).

In addition to the knowledge and civic skills benefits that correlate with higher income, findings highlight concerns about income gaps in the request and provision of services through casework. Verba, Scholzman, Brady and Nie (1993) discovered that constituents who receive government assistance through means-tested programs contact representatives about those programs at a much lower rate than those who receive support through non-means-tested programs. 13.8 percent of respondents who receive veterans benefits reported particularized contact compared to only 2.6 percent of respondents who receive SNAP. To directly compare governmental healthcare programs, 6.1 percent of Medicare recipients reported contact while only 3.4 percent of those who receive Medicaid, displaying a nearly 50 percent increase in particularized contact for those receiving non-means-tested services.

Most work examining income-based access gaps has centered on policy preferences, but these findings inform assumptions made about elected representative's responsiveness to contact by different subsets of constituents under the RCM. Studies have shown that representatives favor the preferences of high-income constituents over those of low-income constituents (Ellis, 2012; Hayes, 2013) and that the opinions of low-income constituents who do contact representatives are taken less seriously (Butler, 2014). Representatives also show deference to those who have the means to contribute to their campaign. A 2016 field experiment finds that senior policymakers made themselves available between three and four times more often when informed that the prospective attendees were political donors (Kalla and Broockman, 2016). While this does not directly speak to access to the provision of casework, it does offer support for assumptions about whom the representative is most responsive to under the RCM.

Studies on internal and external political efficacy also reveal vast racial and gender disparities resulting in alarming efficacy gaps. Findings on feelings of efficacy mirror the findings presented for many of the disproportionately disadvantaged groups. In a 1972 study of schoolchildren, Abramson finds that Black schoolchildren tend to have lower feelings of internal efficacy than white schoolchildren, reflected in their belief that they have little to no ability to make change. He also shows that Black school children tend to have lower levels of external efficacy, reflected in their lower feelings of trust toward political leaders than white school children. Women have also been shown to exhibit lower levels of internal efficacy, reporting lower levels of confidence to impact politics effectively than similarly situated men (Wen, Xiaoming, and George, 2013).

Demographics of both the representative and the constituent also impair natural communication in the absence of intentional programs meant to deliberately contact all constituents in a district resulting in alarming racial gaps. Grose et. al (2007) argues that Black representatives, or white representatives who hire minority staff in district offices can allow elected representatives to make use of existing connections within the Black community to engage constituents, connections that prove vital to the equitable distribution of services. Qualitative work done during the 2007 Grose et. al study suggests few white members are willing to bridge the communication gap, evidenced in a startling quote; *“When our interviews asked about how they reached African-American constituents, a white staffer for a white Republican legislator claimed, “They pulled out all the Blacks, [of the old pre-1992 district for the neighboring African-American legislator who was elected in an African-American majority district] You should go talk to their office.”* This assertion ignored the fact that fully 20 percent of the legislator’s district was African-American (2007, p.460). Minority constituents are also less likely to receive responses from representatives, particularly Republicans (Gell-Redman et al., 2018). These findings are supported by Verba and Nie’s findings that report Black respondents were more than twice as likely as white respondents to believe a "go-between" would be needed if they wanted to approach a government official, and that if needed they reported feeling "less likely" than white respondents to believe they could find such a "go-between" (1972, 164). In essence, the failure to address demographic disparities in representative staffing and outreach programs perpetuates communication barriers, exacerbating racial disparities in constituent engagement and service provision, as underscored by both contemporary and historical research findings.

5.1 Initial Support for Access Gap Assumptions under the RCM

Turning again to the PEW data we can check assumptions made about access gaps under the RCM. For all gaps under consideration the question “If you were to contact an elected official about a problem, How likely would they be to help?” will be referenced.

5.2 Education Gaps and Income Gaps

Table 5.1 displays the responses by education. Those with postgraduate degrees responded that representatives would be “somewhat” or “very likely” to help at 49 percent. Those respondents with

only a high school diploma responded that representatives would be "not very likely" or "not likely at all to help" at 63 percent.

Table 5.1: Expected Result of Contact by Education Level

Level	Not Likely at All (%)	Not Very Likely (%)	Somewhat Likely (%)	Very Likely (%)
Associate's degree	14.48	34.38	30.81	7.33
College graduate/some postgrad	13.29	28.61	23.67	6.85
High school graduate	16.10	30.74	22.16	5.79
Less than high school	21.77	33.35	27.26	11.62
Postgraduate	12.64	31.47	32.51	9.39
Some college, no degree	15.32	40.07	31.11	9.13

For all income categories over 50k, at least 36 percent of respondents indicated that the representative would be "somewhat likely" or "very likely to help". For those making less than 20k, 60 percent responded "not very likely" or "not likely at all to help".

5.3 Racial Gaps

Figure 5.1 displays reported contact disparities between Black and white respondents. Black respondents reported contact at a rate 17 percent lower than white respondents.

Figure 5.1: Percentage of Contact by Race

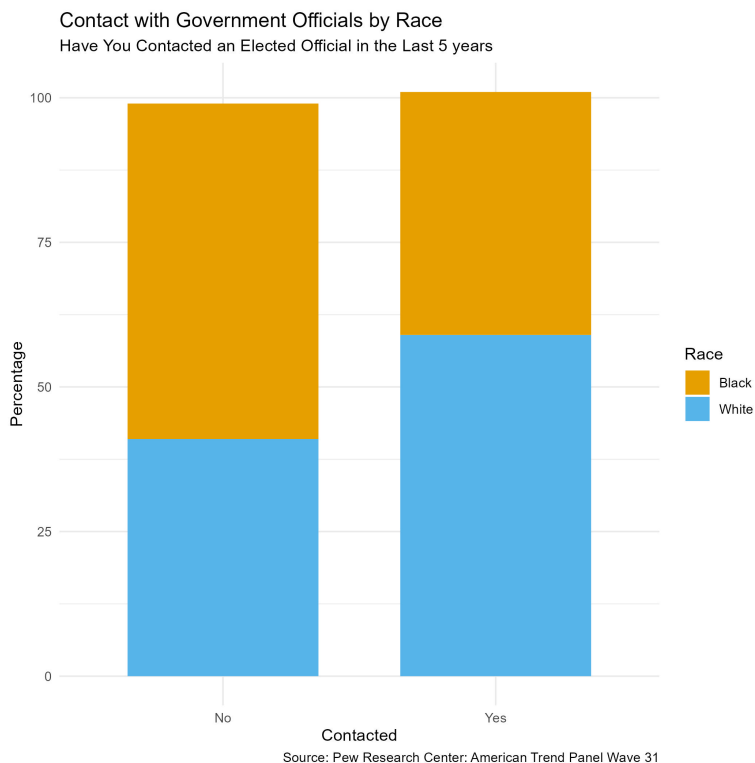
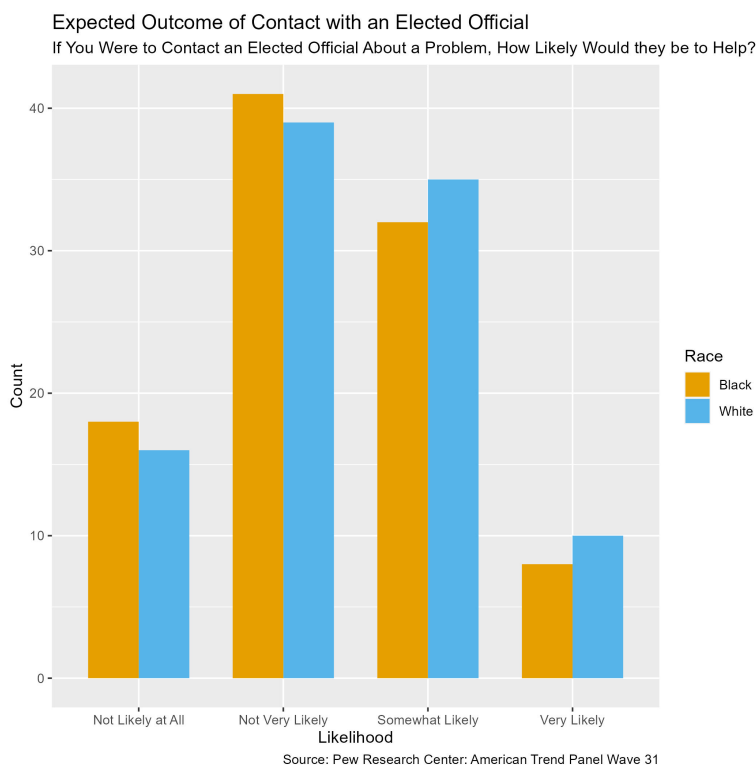


Figure 5.2 displays the belief that a representative would be helpful if contacted about a problem by race using the contact and likely to help questions from the Pew surveys cited above. A lack of trust that contact would result in meaningful help from a representative may explain the lower rate of contact as Black respondents as expected under the RCM.

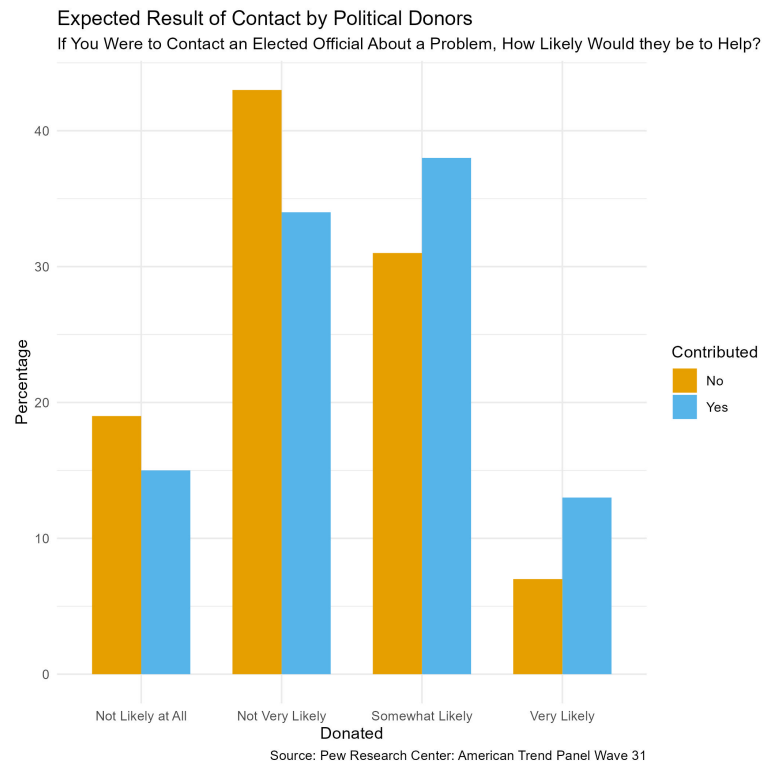
Figure 5.2: Expected Results of Contact by Race



5.4 Campaign Contributions as a Means of Access

Figure 5 displays the indicated belief that a representative would be helpful if contacted about a problem by respondents who indicated they had contributed to a political campaign in the last year. The disparities in perceived assistance are best displayed here as 51 percent of those who indicated they had contributed responded “somewhat likely” or “very likely to help” compared to only 31.7 percent of those who had not contributed to a campaign. This exacerbates standing income disparities as those with the means to support a campaign may feel that their money buys access to elected representatives and the vital services they can provide.

Figure 5.3: Expected Results of Contact by Contribution



CHAPTER 6

PCT as a Means to Overcoming Access-Gaps

The RCM requires that the constituent act as the first-mover in the request for services. As shown above, this disproportionately benefits constituents who already have the skills, knowledge, and means necessary to do so. Under PCT the roles are reversed and the representative acts as the first-mover, reducing the costs of contact for the constituent.

PCT requires that representatives, and researchers alike, accept the Political Reality Model (PRM) at the heart of PCT's theoretical expectations. First introduced by Abramson in 1972, PRM argues that: *"in a political system characterized by majority rule, minorities realize that they have little political power, and they respond to this reality by exhibiting negative political attitudes and expecting little representation in the political system."* PCT argues that the representative as first-mover model has the power to decrease feelings of minimal political power, decrease reported negative political feelings, and increase expectations of effective representation through casework in the political system.

While the PRM originated within the study of majority-minority districts where the identified minority was primarily Black voters, PCT extends Abramson's theory to include; district members who identify with the minority opposition party rather than the majority party currently in power in their district. PCT also extends PRM to include those who are placed relatively low on the SES scale.

PCT posits that when the representative acts as the first mover, initiating contact with the constituent, informing them of the types of casework representatives can undertake on their behalf, and asking if the constituent has any issues with governmental agencies, traditional access gaps that prevent constituents from receiving pivotal services will be overcome. PCT benefits both the constituent and the representative by increasing the number of requests for casework, as well as increasing the proportion of casework that represents constituents who are of marginalized

communities. While further work is required to determine if these effects are reliant on the successful completion of requested services, the following assumptions are made under PCT.

PCT overcomes the knowledge gaps by requiring the representative to act as first-mover in communication informing citizens of institutions and procedures. PCT overcomes the racial gaps by reducing the communication disparities for Black constituents not represented by Black members, and by eliminating the need for extensive established networks within the Black community. PCT overcomes income gaps by extending the representative's network beyond donor and partisan networks. PCT overcomes efficacy gaps by eliminating the need for the constituent to feel either internally or externally efficacious to initiate contact. PCT increases trust among those who exhibit low trust based on expectations from the Political Reality Model. PCT reduces negative affect, increasing trust and approval for the representative, while reducing polarization among those who identify with an opposing party to their member. PCT prevents constituents from having to rely on motivation initiated by traumatic experience, or, reaching rock-bottom as a result of poor service.

PCT should prove easy to implement as the representative can extend the use of automatic dialing software used during campaigns by extending the call list to include all constituents of the district including those of the opposing party. District staff and volunteers are already familiar with the phone banking procedures and can utilize PCT outside of the campaign season to contact constituents within the district at random.

For constituents, the benefits of PCT are clear. In *Beyond SES* Brady, Scholzman, and Verba are clear, the most common reasons people fail to participate is "*Because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked*" (1995, 271). PCT overcomes two of the three conditions while allowing those who do not want to receive services through casework the opportunity to decline such services.

For representatives, the benefits of PCT have the potential to be long-reaching. The standing theory presented by Mayhew, that representatives are single-minded reelection seekers, argues that representatives achieve these goals by: advertising, position-taking, and credit-claiming (1974).

PCT fulfills all three activities. A representative advertises themselves simply by making the call. They then are offered an opportunity to signal their position as an elected official who cares about helping their constituents navigate the agencies meant to provide them with crucial public services. Finally, a representative has the opportunity to credit-claim by directly intervening on the

constituent's behalf, rather than relying on the institutions and agencies to handle the constituent's issue in their absence.

PCT has the potential to resurrect the personal vote (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart, 2000), where constituents value the qualities of the candidate over party, a practice the field has long argued is dead in the era of high partisanship (Jacobson, 1989). Dancey et. al, (2023) use a survey experiment to show that offering respondents a personalized appeal, one that highlighted their Senators' commitment to casework (while also explaining what casework entails) increased approval ratings amongst respondents.

For constituents who do not share the same party affiliation as their member, PCT changes the means of communication from partisan cues to personal contact. Such changes are thought to have the potential to promote greater engagement between people who hold differing political opinions (Shapiro, 2013). While party identification serves as a strong-tie relationship, the non-partisan, personal nature of the call being conducted by a community member from their own district may present the opportunity for a weak-tie relationship, which has been shown to offer novel information that individuals would not otherwise encounter from their conversations within strong-tie relationships (Granovetter, 1973).

Data

Working with the support of Virginia State Delegate Sam Rasoul, I conducted a pilot test comparing three months of requests under the RCM from August 1, 2022 to October 31, 2022 to requests received during a three-month pilot of the PCT from August 1, 2023 to October 31, 2023. The RCM period resulted in thirty-one constituent-initiated contacts, with twenty-eight, resulting in service requests, while the PCT period generated 1728 contacts with 1169 requests for constituent services. This represents a 5474.19 percent increase in contact with constituents and a 25 percent increase in requests per contact.

Requests were then coded to reflect the type of service requested as a result of PCT calls. The district staff conducting the PCT pilot calls could categorize the call into ten different service types, with secondary categories for eight of the categories. The district staff then were able to make notes on the specific request, which allowed for further classification. Of the 1728 contacts under the PCT fifty-two did not have any current request for services, although many callers did indicate they were

simply happy to receive a check-in from their representative. One recipient of the PCT pilot call stated that they *“Loved Sam and supported his policies, especially community-driven service like this!”*. Four additional calls that fall under the no service needed category expressed aggression in response to the call, with one recipient stating *“Sam needs to act like a man!”*. Seven callers asked to be removed from the call list. 269 additional calls were classified by the district staff as “Bogus”. These include one recipient who wanted to discuss the dying music industry in Virginia, and one who believed they were being personally harassed by Governor Northam, who notably was no longer serving as Governor at the time of the call.

Some callers did not request any services but did want to express their preferences on policy; this removes an additional twenty-eight calls from the PCT observations. An additional forty-seven calls were met with non-governmental-related requests, which the district staff directed to the appropriate community organization as appropriate, or in some cases were handled directly by district office staff and volunteers. For example, one elderly woman who received a PCT call complained that she could not find an affordable service to cut her grass, the following week a member of Del. Rasoul’s district staff followed up to offer to send services and were informed that the volunteer that took the call had personally driven over and cut the lady’s grass that weekend.

Finally, many calls were legitimate service requests, but fell under the purview of the federal representative for the area, or, would be handled directly by the Governor. These calls were directly forwarded to the Constituent Services Director for the appropriate department within the Governor’s Administration, their House of Representatives member or the Senator’s office. These types of requests remove an additional 147 observations. Of note, of the calls forwarded to Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, 89.1 percent represented issues that plague marginalized communities such as Medicare coverage and VA benefits.

Sixty-two additional calls escaped categorization, mainly due to a lack of additional notes from the district staff member. This leaves the final number of valid observations under the PCT trial period which qualify as requests for constituent service at 1116.

Under the thirty-one contacts from constituents during the RCM trial period, one request for service was escalated and forwarded to the Senator for Virginia, one call represented a request to express a preference on policy, and one represented a constituent who wished to complain about the government in general. These observations have been removed leaving the final number of

valid observations under the RCM trial period which qualify as requests for constituent service at twenty-eight.

Table 1 displays the new categories and the number of observations under the RCM and PCT trial period. The table also displays how many of each category requests fall under the new categories of representing marginalized people or people who are identified as privileged. This determination was made based on the nature of the requests and the notes available from the district office staff. For example; a district staff member may categorize two callers as needing services related to “Housing”. Of these, one indicates they need assistance in navigating the public housing inspection office as they have complained multiple times of poor conditions. During the PCT trial, one constituent stated, *“The residents and myself included, complain, regarding having the outdoor trash cans located inside the hallways, mice, and rodents, extremely high volume of roaches.”*, this constituent had tried to navigate the system independently and could not get anyone in the public housing department to respond. This would be coded as a “marginalized” case. Another caller, during the RCM trial, was classified under the “Housing” category and had called the office for help navigating the eviction process as one of their tenants was three months behind on rent. This would be coded as a “privileged” case. Of note, many of the staff notes for cases involving requests directed to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) failed to include enough information to code the request as either “marginalized” or “privileged”. As such, all observations regarding requests related to the DMV will be coded as “neutral”.

Table 4: Number of Observations under PCT and RCM with New Categories

NewCat	N under PCT	Pct Marginalized	N under RCM	Pct Marginalized
Unemployment	466	100	10	100
Transportation	7	28.6	0	-
Taxes	46	12.5	0	-
Social Services	72	100	0	-
Small Business	59	0	5	0
Senior	14	100	1	0
Housing	230	84.3	0	-
Healthcare	148	68.9	1	100
Education	34	76.5	1	100
DMV	63	-	1	-
Broadband Access	7	100	0	-
Local Issues	27	7.4	7	14.3
Justice System	26	100	2	100
Total	1106	78.1	28	53.6

Under the RCM pilot, 53.6 percent of service requests represent marginalized people. During the PCT trial, this increased to 78.1 percent. In simple words, by using the PCT model instead of relying upon constituents to act as the first-mover under the RCM, elected representatives can increase the percentage of their casework that represents marginalized communities by 45.68 percent.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

There remain large portions of the PCT that require more study. To parse out individual-level effects a large-scale panel survey experiment must be conducted to determine how PCT impacts levels of efficacy, trust, knowledge, and approval for the treated. While it is too soon to make any firm assumptions of such effects, a preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted using the 2023 Virginia State Elections to see if anything could be determined regarding partisanship and negative affect. Again, these results are only preliminary and extremely speculative, however, results indicate that out of 2571 voting precincts in Virginia, only 110 offered the voter the option to cast a split ticket for the Republican State Senator and a Democratic State Delegate or vice versa. Of the 17 precincts that make up Del. Rasoul's district, five precincts offered the opportunity for the voter to cast a vote for a Republican in the State Senate race. 100 percent of these precincts resulted in a win for Del. Rasoul in the House of Delegates race for the precinct. Of additional concern, we might expect under these circumstances that a large amount of Republicans in these precincts may simply choose not to cast a ballot in the House of Delegates race as Del. Rasoul was running uncontested. This phenomenon of ballot-roll off could undercut the assumption under PCT regarding the decrease in negative affect and the increase in the personal vote. Again, these results are speculative at best, as Virginia does not release detailed voting files, but upon first analysis, this does not appear to be the case. In precincts with the split ticket option, the average ballot roll-off percentage for these precincts was only 5.8 percent. Per these results, it is safe to assume a large portion of Republican voters at the State Senate level split their ticket and voted for Del. Rasoul in the House of Delegates race. This offers weak but positive preliminary evidence that the pilot calls under PCT during the three months prior to the 2023 Virginia election, of which we know a portion reached Republicans, may have acted as a mechanism to reduce negative affect and increase trust.

In addition to the extensive additional analysis necessary to identify individual-level treatment effects, we must also consider whether any positive effect would be contingent on requiring services.

PCT argues that the simple act of receiving the call should be strong enough treatment to illicit some positive movement, however, this impact may only apply to those who have a concern the office can be informed of through the call and meet. Amongst those who do report problems that result in a service request, any increase in efficacy, trust, or approval, may correlate directly to the office's ability to successfully deliver said services. If the increase is solely dependent on the elected representative's provision of constituent services, there may be backlash effects that decrease efficacy, trust, and approval.

Finally, ideological differences about the size and scope of governmental services may prove to be a detriment to both constituent response, and elected representatives' willingness to implement PCT. If certain elected officials believe the country would be best served by privatizing such services, they would certainly be opposed to encouraging constituents to engage, and much less interested in serving as an advocate between agencies and voters. PCT may prove to be a party-specific strategy that exclusively works for Democratic incumbents. In an interview with Del. Rasoul when asked why he believed so strongly in the proactive provision of services, he states; *"If we say we are the party of good government, that we are interested in building trust, not fear, If we want to be the party of institutions, we have to be willing to do the work to show the voter that the institutions are working for them."*

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

In Conclusion, this paper has introduced a new way of conceptualizing the provision of constituent services. By outlining the assumptions behind PCT and explaining, at length, why PCT is a preferred model to RCM, this work hopes to serve as a proof of concept that PCT is the best practice for elected representatives interested in reaching and servicing the largest amount of constituents possible. Additionally, the theory has explained why PCT is a superior model for reaching traditionally marginalized populations and produced preliminary exploratory evidence that shows through successful PCT communications, larger proportions of the representative's casework can begin to represent these often overlooked voters.

Through PCT elected representatives have the power to reach voters on a personal level, helping them to navigate the governmental systems and agencies that most intimately impact their daily lives. In an era where even county school board elections have become nationalized affairs, former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill's famous quote "*All politics is local*", feels like an epitaph to a distant past. But PCT argues, that elected representatives have the power to breathe life back into democracy at a level where their actions and advocacy are most likely to reignite the trust in government we are so desperate to restore. Through simple outreach conducted by volunteer neighbors in the district, and by using this outreach to inquire into any problems the constituent may have, the elected representative reminds them that they matter. That their problems with the governmental agencies meant to serve them matter. That this entire system we have constructed to govern our nation is not only for their benefit but dependent upon their continued trust and participation. If American Democracy is best understood as a social contract, it is high time elected representatives lived up to their side of the deal. PCT offers a simple, cost-effective means for them to do just that.

APPENDIX A

All VA Delegates Website Analysis

Table A.1: Delegate Information

Delegate	District	Party	Constituent Services	Specific Instructions
Adams, Dawn M.	68th	D	No	No
Adams, Leslie R. (Les)	16th	R	No	No
Arnold, Jonathan E.	6th	R	Yes	No
Austin, Terry L.	19th	R	Yes	No
Avoli, G. John	20th	R	No	No
Ballard, Jason S.	12th	R	No	No
Batten, Amanda E.	96th	R	Yes	No
Bennett-Parker, Elizabeth B.	45th	D	No	No
Bloxom, Robert S., Jr.	100th	R	No	No
Bourne, Jeffrey M.	71st	D	Yes	Yes
Brewer, Emily M.	64th	R	No	No
Bulova, David L.	37th	D	Yes	No
Campbell, Ellen H.	24th	R	No	No
Carr, Betsy B.	69th	D	No	No
Cherry, Mike A.	66th	R	Yes	No
Convirs-Fowler, Kelly K.	21st	D	No	No
Cordoza, A.C.	91st	R	No	No
Coyner, Carrie E.	62nd	R	No	No
Delaney, Karrie K.	67th	D	No	No
Durant, Tara A.	28th	R	No	No
Edmunds, James E., II	60th	R	NA	NA
Fariss, C. Matthew	59th	R	No	No
Filler-Corn, Eileen	41st	D	Yes	No
Fowler, Hyland F. (Buddy), Jr.	55th	R	No	No

Delegate	District	Party	Constituent Services	Specific Instructions
Freitas, Nicholas J. (Nick)	30th	R	No	No
Gilbert, C. Todd	15th	R	No	No
Glass, Jackie Hope	89th	D	No	No
Gooditis, Gwendolyn W. (Wendy)	10th	D	NA	NA
Greenhalgh, Karen S.	85th	R	No	No
Guzman, Elizabeth R.	31st	D	No	No
Hayes, C. E. (Cliff), Jr.	77th	D	Yes	No
Head, Christopher T.	17th	R	No	No
Helmer, Daniel I.	40th	D	No	No
Herring, Charniele L.	46th	D	Yes	No
Hodges, M. Keith	98th	R	No	No
Hope, Patrick A.	47th	D	No	No
Hudson, Sally L.	57th	D	Yes	No
Jenkins, Clinton L.	76th	D	No	No
Kilgore, Terry G.	1st	R	No	No
Knight, Barry D.	81st	R	No	No
Kory, Kaye	38th	D	Yes	No
Krizek, Paul E.	44th	D	Yes	Yes
LaRock, David A.	33rd	R	No	No
Leftwich, James A. (Jay), Jr.	78th	R	No	No
Lopez, Alfonso H.	49th	D	No	No
Maldonado, Michelle Lopes	50th	D	No	No
March, Marie E.	7th	R	No	No
Marshall, Daniel W., III	14th	R	No	No
McGuire, John J., III	56th	R	No	No
McNamara, Joseph P.	8th	R	No	No
McQuinn, Delores L.	70th	D	No	No
Morefield, James W. (Will)	3rd	R	No	No

Delegate	District	Party	Constituent Services	Specific Instructions
Mullin, Michael P.	93rd	D	Yes	No
Mundon King, Candi	2nd	D	Yes	No
Murphy, Kathleen J.	34th	D	Yes	No
O'Quinn, Israel D.	5th	R	No	No
Orrock, Robert D., Sr.	54th	R	NA	NA
Plum, Kenneth R.	36th	D	Yes	No
Price, Marcia S. (Cia)	95th	D	No	No
Ransone, Margaret B.	99th	R	NA	NA
Rasoul, Sam	11th	D	Yes	Yes
Reid, David A.	32nd	D	No	No
Robinson, Roxann L.	27th	R	Yes	No
Roem, Danica A.	13th	D	Yes	Yes
Runion, Chris	25th	R	No	No
Scott, Don L., Jr.	80th	D	No	No
Scott, Phillip A.	88th	R	No	No
Seibold, Holly M.	35th	D	Yes	Yes
Sewell, Briana D.	51st	D	No	No
Shin, Irene	86th	D	No	No
Sickles, Mark D.	43rd	D	No	No
Simon, Marcus B.	53rd	D	No	No
Simonds, Shelly A.	94th	D	No	No
Subramanyam, Suhas	87th	D	No	No
Sullivan, Richard C. (Rip), Jr.	48th	D	No	No
Tata, Anne Ferrell H.	82nd	R	No	No
Taylor, Kimberly A.	63rd	R	No	No
Torian, Luke E.	52nd	D	Yes	Yes
Tran, Kathy KL	42nd	D	Yes	Yes
Vacant -	79th	NA	NA	NA

Delegate	District	Party	Constituent Services	Specific Instructions
Vacant -	83rd	NA	NA	NA
Vacant -	74th	NA	NA	NA
Vacant -	84th	NA	NA	NA
Vacant -	58th	NA	NA	NA
Vacant -	22nd	NA	NA	NA
VanValkenburg, Schuyler T.	72nd	D	No	No
Wachsmann, Howard Otto, Jr.	75th	R	Yes	No
Walker, Wendell S.	23rd	R	No	No
Wampler, William C., III	4th	R	No	No
Ward, Jeion A.	92nd	D	No	No
Ware, R. Lee	65th	R	Yes	No
Watts, Vivian E.	39th	D	Yes	Yes
Webert, Michael J.	18th	R	No	No
Wiley, William D. (Bill)	29th	R	No	No
Willett, Rodney T.	73rd	D	No	No
Williams, Wren M.	9th	R	No	No
Williams Graves, Angela	90th	D	No	No

APPENDIX B

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