

## EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR LAWMAKERS

YOU, as a voting constituent, have the power to influence the outcome of legislation. All politicians are acutely aware that it is their constituents who hold the keys to their political futures. That makes your concern, as a constituent, of utmost concern to the politician. The most effective way to affect the outcome of legislation is to directly communicate with your view to your lawmakers.

Address your concerns first to the lawmakers who represent you, being mindful that you will likely deal first with his/her legislative staff who often play a key role in this process and have major input with the lawmakers.

In order of effectiveness, additional tips on successfully communicating with you elected officials follow:

### MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR ONE-ON-ONE AT THEIR LOCAL (DISTRICT) OFFICE

The most effective way to articulate your views to your elected official and to affect the outcome of legislation is, *by far*, to sit down and speak with your lawmakers face-to-face. While these personal visits are extremely productive, they also require the most amount of planning to ensure success. When planning a personal visit, you may elect to refer to the guidelines that follow:

- Schedule an appointment.** Elected officials have extremely hectic schedules. Call their district offices in advance to schedule an appointment
- Explain how the proposed legislation will directly affect you.** Use specific examples to show your lawmaker how the bill (or proposed measure) will strengthen our rights or benefits; specifically cite examples to support this position.
- If your lawmaker is unavailable, meet with his/her staff.** Your representative may not always be available for a meeting. In such cases, try to schedule an appointment with the staff member responsible for the related issues. Legislative staff will bring your concerns to your legislator's attention, and often have great influence on legislator's voting decisions, as well as, expertise on related issues. Following this meeting, send a letter to the staff member you met with as well as the legislator.
- Be Courteous!** Nothing is more harmful to a visit with a lawmaker than a constituent who is rude, vulgar, or threatening. Be polite at all costs even if you disagree with the position of your legislator.
- Dress appropriately.** The proper attire will convey the seriousness of your visit.
- Bring plenty of documentation and materials to share with**

**your lawmaker and his staff.** These supporting materials will strengthen your point and serve as valuable reference materials after your meeting has concluded.

**Send a letter in follow up to your visit.** Regardless of how your meeting goes, send a letter to your legislator thanking him for his time, and reiterating the points you discussed. This gesture will go a long way, and possibly allow for future meetings.

## **WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS**

Writing a letter is the most common method of communicating with your lawmakers. As a voting constituent, a letter is an easy method for you to let lawmakers know your views on specific issues, encourage them to vote your way, and let them know you will watch how they vote on particular issues and keep those votes in mind on Election Day! Personally-written letters allow you an opportunity to present your position to your lawmakers without interruption.

Some basic letter writing tips follow:

- Keep your letter short and to the point (i.e., no more than 1 page).**
- Always be courteous!**
- Use just enough facts and figures to further enhance your statement.**
- Only make statements you can back up with evidence.**
- State how this legislation will affect you personally.**
- Reiterate that you live and vote in his/her district or state.**
- If you own or operate a business, use your company letterhead.**
- Mention any civic group or organizations you are a member.**
- Always ask for a response to your letter.**

## **FAXING**

Faxing has become increasingly popular as more and more Americans have gained access to fax machines. In fact, nearly all U.S. Senators and Representatives have published fax numbers. The advantages to faxing include that it allows you to send a letter to your representative in minutes, and it's cost effective. Follow the same guidelines for writing an effective letter, making sure that your fax number is clearly visible.

## **Email**

E-mail is becoming an even more popular way to communicate to lawmakers. While not all lawmakers can receive Email messages, most do, and more and

more elected officials now utilize Email. Follow the tips for writing an effective letter, though this format is usually less formal and allows you to slightly abbreviate your message. A major advantage of Email versus a personally written letter is the speed at which your message will be received. A disadvantage is the uncertainty of your Email reaching the intended party. Be prepared for some lawmakers to send an automated response to your Email; and always request that he/she state their position.

## **EFFECTIVE TELEPHONE CALLS**

As a bill moves through the legislative process, often times, there isn't enough time to write to your legislators in time for them to receive the correspondence, prior to a key vote. When you need to get in touch with your lawmakers immediately to let them know of your position on issues, and also if you do not have access to Email, or a fax machine, your telephone calls become the most effective means for you to communicate your views.

Several tips to use when placing your calls follow:

- Identify yourself as a constituent.** As someone who lives and votes in the district or state of the lawmaker you are contacting, your phone calls carry the most weight. Calls to representatives outside your district or state can be helpful as well. However, be sure to always contact your own legislators first.
- State your point quickly and clearly.** Be sure to limit your telephone call to one subject. Be brief but specific. ***Your phone call should last at most only a couple of minutes.*** State the reason you are calling, giving a brief description of the bill and bill number:
- Always be courteous** and never threaten or use abusive language.
- Request that your legislator follow-up your call with a letter.** Be sure to give your name and home address (including county) and request that your legislator follow-up with a letter. Get his position in writing on issues important to you.