

Advocating with your Elected Officials: Government Participation Overview

Your elected representatives want to hear from you! Your involvement and participation are integral to ensuring legislators understand the needs of their communities.

You can easily keep in contact with your elected officials via:

Phone Calls:

- Calling to give your opinion regarding an issue or a piece of legislation is one of the easiest and fastest ways to communicate with your legislators
- Feel free to contact either the local (in-district) office, or the office headquarters (Federal Legislators: Washington, D.C. | State Legislators: Madison, WI)
- Remember, it is your prerogative whether to leave your name/contact information or ask for a response; staffers only ask to ensure you are a constituent and live in the district of the legislator
- Most offices keep a tally in real time of the number of positive/negative calls regarding an issue that are received daily; this information is typically shared with staff and the elected official

Letters:

- Some constituents still prefer to write letters to their elected officials; while all inquiries will likely receive a response, due to security threats postal mail receipt is significantly delayed
- Depending on your issue, it is best to contact:
 - Office headquarters (Washington, D.C. or Madison, WI) when commenting or advocating regarding a specific legislative issue or policy
 - District offices (in-district, may be multiple options) when asking for assistance or clarification with a government (local, state or federal) agency
- Most offices will likely keep a more detailed record on file of your contact information and correspondence when a postal letter is received

Emails:

- Most elected officials have an email address or online form for constituents to use and share their views
- Emailing to give your opinion regarding an issue or a piece of legislation is one of the easiest and fastest ways to communicate with your legislators; you can likely expect a response within 3-6 weeks
- Most offices will likely keep a more detailed record on file of your contact information and correspondence when an email is received
- A response outlying your legislator's views will likely be sent in reply

Meetings:

- Constituents may request a meeting with their elected official or members of their staff at any time
- Keep in mind the legislator's schedule may not be able to accommodate a meeting in person, however meeting with a staff member can be just as effective in conveying your views
- When requesting a meeting, it is best to have 3-4 focused, legislative asks to make of your elected official – and make sure to ask to speak with a staffer who works on the policy issues you'd like to discuss

Petitions:

- Depending on the issue, it may be easier for constituents to organize a legislative ask via a standard, signed letter. This may include just a name and the statement, or full contact information
- Typically when all of the responses are gathered, one designee will hand deliver the signed petitions to a legislator's office. You may want to call the office in advance and make staffers aware of the delivery
- Remember to indicate whether each signer would like an individualized response, and remind staffers of the overall goal of your campaign (co-sponsorship of a bill? Voting yay or nay on a piece of legislation? Or simply making the legislator aware of your views on a particular issue?)

Remember, your elected officials and their staff receive requests and policy inquiries from constituents each and every day! Your legislators want to hear from you!