

Tips for Communicating with Legislators



General Tips

Why advocate?

Every piece of legislation starts as an idea, and that idea can come from a legislator, a staff member, a professional lobbyist, or an “average citizen.” Legislation succeeds or fails depending on a number of factors. Advocacy organizations represent the views of like-minded individuals when it comes to supporting or opposing bills, but the most powerful voice still belongs to the individual constituent.

Legislators appreciate hearing from their constituents. Don't forget they are elected to represent YOUR views.

When **contacting your legislators**, a short sentence or two about why you personally support or oppose a certain proposal is often best. Most importantly, always be courteous and clear when communicating with your legislators.

- Be specific.
- Ask for action.
- Use time wisely.
- Plan out your remarks.
- Solicit support from your legislator.
- Tell the truth.
- Be respectful.
- Follow-up: write a thank you note.

What is appropriate to ask?

- You may ask elected officials to do any of the following:
- Introduce, vote for, or vote against legislation.
- Cosponsor legislation introduced by someone else in the same chamber of the legislature.
- Send a letter to an agency about a specific concern or sign onto a letter drafted by another legislator.
- Send a letter to another member of the legislature in an influential position, such as the chair or ranking member of a particular committee.
- Help you find and gather information from agencies and research services.

- Submit a statement to the federal Congressional Record or official state record of legislative action, if applicable.

What is inappropriate to ask?

- Elected officials cannot do the following, however:
- Take action for the specific purpose of benefitting you and/or your business
- Sponsor legislation that is not within their jurisdiction, for example—
- House members cannot cosponsor or vote for Senate legislation, and vice versa (although they have the option of introducing companion legislation in the chamber in which they serve).
- Federal legislators cannot cosponsor or vote for state-level legislation, and vice versa.

Timing is very important: If your issue is imminent, contacting your legislator quickly by phone or e-mail can be most effective. However, if time allows, take advantage of additional influential techniques, like writing a letter or meeting with your legislator and/or their staff.

Voice your position: Legislators act on behalf of their constituency. Even if your legislator does not currently support your position, contacting them and voicing your concerns is a good way to put your issue on their radar screen.

Know the issue: Legislators are concerned with multiple issues, so be sure to provide good information. Offer information, including background or leave behind materials explaining the issue. Additionally, ask questions about your legislator's stance toward the issue, and be ready for your legislators to ask about your position.

Build relationships with staff: Legislative staff are extremely important, and it is very beneficial to develop a working relationship with staff assigned to your issue. When it comes time for action, knowing someone to call will pay off and these relationships will prove invaluable.

Share information. It is very important to relay any information you receive from your legislator to your organization, community, family and friends. Information helps to broaden the audience by increasing awareness of your issue.

Calling Your Legislator

Phone It In!

If the time is limited, then it's time to take immediate action by calling your lawmakers! Your phone call could be the call that helps push forward our fight to preserve America's hallowed ground. To find their contact information, use one of the tools at the right.

Key things to remember when you call:

Be professional. Establish credibility by communicating your position in a courteous, factual and professional way. Additionally, make sure you speak clearly, loudly and slowly when talking to your legislators or their staff.

Provide your information. Legislators and their staff want to know how their constituents feel about certain issues, so once you identify yourself as a constituent (not to mention a voter), they will be much more receptive.

Knowledge is power: Legislators are concerned with multiple issues. A quick and factual call not only saves time but is easily absorbed and remembered by legislators and their staff. Report facts and figures and stay on message to make the best argument.

Thank staff for their time and consideration: Legislators' offices hear complaints all the time, and just like anyone else, they feel rewarded when their actions are appreciated. Always say thank you.

Writing Your Legislator

Letter writing campaigns, both physical mail and e-mail, enable you to directly express your position on an issue to your Senators or Representative. As in all writing, make sure to know your audience. It's also important to be courteous, clear, concise and factual when communicating with your legislators.

After finding the best way to contact your legislator, the additional tips below will help you begin:

Identify yourself as a constituent. Legislators and their staff are much more receptive once they know they're talking to a constituent (not to mention, a voter).

Voice your position. After identifying yourself as a constituent, begin with a short explanation about why you personally support or oppose a certain issue. You may want to include how this affects your community and the local economy.

Know the issue. Legislators are often concerned with multiple issues, so make your call count by providing information sourced from sound, scientific research. A quick and factual message will demonstrate to your legislators and their staff that you are a well-informed constituent who means business.

Always say thank you. Legislators' offices hear complaints all the time, and just like anyone else, they feel rewarded when their actions are appreciated. Thank you notes are also a great way to keep your issue at top-of-mind.

Schedule a Meeting

Meeting with your legislator or staffers in the office is an excellent way to voice your position. An in-person visit will give you a chance to look them in the eye and voice your concerns. Not to mention, you will stand out from thousands of phone calls, mail and e-mail messages.

Once you've tracked them down, it's time to plan a strategy for your meeting.

Legislators are concerned with multiple issues, so be sure to provide good information. Offer information, including background or leave behind materials explaining the issue. Leaving visual handouts, flyers or petitions, is a great way to explain your stance on the issue.

Ask questions about your legislator's stance toward the issue and be ready for your legislators to ask about your position.

Developing a relationship with staff is important. When it comes time for action, knowing someone to call will pay off. Don't be discouraged if staff members are young. These individuals will one day be old hands, and thanks to your relationship with them, they will be able to open doors previously closed.

Always say thank you. Follow-up after your meeting by writing a thank you note to each staff member with whom you met. Also be sure to thank your legislator for his or her consideration. Additionally, it is important to relay any information you receive from your legislator to your organization, community, family and friends.

Other Ways to Take Action

Use whichever medium is most comfortable and convenient for you. Whether you visit in-person, call or write, be sure to always give your legislator your name, address and telephone number, so they know you are one of their constituents (it makes you a big deal in their eyes). You can support pharmacy by **contacting your representatives** and speaking out about our **current initiatives**.