

# How to Influence Legislators

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## 1. Get to know your legislators outside of the formal capitol setting

**Personal meetings will not be forgotten.**

The best time for personal contact with your local legislator is when he or she is home in the district. Your opportunity for meaningful discussion diminishes during the busy legislative session. Once in St. Paul, they lose control over their schedules. However, if you come to St. Paul to meet with them, make sure you have an appointment. If you do not, nine times out of ten you will not be able to visit with them.

When meeting with them, be sure to address them appropriately and with respect. Resist attempts at humor. And don't threaten them! Name the issue. Identify your concerns and suggested action. Know what you want from the legislator and ask them. Remember to be concise, use 10 words or less to introduce your topic.

- If you have a fact sheet, it should be one page only.
- Provide visuals and bullet points.
- Always send a thank you note, address their questions and offer future help.

## 2. Other Ways to Make Contact

**Letters are best.**

Well written letters are invaluable and quick. Most legislators read mail from their constituents first so be sure to identify yourself. To be most effective letters should be brief and neat, one page only and typed. Keep your letter to one topic and simplify your point. Everything you say should support your point. Outline your concerns and suggested action. Explain to them why they should care and how

will it impact their district? Offer to be of further assistance and to provide more information if they need it.

Remember a few letters on a single subject from constituents to a legislator makes an impact. It's the most important tool if you don't have a personal relationship with a legislator.

### Phone Calls.

*You don't have to be an expert, you just have to care.*

Phone calls are effective during the height of legislative session before an important committee or floor vote. Sometimes when you call, you will simply speak to a legislative assistant who will be tallying the number of calls on an issue. Five calls is an avalanche.

You may or may not get a phone call back, but you should have a few basic facts. The most important thing to tell them is why you want them to vote for or against an issue.

### Emails

*Using email is a tricky business.*

Some legislators personally check and reply to emails faithfully. Some have their assistants do their emails. Some ignore them completely.

The best way to use email is if you have a pre-established personal relationship with the member. Even then, late in the session, it may not be the best. They sometimes get 600 a day and simply quit checking.

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## *12 Tips for Citizen Lobbyists*

1. Remember that legislators are human beings. Dress respectfully, be punctual, start your meeting with a compliment (if possible), be friendly and polite, and thank the legislator for taking the time to meet with you.
2. Never lie or make up information – your credibility will be forever lost. If you do not know the answer to a legislator's question, tell them you will find out and get back to them, and then DO IT.
3. Introduce yourself and tell the legislator what group you are representing (if any).
4. Treat legislative staff with respect – they are not just the gatekeepers, their opinions often weigh heavily with the legislator.
5. Provide a short fact sheet on your issue, but don't weigh them down with too much paper.
6. Try to put your issue into the context of the legislator's own district.
7. Assume support, but press for an explicit commitment. Polite nods are meaningless.
8. Allow the legislator a chance to respond, listen carefully to their advice, and don't interrupt.
9. Be understanding of the complex pressures upon legislators.
10. Never criticize another legislator, lobbyist or the opposition.
11. Don't burn bridges unnecessarily.
12. Send a written follow-up note thanking the legislator again and summarizing any action items from the meeting.