TIPS FOR E-MAILING CONGRESS

Heightened security measures have dramatically increased the time it takes for a letter sent by mail to reach a congressional office. More and more, citizens are using e-mails to communicate their concerns and increasingly elected officials' offices prefer electronic communications for constituent contact. As a general rule, Members of Congress are far more likely to heed your message if you are one of their constituents.

**Purpose of your E-Mail:**

- State your purpose for writing in the first sentence of the e-mail.

- If your e-mail pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it. And make sure that you are referencing the correct legislation to the correct body of Congress. House bills are H.R. ___; Senate bills are designated as S. ___.

- Be courteous.

- Always include personal information about why the issue matters to you.

- Address only one issue in each e-mail.

**Addressing your Correspondence:**

- **To a Senator**

  The Honorable (Full Name)  
  United States Senate  
  Washington, D.C. 20510

  Dear Senator (Last Name):

- **To a Representative**

  The Honorable (Full Name)  
  United States House of Representatives  
  Washington, D.C. 20515

  Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name):

Note: When writing to the Chair of Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address him/her as:

  Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman:  
  or Dear Madam Speaker:
TIPS FOR PHONING CONGRESS

Telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment.

After identifying yourself as a constituent, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: “Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S.__/H.R.__).”

State your reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your senator’s or representative’s position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A PERSONAL VISIT

Meeting with a Member of Congress, or congressional staff, is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific issue or legislative matter. There is no one “correct” way of calling upon a Member of Congress. But there are some things that you can do that will greatly increase the effectiveness of your visit. Here, are a few guiding principles to remember:

11 Steps to a Successful Visit:

• Make an Appointment
  • E-mail a letter to the scheduler in the office of each Member, advising of your trip to Washington and requesting a meeting. Include the issues you would like to discuss.

• Do your Homework
  • Proper preparation for the meeting is the name of the game; the more you know about your Members of Congress— including their backgrounds and their positions on issues of importance to the organized bar— the more effective your visit and other communications will be. Prior to your visit, research the following information regarding the selected Member of Congress: political party/ideology; Congressional Caucus memberships; date elected to office; number of terms served; previous work experience; state and legislative district represented; key characteristics of the district; education; key ABA and Bar contacts in the district; Committee or Subcommittee memberships; and their legislative history within the House or Senate.
  • Know the key points you would like to make and anticipate likely questions or reactions.
  • Know and be able to respond to your opposition’s arguments.
  • Recognize the roles played by the parties, House and Senate leadership, committee chairs, etc. and what each can and cannot do.

• Select a Spokesperson
  • Select a person who is: known to the Member— preferably a close friend, business colleague, etc.; most knowledgeable on the issues; or otherwise best able to state your case.
  • If each group member is going to speak, decide in advance who is going to say what. If you have a large group, ask the scheduler in advance how many people can attend the meeting –there may not be room for everyone.
• Be Prompt

  • Leave plenty of time between appointments --as least 30 minutes, or more if going between House and Senate appointments to account for delays.

• Be Brief

  • Don't try to cover more than three issues, and decide in advance which is the most important to cover for each particular Member (review committee membership, leadership roles, etc.) Meetings typically last no more than 15 minutes, but can be cut short by a floor vote, etc. Therefore, it is essential that you make your point and keep your eye on the clock.

• Be Positive

  • Thank the Member for his/her past support on key issues and look for common ground— don't retreat from your position, but respect the Member's point of view even if it differs from yours.

• Localize the Issue

  • Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the Member's constituency. If possible, describe for the Member how you or your group can be of assistance to him/her. When it is appropriate, remember to ask for a commitment.

• Do Not Ignore Staff

  • Find out which staff person handles your issues and develop a working relationship with him or her. Many staff members are very influential with their bosses and can be of great help in relaying inside information, influencing a Member, etc.

  • DC Staff handle a substantive amount of issues; local staff generally handles casework. Be sure to exchange e-mail addresses with the staff that handles your issues, and ask them to call on you for information, and you will be able to reach staff during crunch times.

• Leave a "One-Pager"

  • Leave behind "One-Pagers" setting forth your position on each issue so that the Member or staff can refer to it after you've gone. Make sure your name, address and telephone number is either imprinted on them or your business card is securely attached. Ideally, your one-pager should be accessible from your web page.

• "Close the Deal"

  • Tell the Member exactly what you would like them to do — sponsor legislation, write a letter to a committee, etc. Members hear from many different constituencies on most issues, and are careful to avoid making too many commitments.

• Write a Thank You

  • Write a letter thanking the Member and/or staff for their time and attention. Briefly summarize your position and any understandings that might have been reached.