Lobbying is for everyone!
A message from FCLCA clerk Laurel Gord

As part of FCLCA’s strategic planning process (more about that in our next issue), I’ve had the opportunity to talk recently with many of our allies and coalition partners about what FCLCA brings to the table and how we can have the maximum impact on California politics.

They told me that our direct lobbying at the Capitol is very effective and in fact invaluable when it comes to criminal justice legislation. Our work helps defeat the “bad” bills and helps get good legislation passed.

But you know what else they told me? The more FCLCA can get its supporters to weigh in on proposed legislation with their legislators, the more impact we will have. The key to our success is you – the citizen lobbyist!

We put this advice to good use this summer when SB 399 (a bill that would have created a process for juveniles sentenced to life without parole to petition for resentencing) faced a tough, close vote in the Assembly.

Dedicated FCLCA supporters from Santa Monica Meeting stepped up and lobbied hard for SB 399’s passage in their own backyard, as did many members of many other Meetings around the state.

In Santa Monica, it all started when Anthony Manousos, clerk of Pacific Yearly Meeting Peace and Social Action Committee, brought the plight of youthful offenders to our Meeting. In our discussion, it became apparent that some of us in the Santa Monica Meeting community were ready to organize delegations and plan visits to legislators and their staff in our districts.

We decided to focus this first round of visits on the Assembly Members, particularly those who were not yet committed to an “aye” vote. The plan was to combine a “get to know you” visit with a plea for passage of SB 399, as well as other bills that FCLCA was following.

We found that among those who stepped forward we had FOUR Assembly districts covered. We decided that we would be happy to meet with a staff person if the Assembly Member was not available. Indeed, in these days of term limits, when elected officials come and go, many feel that that making relationships with staff members is an effective strategy. One person from each delegation volunteered to take on the task of setting up the meetings.

Once the meetings were scheduled, we saw the real value of having a professional lobbyist on staff. Jim Lindburg, FCLCA’s hardworking legislative advocate in Sacramento, furnished each group with a brief history of their Assembly Member’s relationship with FCLCA, and with up to the minute information about current bills to craft our message.

We met with staff at the offices of Karen Bass, Ted Lieu, Julia Brownley and with Assembly Member Mike Feuer himself. Each meeting yielded something of value. First of all, we created a respectful direct relationship. Second, in several cases it was very interesting to hear the thinking behind points of disagreement. This was especially true with Mike Feuer who told us what changes would have allowed him to support one of the bills we were lobbying for, and also shared some of his thoughts on what it would take to change the climate of public opinion regarding criminal justice issues.

Most of us had never been part of a delegation to a legislator before. Some of us were a little nervous, but we reminded ourselves that democracy is a hands-on process. Legislators work for us and need to hear from us. We all came away feeling energized and more confident in our ability to work with legislators as important issues come up in the future. We felt empowered!

One member of our delegation, FCLCA board member Elizabeth Ralston, had this to say about the three legislative visits she participated in: “I’m more convinced than ever that it’s crucial for those of us who support fairer, more humane sentencing and incarceration to make our views known to state legislators. Legislative visits are a great way to do this, because they represent a two-way conversation in which we can learn to do our advocacy more effectively.”

I encourage you to make a commitment to organize and participate in a delegation to your legislator. You can do it right there in your district. There is nothing to lose and everything to gain!