

Tips for Contacting Elected Representatives

Writing

Letters, faxes and e-mails are effective ways of communicating with your elected representatives. Most officials recognize that each contact represents not only the position of the writer but also many other constituents who did not take the time to write.

These tips will help you increase the effectiveness of your written contact:

Use the correct form of address:

The Honorable _____

United States House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable _____

United States Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative _____:

Dear Senator _____:

Keep it brief: Letters should never be longer than one page, and should be limited to one issue. Aides read many letters on many issues in a day, so you need to be concise.

State Who You Are and Why You Are Writing: In the first paragraph, tell the official that you are a constituent, if applicable. Next, identify the issue about which you are writing. If your letters pertains to a specific piece of legislation, it helps to identify it by its bill number (e.g. H.R. ____ or S. ____).

Hit your three most important points: Choose the three strongest points that will be most effective in persuading legislators to support your position and flesh them out.

Personalize your letter: Tell your elected official why this legislation matters in his community or state. If possible, include a personal story to illustrate how this issue affects you. A human face on an issue can help shape the official's position.

Highlight your relationship: Mention any connect you have to the official—as a voter, a contributor, a volunteer, etc. If you have any other connection to the official or his/her staff, be sure to use it. The more connected the official feels to you, the more persuasive you will be.

You are the Expert: Elected representatives can't have deep knowledge of every issue. Without sounding condescending, remember that often the official or his/her staffer may not know much about the subject you are writing about.

Calling

You can also call your elected representatives and let them know where you stand on the issues. Although it is unlikely that you will get to talk to the official directly, you will be able to advocate a position with a staffer. The staffer should note your position and convey it in some form to the official. As with written communication, the assumption is each call represents many constituents, so you can have real impact, especially if you are organized and to the point.

Sample Conversation:

Staffer: Congressman Smith's office, how may I help you?

Caller: Hi, my name is Jane Doe. I'm a constituent and long time volunteer on his campaigns.

Staffer: The congressman appreciates your support. How can I help you today?

Caller: Please tell the Congressman to oppose the amendment granting citizens the right to arm bears. I work in sales, and I've discussed this bill with many of my customers. Virtually all of them agree that it's a bad policy that would make our community less safe.

Staffer: Thanks for your concern and your call Ms. Doe. I'll definitely pass on the message to Congressman Smith.