

HOW TO COMMUNICATE, IN PERSON, WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

By far, the best way to communicate with your legislators is to visit them. Visits are appreciated by your representatives who know that you are watching, with interest, what they are doing. However, your legislators are subject to a tremendous amount of constituent opinion; it is important to communicate with them in the most effective manner.

The Visit

The following are a few points to keep in mind when talking to your legislators:

- Plan ahead. While you don't have to be an expert, know your issue as best you possibly can. Go in with a mental list of issues to be covered, questions to be asked, and answers to be obtained. Approach your visit with two goals in mind:
 1. to learn more about the legislator, and;
 2. to convey some information.
- Discuss only one issue during a visit.
- Identify yourself by name and, if appropriate, as a constituent. Give your occupation.
- Be brief and specific. State the issue you wish to discuss and refer to the issue/bill by name and/or number.
- Devote the early part of the visit to finding out about her/him. For example, has she/he had a chance to review the bill you are concerned about; inquire about her/his position on the issue/bill.
- Briefly outline your position and why.
- Be prepared to provide facts about the issue. If possible, bring along a fact sheet summarizing the major points you plan to make.
- Be specific and as practical as possible. Make it a local issue. Let your legislators know how the issue relates to her/his constituents.
- Ask the legislator to actually agree to do something—talk to another legislator; sit in on upcoming hearings, work for defeat/passage. Get any commitment you can.
- If the legislator is undecided, suggest other legislators you know to be on your side and that this legislator might talk to. Also, offer to follow-up with additional information.
- Be reasonable and non-threatening.
- Be cooperative and friendly. Do not contact your legislators just when you are concerned about a vote. Invite her/him to visit your agency or to attend meetings of your organization.