

Advocacy tips for contacting legislators.

How tos:

Letters to the editor: Stick to guidelines. Be polite. The paper will verify by phone call before publishing. Speak from your heart, be respectful, and give examples if possible. Don't be "preachy" and keep it simple.

Letters: These are important, but it is a slow tool since letters are physical pieces that someone has to handle. At a national level, because of the ricin scare some years ago, letters are not opened at offices but at a large facility not in DC; hence, it will take longer to get to the correct office. Intelligent, thoughtful letters are worthy and important and sometimes get more response than a form answer, but that is rare. Adding a hand-written note to a form letter gets more attention. Handwritten letters are the most effective. Be respectful and be clear about what you are asking for. Ask for a response from them. A great thing to do is to have children write letters. Crayons are eye-catching and effective. If possible, a best practice is to hand-deliver a letter.

Calls-it is not always possible to get through, but mostly they have people "counting" the "yeas" or "nays" on issues. You don't have to be eloquent. They will let you speak (try not to be too emotional, and certainly not angry). It is helpful to ask for their name up front and ask for a response from the law-maker. We are told from former a former staffer that it does help inform a decision.

Facebook: This a great way to get the word out to your friends and contacts but think about what you pass on or write. Vitriol doesn't help any issue nor does unresearched information. Be sure of your sources; make sure they are reliable. Speak with compassion and from the heart.

If it is issue-specific, add the legislator, council person, or lawmaker with their twitter handle such as @RepMarkWalker or @SenThomTillis, etc. (You can do a search in twitter for the correct handle). If you post your Facebook page and the @name, their staff will pick it up. This is important to them.

Also, find group(s) you want to follow and "like" and "follow" them. They are often your best source of information. Same for people who follow the issues you care about-follow them as they are doing research.

Tweets- After you install the app, the search hourglass at the top will show you how to find a particular person. You can post or retweet (the boxy symbol). If you are talking about an issue, be sure to include the person who has the power over the legislation. See the resist bot section for tagging congressional offices so they see the tweets also. One friend reported using the Tweetdeck website very useful at times. It allows you to set up tweets to come out at prescheduled times. It is not a mobile app - must be used from a desk top. She only uses it when going out to a protest - when it will be hard to compose a tweet with all the right language.

Office visits: This takes persistence. To get an appointment of a Congressperson is difficult and frankly rare. If you do get through to a live person who does scheduling it may take weeks of back and forth, but it can happen, particularly if there is a small group. At a national level, you will almost always speak with a staff person, hopefully the one who is assigned the issue of your concern.

Council people are much more “reachable” at the local level, but again, small delegations are good that represent a constituency or group or entity (your church or denomination, for example).

Respect their time, don’t plan on more than 20 minutes and leave behind information that they can refer back to (important), as well as your name and contact information. The key to this is to develop a relationship with at least one person in the office who will respect you and listen.

On specific issues, you might call the national advocacy office for the most up-to-date talking points before your scheduled legislative visit.

Bread for the World offers lobby days in DC in early June each year. This is well worth the time, energy, and funds to do this. Local Bread groups coordinate by state on specific hunger legislation and/or issues and BRW makes the appointments. This is done as a group which dials back the first-time fear factor. Amazing experience! There is also a state-wide BFW conference each year. Again, important and well done for local as well as national issues.

General training tips from state Bread for the World Training, Spring 2017

1. It is best to post on email within 6 hours of an issue where something is happening. For Facebook, this is 24-72 hours (2 days is best here).
2. On any issue Congress wants to hear about include:
 - local knowledge
 - economic impact on community and people
 - how this legislation has/could change lives
3. Like and follow legislators on FB and twitter. Give feedback, positive and negative. Put on your own FB page.
4. On twitter, graphics matter
5. If you meet with legislator, (or staff) get picture and post. If you can't, post your picture by their office name and post.
6. In a meeting, pitch ideas and give reference info and your contact info (put in a labeled manila folder?)
7. Say "thank you" for time.
8. Be civil and polite
9. Keys are: timeliness, constituents, local impact, civility, persistence and relationships