ADVOCACY IN MOTION

The Legislative Process and Communicating with Elected Officials
Do Your Homework

On Your Own Organization/Story

• Mission Statement
• History and reputation with lawmakers, consumers, members?
• Constituent reach – how many and where?
• Existing relationships with policy makers?
• What’s the on-going communication vehicle?
Do Your Homework

Focus on Policymakers

- Does the issue impact the policy maker’s overall goals?
- How could your issue impact the policy maker politically?
- Why should the policy maker consider the issue a priority?
- How has he voted in the past on similar issues?
- Who on their staff is handling this issue?
Communicating with Elected Officials

Four Methods to Communicate Directly

- Letters
- E-mails
- Telephone Calls
- Face-to-face Meetings
Once you have identified your elected officials, take advantage of the various opportunities available to connect with them.

- Attend candidate meetings/forums/debates
- Participate in “town meetings”
- Call, visit and write to legislators occasionally, positioning yourself as a source of information
- Invite elected officials to attend your events, fundraisers, annual conferences – be mindful of election season.
Getting to Know Your Elected Officials

Who are my legislative representatives?

• Can be found via internet:
  • https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/members/legsearch.asp

• State pages lists the House of Representatives, State Senate, Legislation and Joint Offices.
Writing to Your Elected Officials

• Make it personal
• When doing individual advocacy, write as a constituent, using your home address and not on company letterhead.
• When representing a group, use the appropriate letterhead to reflect the group’s collective identity.
• When addressing mail to a legislator, the title "Honorable" should precede their full name.
• The letter's salutation should read "Dear Senator" or "Dear Chairman/woman.”
• Limit the letter to one page – absolutely no more than two pages.
• Close with a request, support, and the bill number.
• Be specific in what you are asking your legislator to do.
E-mailing Your Elected Officials

To find out your NJ legislator’s contact information, including e-mail address:

- [https://openstates.org/nj/legislators/](https://openstates.org/nj/legislators/)
- [http://www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)

For Members of Congress visit:
After your letter/email has been sent:

• If you don't receive a response, or if you get one that is unsatisfactory, write again or call.

• If the legislator votes in the way you requested, write again or call directly to express your thanks for supporting your position.

• If the legislator doesn't vote in the way you hoped, send a note of thanks for considering your position, but express your disappointment.

With this follow-up, the official will know that you’re watching.
Communicating with Elected Officials

Calling Your Elected Officials

• Ask to speak with the member directly, but if the legislator is unavailable, ask to speak to the aide handling the particular matter of concern to you.

• Don’t underestimate the influence that key staffers have on their legislators relative to profiling your concerns.

• When speaking to an aide, explain your views carefully, asking that they be presented to the legislator, and request a responses.

• Make sure you ask for the legislator's supports.

• Always follow-up your call with a brief letter thanking the official and the staff member by name for their time and interest, and restating your positions.
Communicating with Elected Officials

Sample Phone “Scripts” for Making a Phone Call to Legislators

Hi. My name is _____ and I live at/in _____. I am a constituent of Senator/Representative _______.

Is there someone in your office I can talk to about insurance reform?

I am calling today to ask for the Senator/Representative’s support for _____ . This bill will help protect his/her constituents in by leveling the playing field between New Jersey residents and insurance companies.

OR

Can I make an appointment to meet with the Representative/Senator or a staff member in person to discuss this issue further?

Thanks again, and I really appreciate your time and consideration.
Meeting with Your Elected Officials

In preparation for a meeting:

• Do your homework on both your issue and the legislator.

• Be "on-time" for the meeting, but patient if you should have to wait.

• If meeting as a group, arrive at least 10-15 minutes in advance of the meeting to review talking points, the purpose of the meeting, and to confirm the role and contribution of each person.

• Determine who will act the “leader” and “closer” of the meeting.

continued
Communicating with Elected Officials

Meeting with Your Elected Officials

During and after a meeting:

• Be prepared to answer the legislator’s questions; if you don't know the answer, tell him you will follow up with the right information.

• Provide a one-page summary of the issue as well as the arguments in your favor. Leave it behind at the conclusion of your visit.

• After the meeting, send a brief thank you letter including the date, time, location and topic discussed.
Engage in Public Testimony

Guidelines for Testimony at Public Hearings

• Be on time, flexible, prepared, and recognized as giving testimony.

• Be respectful, be known, and be succinct.

• Try to foresee opponent’s messages and shoot them down before they can even make them.

• Put together panels to avoid testimony fatigue to the committee.

• Call your local legislator to let them know you will be in the building testifying on an issue and ask for their support.

• And finally, relax. Legislators understand that you are not a professional lobbyist and therefore are not expecting perfection.