

COMMUNICATING WITH THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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- The Roles of the Legislative Staff

Tips for Writing Your Legislature

Heightened security measures have dramatically increased the time it takes for a letter sent by the U.S. Postal Service to reach a Legislator. More and more, citizens are using e-mails and faxes to communicate their concerns. Elected officials' offices tend to prefer electronic communications for constituent contact. As a general rule, Members of the General Assembly are more likely to heed your message if you are one of their constituents.

Purpose of Your Letter:

- State your purpose for writing in the first sentence of the letter.
- If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it. Make sure that you are referencing the correct legislation to the correct body of the General Assembly. House bills are H.R. ____; Senate bills are designated as S.B. ____.
- Be courteous.
- If appropriate, include personal information about why the issue matters to you.
- Address only one issue in each letter or e-mail.

Addressing Your Correspondence:

- To a Senator
Senator (Full Name)
Legislative Address
Nashville, TN 37201
-Begin with salutation, such as...
Dear Senator :
- To a Representative
Representative (Full Name):
Legislative Address
Nashville, TN 37201
-Begin with salutation, such as...
Dear Representative:

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of The House, it is proper to address him/her as: Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman: or Dear Madam Speaker:

Tips for Phoning Congress

Telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment. After identifying yourself as a constituent, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S.B./H.R. ____)." State your 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.

Suggestions for a Personal Visit



Meeting with a Member of the General Assembly, is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific issue of legislative matter. Below are some suggestions to consider when planning a visit to a legislator's office.

Plan your visit carefully: Be clear about what it is you want to achieve.

Make an Appointment: When attempting to meet with a Member, contact the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler. Explain your purpose and who you represent. It is easier for legislative staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the Member.

Be Prompt and Patient: When it is time to meet with a Member of the General Assembly, be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for a legislator to be later, or to have a meeting interrupted due to the Member's crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a Member's staff.

Be Prepared: Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. Members are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a Member of the General Assembly may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share with the legislator information and examples that demonstrate clearly the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.

Be Political: Members of the General Assembly want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the Member's constituency. If possible, describe to the legislator how you or your group can be of assistance to him/her. When it is appropriate, remember to ask for a commitment.

Be Responsive: Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information in the event the Member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up the meeting with a thank-you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials requested.

