

Five Ways to Communicate to Legislators

Face to Face, Letters, Emails, Telephone Calls and Testimony

Content adapted from document created by Representative Jacqueline Sly



Face to Face with Legislators

Hey You! Advocate. It's Showtime. All the work you have done has come down to communicating what you want to the people that can get you what you want...Legislators. The good thing is that you have all you need to know to get the job done... and that is your story and your experiences. Remember, you are legitimate and don't let a legislator make you feel that you are not. Now, below you will find a few helpful strategies to help you stay on task and get the most out of your visit with a legislator.

1. Be concise to the point—keep jargon to minimum
2. Ask short and specific questions
3. Be dependable and honest—if you don't know, then say that you will get the answer later and do it.
4. Have an understanding of how your issue plays with other residents of the state
5. Compromise is not a failure, its progress
6. Know your opposition and what they are saying about your issue

Some things to keep in mind about Legislators are:

1. Legislators are elected to represent you
2. Legislators like to be informed and told something they do not know
3. Legislators need to hear from people that live in their district
4. Legislators like good press and do not like bad press
5. Legislators time is limited

Letters

Letters are excellent opportunities to state your position and get your point across. In the letter, you want to communicate your issue, the impact the issue has on you, your profession and/or community. Letters should always be addressed to the legislator you want to communicate to and should be mailed in reasonable time for the legislator to read it, follow up with you if desired and make a decision.

Email

Emails can also be an effective way of communicating to legislators. Keep in mind that because emails are easier to send than letters, your email will be competing with many others in the inbox of the legislator. Put the bill number and a word or two about the bill in the subject line.

Telephone Calls

Getting a legislator on the phone may be very difficult but if you do, keep your statements focused and to the point. After you make your point, ask the question of support. Something like, "can we count on your vote?" If the legislator is uncommitted, do not be combative; ask what you can do to help the legislator get more informed on the issue.

Legislative Testimony

Hearings are an opportunity for you to give public statement in support of your issue. Hearings are very important. Hearings are often on local public television and testimonies submitted in a hearing are submitted as public record for anyone to go back and read. Without your knowing, legislators read testimonies and often make decisions based on what they read or seek more information to learn about the issue. During your testimony, be brief. The hearings are conversational and a legislator may ask you a question and/or to elaborate. **KNOW YOUR ISSUE: Bill number, who sponsors the Bill, and the details of the Bill.** Avoid acronyms or lingo that will confuse. It is helpful to have copies of your testimony to give to the committee members. An example form to use as a guide is below...

Preparing Testimony

Print it on letterhead.

Date:

Name of Bill and Bill Number

Regarding: Senator _____, Representative _____, (Or committee name) I am (your name)

and I am here today to represent (organization) to testify in support /against Bill and title, organization or group.

I see the impact of _____ in my work at (name of your organization).

Thank you for your time.

(signature)

Your name, title

Organization

Phone number

E-mail address