

How to Talk To Your Legislators

There is nothing more politically powerful and effective than a local constituent expressing their interest and concerns to their legislator. You may be reluctant to get involved in politics - - it is easy to assume that someone else will do it. But if an issue affects your livelihood and your ability to do business, then you are the best person to communicate with your legislator and ask him or her for help.

Few things leave the same impression in a legislator's mind as a persuasive story from a local constituent or business person. It is even better if that story comes from the heart of someone whom he or she already knows in the community, and whom they will see again.

There are two main components: Relationship building and Communication. To effectively 'lobby' your legislators, it is helpful to build a relationship communicate with them when possible.

Relationship-Building

Having a personal relationship with your legislators is the single most important step. Think of it the same way you would with an important customer: this is a long-term relationship.

- Invite your legislator (or a candidate) to visit your facility.
- Familiarize legislators with your business and your products or services.
- Tell them your concerns. Introduce the legislator to employees.
- Create a steady stream of communication that allows future correspondence. Your legislator will rely on you as a source of information and advice when faced with decisions on business issues.

Communications

Tips for Contacting Legislators

- **Make Your Contact Early.** Time your contact so that your letter or telephone call is received before significant action is taken, or while legislators are not in session.
- **Identify Yourself.** Sign all correspondence and include your address and telephone number. Your legislator may want to get back in touch with you.
- **Be brief.** Give your position and make your point as clearly and concisely as possible.
- **Be logical.** An emotional appeal is not enough. Back your arguments with facts and substance. Explain how the proposed legislation will affect you.
- **Be specific.** Refer to an issue by bill number and discuss its content. Clearly identify the action (support, oppose, amend) you would like your legislator to take.
- **Be positive and cordial.** Your tone should be businesslike, clear and cordial. Never ask the impossible or threaten to vote for someone else.
- **Say Thanks.** Saying thanks when appropriate is effective and appreciated.

Face-to-Face Visit Guidelines

- Appointments are not necessarily required, but are strongly recommended.
- Introduce yourself as a constituent to the legislator and office staff.
- Meet the staff in the Legislative Services Office. They are knowledgeable and willing to help, even with information such as finding your way around town.
- Identify your subject: state the name of the bill and give them the house or senate bill number.
- Come to committee meetings or appointments prepared to clearly state your thoughts and arguments on the issue. Leave them a note with your position.
- As a constituent you are entitled to know your legislator's position on the issue. Ask specifically if they intend to vote 'yes' or 'no' on the bill. If his or her answer is not clear to you, ask them again.
- Thank your legislator for his or her time in any event.

Telephone Call Guidelines

- Introduce yourself as a businessperson, employee and a constituent.
- When the legislature is in session, any number of people can answer the phone: a secretary, aide, intern or even the legislator. All are knowledgeable and professional.
- Identify your subject clearly: state the name of the bill and give the House or Senate bill number. If you don't know specifics, ask for staff assistance to tell you the title, number and summary.
- Clearly state your position to let them know specifically whether you want them to vote 'yes' or 'no.'
It's okay to ask for your legislator's position on the issue
- If you talk to the legislator personally, feel free to share your personal experiences and the reason for your opinion.
Treat the legislator's time respectfully. Thank him or her for taking the time to listen.