

Contacting your lawmakers

1. General Principles

Regardless of the communication channel, the following norms apply:

Professionalism.

Use respectful, concise, and neutral language. Avoid accusatory or emotionally charged statements.

Clarity of Purpose.

State your reason for contacting them early and directly. Lawmakers appreciate when constituents get to the point.

Respect for Their Role.

Acknowledge their position, responsibilities, and the demands on their time.

Constituent Status.

If you reside in the lawmaker's district, identify yourself as a constituent. Constituent communications are prioritized.

Politeness and Courtesy.

Thank them for their time, for past work (if relevant), and for considering your perspective.

2. Addressing a State Lawmaker

Formal Address:

- In writing:
 - “The Honorable [Full Name]” (in the address block)
 - “Dear Senator [Last Name]:”
 - “Dear Representative [Last Name]:”
- In conversation or a meeting:
 - “Senator [Last Name]”
 - “Representative [Last Name]”
 - If you are unsure: “Representative” is a safe default for the House and “Senator” for the Senate.

Never use first names unless they explicitly invite you to do so.

3. Communicating by Email

Subject Line:

Clear, specific, and brief. Example: “Constituent Request Regarding House Bill 1287.”

Opening:

Formally address them using title and last name.

Body:

- Identify yourself and where you live (city or district).
- Briefly state the issue or bill you are writing about.
- Provide 1–3 succinct points that explain your position or concern.
- If applicable, provide a brief anecdote or evidence showing how the issue affects you, your community, your job, or your students.
- Make a specific ask: “I respectfully request that you support/oppose...”
- Thank them for their service and time.

Length:

Ideal length is 1–3 short paragraphs.

Tone:

Positive, factual, and non-confrontational.

4. Communicating by Phone

Preparation:

Have a short script or bullet points ready. Calls are typically fielded by staff.

Protocol:

1. State your name and city or district.
2. Ask to share your comment on the relevant bill or issue.
3. Provide a clear, concise statement of your position (20–30 seconds).
4. Thank them politely.

Tone:

Calm, respectful, and efficient. Staff members record positions; they do not debate.

5. Meeting in Person (Scheduled Meeting or Advocacy Day)

Before the Meeting:

- Request the meeting through their staff, stating purpose and agenda.
- Prepare a short briefing document (1 page) summarizing your request and key facts.
- Dress in business or business-casual attire.
- Know the bill number, your position, and your specific “ask.”

During the Meeting:

- Begin with a brief introduction and thanks for their time.
- Use their title when addressing them.
- Present your issue succinctly. Keep explanations concise and avoid jargon unless they work in that domain.
- Provide concrete examples or local impact.
- Make your ask clearly.
- Listen respectfully to their response; do not argue.
- If you don’t know an answer to a question, say so and offer to follow up.

After the Meeting:

Send a thank-you email summarizing what you discussed and any promised follow-up materials.

6. Written Letters or Formal Advocacy Documents

Format:

Use professional formatting, correct titles, and a clear structure. Keep the letter to one page if possible.

Content:

- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- State the purpose clearly.
- Provide supporting points in a straightforward, well-organized manner.
- Include your contact information.
- Thank the lawmaker.

7. What Not to Do

- Do not make threats, ultimatums, or personal attacks.
- Avoid partisan language or assumptions about their political motivations.
- Do not overwhelm them with long blocks of text or documentation.
- Avoid disparaging statements about other lawmakers or agencies.

8. Additional Tips for Effective Communication

Be Timely.

Reach out before major deadlines, hearings, or votes.

Be Accurate.

Use verifiable facts and cite sources if sharing data.

Stay Local.

Lawmaker decisions are strongly influenced by constituent impact. Focus on how the issue affects your district or community.

Build Relationships.

Thank them when they vote as you requested or support an issue you care about.
