

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

A face-to-face meeting is the most effective way of communicating with your legislators. However, such meetings tend to be the exception and not the rule. What then are the other ways of communicating and what is their effectiveness? One caveat that applies no matter which method you choose – make sure you use a communication means that will get your opinion to your legislator **BEFORE** that vote needs to be taken.

TIPS ON WRITING/FAXING

The letter is an important communication tool when dealing with congressional offices. However, since the anthrax incidents on Capitol Hill, you are advised to **fax your letters** to your Members of Congress if time is of the essence.

If you decide to fax a letter, this list of helpful suggestions will improve its effectiveness:

- Write on your organizational letterhead or use personal stationary.
- Be sure your return address is on your letter, not only on the envelope. Envelopes normally get detached, discarded, or misplaced before the answer is written.
- Be accurate. Spell names correctly and verify information.
- State your purpose for writing in the first paragraph of the letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H. R.____, Senate bill: S.____.
- Address only one issue in each letter; and, if possible, keep the letter to one page.
- Be courteous and include key information, using examples to support your position.

Explain how the legislation would affect your profession, your colleagues, your institution, and the community in which you live.

- Ask your elected officials to explain their position on the issue in their reply so you do not get the typical form-letter response – “I’ll keep your views in mind should this legislation come up for a vote.” As a constituent, you are entitled to know why your Members of Congress think as they do.
- Thank your elected officials if they vote your way. They appreciate a compliment, and they remember positive feedback.
- Do not hesitate to state your displeasure. However, that, too, will be remembered, so be polite if your Members of Congress oppose your position. You will want their help on another issue on another day.

Addressing Correspondence

To a Senator:

The Honorable (full name)
Rm. #, (name of) Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (last name):

To a Representative:

The Honorable (full name)
Rm. #, (name of) House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative (last name):

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as:

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman:

or

Dear Mr. Speaker or Madam Speaker:

TIPS ON TELEPHONING

If there is not enough time to fax your letter stating your concerns/support, make a phone call instead. To contact your legislator via phone number, call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Senators' and/or Representative's office.

- Decide whether to direct your calls to the Washington or district office. Call the Washington office when you want to discuss the technical aspects of the bill in question. Call the district office when you want to make a political statement by contacting your legislator's top political person in the district. That

person will make sure your message gets to the elected official.

- Remember that telephone calls are most often taken by a staff member, not the Member of Congress. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue on which you wish to comment.
- After identifying yourself, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S. ___/H.R. ___)."
- State the reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your Senator's or Representative's position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call.

TIPS ON E-MAILING CONGRESS

If you cannot fax your letter or call, then e-mail. Generally, the same guidelines apply as with writing letters to your Members of Congress.