

Tips on Contacting Your Legislator

TEN EASY STEPS TO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

- 1. Get a Copy of the Proposed Legislation**
Review it carefully. What impact will it have, both locally and statewide? What fiscal impact will it have and upon whom? Watch the entire bill carefully for changes as it travels through the process (copies of legislation can be found on the General Assembly website at www.in.gov/legislative).
- 2. Know the Facts and Be Accurate In Expressing Them**
The most effective lobbyists trade in facts - not influence! What you may lack in experience and contacts can be compensated for with knowledge and research. Be accurate and thorough!
- 3. Know the Opposition**
Identify the opposition and then analyze it and attempt to neutralize it. Be able to counter the opposing position with as much accuracy and fervor as you argue your cause.
- 4. Correct Any Errors Immediately**
Errors can happen. If erroneous information is given - admit the mistake and correct it at once.
- 5. Plan, Coordinate And Follow Up On Each Contact**
Keep careful notes. Follow up a conversation with a written note. Be sure to send a "thank you" when you get a favorable action. Also, talk to the legislator to find out what happened when the vote goes the other way. Try to be aware of major issues and the political atmosphere surrounding those issues.
- 6. Know Your Own Legislators and Their Staff**
A personal contact is always best. Contacts should be made ideally before the session starts and maintained throughout the year -- NOT JUST AT SESSION TIME! Keep in touch. Letters should be personally written. Form letters are not effective.
- 7. Refer To Bills by Title and Number**
- 8. Be Prepared To Testify**
Be succinct, polite, courteous, and prompt. Give a copy of your statement to each committee member, but do not just read a statement -- know it well!
- 9. Be Prepared For Questions**
If you cannot answer immediately, say that you will research that question and have the answer -- then do it!
- 10. Be Patient and Alert**
Advocacy can be fun, exhilarating, and challenging as long as you are secure in what you represent and remain comfortable and at ease in the surrounding.

VISITING YOUR LEGISLATOR

Call your legislator to schedule an appointment to meet and discuss issues in which you are interested.

The meeting:

- **Action** -- begin by letting your legislator know what you are asking him/her to do and on what issue(s). If it is regarding a specific bill, refer to it by number and the general subject matter.
- **Build** -- your argument beginning with positions with which the legislator certainly must agree and then take these arguments into the context of your own circumstance and district.
- **Personalize** -- cite personal reasons and experiences for requesting the action sought.
- **Support** -- show that your position or the legislation has broad public interest. Use facts and figures to support your position, if possible.
- **Commitment** -- seek some indication of his/her position, but do not insist.
- **Thanks** -- express your appreciation for agreeing to meet and discuss these issues.

Suggestions:

- **Dress** appropriately.
- **Cordial** -- Be positive and cordial; avoid threatening statements or questions. The legislator also has a right to his/her own opinion.
- **Punctual** -- Be on time; your legislator is very busy and has other meetings and appointments. Do not talk too long -- get to the point.
- **Respectful** -- But do not be intimidated; your legislator is there to serve you.
- **Limit** the discussion to one or a few issues, discussing the main one first.
- **Accuracy** -- Be sure your statements are factual. If the legislator asks questions which you cannot answer, indicate that you will obtain the answer for him/her.
- **Supportive?** -- Your legislator may want to appear somewhat supportive of your issues, no matter how he or she is planning to vote. *DO NOT* be misled by empty statements.
- **Opposed?** -- If the legislator asks hostile-sounding questions, do not automatically assume he/she is against your cause. If the legislator is to be an effective advocate for your position, he/she must know the answers to tough questions.
- **Follow-Up** -- Send a "thank-you" letter to the legislator to increase the effectiveness of your visit. Thank them for their time. Remind them of the most positive statements they made to you and indicate a desire for further communications (especially if no commitment was obtained).

TELEPHONING YOUR LEGISLATOR

If calling your legislator in his/her home district, on the first contact ask if he/she prefers to be contacted at home or at work. Try to observe this preference.

When the General Assembly is in session, the legislators may be called at the State House. If the issue is not urgent, you may also wait until the weekend and try to call the legislator at home so that you are more likely to talk with him/her personally.

If you are able to speak with the legislator:

- Identify yourself.
- Ask if this is a convenient time to speak about a legislative concern (particularly if calling at location other than the State House).
- Indicate reason for calling (refer to any bill by number).
- Briefly explain the intent of the bill.
- Explain your position (support with factual information, if appropriate, and how it would affect you and others in the district).
- Request the legislator to support or oppose the bill in accordance with your position.
- Attempt to determine his/her position on the legislation.
- Thank the legislator for his/her time (keeping the call as brief as possible, but giving yourself ample time to logically present your views).

If you ARE NOT ABLE to speak with the legislator (especially when calling at the State House during the legislative session), leave a brief, definitive message. Include the following information:

- Request that your legislator support or oppose a bill (include the bill number).
- Your name, address, and phone number.
- Legislators are very busy during the legislative session and may not find time to return calls, so it is important to leave a message.

Follow-up:

- If working with a particular group or organization regarding an issue, contact the group / organization to let them know of your legislative contact and the legislator's response.
- Write or call your legislator to say thank you, if he/she votes as you requested.

State Senators: (317) 232-9400
(800) 382-9467

State Representatives: (317) 232-9600
(800) 382-9842

TDD (317) 232-0404
(800) 548-9517

Governor's Office: (317) 232-4567

WRITING YOUR LEGISLATOR

- **Individualize** -- compose the letter in your own words. Do not mail form letters or photocopies.
- **Written** -- letters should be typed or neatly hand-written.
- **Specific** -- limit letters to one specific subject or bill (giving bill number and general subject matter).
- **Action** -- ask for specific action (support, opposition, information, position statement, etc.). This request should be in the first or last paragraph.
- **Personalize** -- cite personal experience and reasons for writing. Note the effect on the writer, family, business, or community. State logical reasons for passage or defeat.
- **Courteous** -- never attack a legislator, no matter what their past actions have been. Conversely, never assume because of past action the legislator agrees with your views and thereby fail to contact him/her.
- **Sign** -- the letter and give your return address on the letter and envelope. Anonymous letters are generally disregarded.

Additional Tips and Suggestions:

- **Timing** -- a letter can be most effective if received when the bill is being considered in his/her chamber or is in a committee of which the legislator is a member.
- **Factual** -- be sure any data used is accurate and not based on rumor.
- **Quality** -- instead of quantity counts. Write the legislator only once on a specific subject, unless you have new information to offer. However, do not worry if you are not an excellent writer -- your interest is to request action, not get an "A" on content.

In general, write a legislator from ANOTHER district ONLY if he or she is chair of a committee you wish to influence (or a personal friend).

- **Thanks** -- send a thank you letter, if the legislator votes in accordance with your request.
- **Copy** -- letters and any responses to the organization/group with which you are working (if applicable).

Sample Format for a Letter to a State Legislator

The Honorable _____
Indiana State Senate
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2785

or

The Honorable _____
Indiana House of Representatives
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2786

Dear (Representative or Senator) (Last Name):

I am writing you to urge to (support or oppose) (State Bill Number) which would (explain expected consequence of the proposed legislation).

(Briefly state why you support or oppose the proposed legislation. Use personal experience, observations, and a few statistics to strengthen your argument).

I urge you to vote (yes or no) on (bill number) so that (the general effects of the legislation will or will not effect constituents).

Sincerely,

Your name and address

CONTACTING INDIANA'S ELECTED OFFICIALS

GOVERNOR

317-232-4567

The Honorable (First Name) (Last Name)
Governor of the State of Indiana
Room 206 State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Governor (Last Name):

STATE SENATORS

Senate Switchboard:

The Honorable _____
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2785

317-232-9400
800-382-9467 (toll free)

Dear Senator (Last Name):

STATE REPRESENTATIVES

House Switchboard:

The Honorable _____
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2786

317-232-9600
800-382-9842 (toll free)

Dear Representative (Last Name):

You can also e-mail your Senator or Representative. The e-mail address is "S" for Senate or "H" for Representative, then the district number at in.org. For example, if you live in Senate District #1, you would e-mail your State Senator at S1@in.org, or if you live in House District #1, you would e-mail your State Representative at H1@in.org.

Note: *In legislative contacts, unless you are acting in an official capacity for an organization, do not mention that the organization asked you to contact the legislator. Your significance to the Senator or Representative is that you are a voting constituent who is so concerned about the issue that you took the time to make a contact. If you are seen as part of an organized effort, it may reduce the significance of your visit/contact in the eyes of your legislator.*



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