

Calling Your Legislator's Office

Legislation & Public Policy Manual

While it is usually best to put your views in writing to your legislators, when a vote is scheduled to take place immediately, calling your Representative's office is a very effective way to make your views known. Suggestions outlined in the "Effective Letter" section also apply when you are phoning, faxing or e-mailing your legislators.

Additionally: Unless you are a personal friend of the legislator, it is not necessary to speak directly with him or her. Leave a message about your concerns with the individual who answers the phone, or better yet, with the legislator's staff member who handles the particular issue in question.

Example: I would like to talk to the individual in your office who handles postal legislation.

Try not to argue; just express your opinions. Say why you feel the way you do and state what action you want your legislator to take.

Example: I am against S.100 because it will cost my neighbors and me \$190 each, something we just cannot afford. Please let Representative Smith know that I urge him to vote no on this legislation.

Seek assurances that the message will be transmitted to your legislator and request a response in writing.

Example: Please pass this message directly to Representative Smith, and also please send me a letter about his views on this bill.

It is very important when calling a legislator's office to remember two cardinal rules:

*Give your full name and address,
and
Keep you call short and to the point.*

If you do not have a direct telephone number already, you can reach your U.S. Senators or Representative's office in Washington through the Capital Switchboard. The numbers of local district offices can be found through directory assistance.

Writing Your Legislator

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Legislators love to hear from their constituents. Often less than half a dozen letters from constituents will influence his or her decision on a particular issue. This timeless form of communication remains the most effective advocacy tool compared to phone calls, faxes and emails.

Tips For An Effective Letter

Identify yourself early in the letter, include that you are a constituent and that you are writing on behalf of other individuals, if applicable. *Example:* I am a constituent of yours living in Fernwood and I am writing on behalf of our 35-member women's club.

Give a reason for your letter and refer to the specific legislation in the first or second paragraph. *Example:* I am writing to express my opposition to S.100, the red mailbox bill.

Explain how the issue in question directly affects you, your community or your family. *Example:* If this bill passes my family and 30 of our 35 neighbors will be forced to purchase new mailboxes at a cost of \$190 each. Many of us have only \$50 left in our monthly budget for emergencies after all our bills are paid, and we cannot afford this extra expense.

Use as many relevant facts as possible and back them up with sources, if available. *Example:* A study conducted by Arthur Anderson concludes that red mailboxes will not increase postal efficiency at all; they will just be a costly \$2 billion expense to the public.

Be specific about the action you want your legislator to take, whether it is voting one way or another on legislation, expressing views on an issue, or sending you information. *Example:* I urge you to vote against S.100 when your committee votes on this bill next week.

Keep the letter short but still include relevant key points. You should concentrate on one issue in your letter, rather than addressing a number of different ones.

Addressing letters and Envelopes:

The Honorable (First and Last Name)	or	The Honorable (First and Last Name)
U.S. Senate		U. S. House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515		Washington, DC 25015

In addition, sending your letter to your legislator's home district office can also be very effective; it takes just a few letters on an issue to get noticed in the district office.

The Salutation:

Dear Senator (Last Name)	or	The Honorable (Last Name)
Dear Mr. (Last Name)		
Dear Ms. (Last Name)		

Other Suggestions:

It is not necessary to type the letter to your legislators. However, if your letter is handwritten, make sure it is legible. When contacting your lawmaker by e-mail or fax. Be sure to include your name and mailing address. Individual letters from each club member are more influential than one letter with 35 signatures.

