

Part III: Influencing Public Officials

Part of the larger audience you need to target is your legislators. Sending them letters and meeting with them to explain your position will help them to understand the communities' concerns. Remember, not all legislators are aware of your problems. Be prepared to explain the situation and give examples.

Here are some pointers:

- Thoroughly research the issue;
- Write letters to your legislator;
- Schedule a meeting with your legislator.

HOW TO ARRANGE A MEETING WITH YOUR LAWMAKER

The best time to meet with your legislators in your district is during a recess or congressional work period. Search online or call your legislator's local office to determine when these times are. Most lawmakers spend this time in their home district speaking with constituents.

If you don't want to wait for a recess, take a road trip! A journey to meet with your lawmakers makes a lasting impression.

Most legislators are eager to meet with local citizens. Your opinions are valuable to your legislator, and your meeting is likely to be very influential. Keep in mind that you don't have to be an expert to get your point across. To request a private meeting with your legislators, follow these guidelines:

Making the appointment:

- Call your legislator's local office to request a meeting. You can find the number in your local phone book.
- Ask to speak with the appointments secretary or scheduler.
- Introduce yourself as a constituent, stating where you live.
- Tell the appointments secretary which issue you would like to discuss with your lawmaker.
- Request a 30 minute meeting with your legislator (don't be frustrated if it's shorter). While it is best to meet directly with your legislator, if s/he is unavailable, you can schedule an appointment with a legislative aide.

Before the appointment:

- It's a good idea to send a follow-up letter or fax confirming your appointment. Remember to include your name, address and daytime phone number.

Lobbying in Harrisburg,

Lobbying at home

1. Clearly identify yourself.
2. Know your facts.
3. Do your research.
4. Always tell the truth.
5. Be clear about what you are asking.
6. Be courteous and respectful.
7. Personalize your message.
8. Know the opposition.
9. Be brief and to the point.
10. Do your homework.
11. Consider yourself an information source.
12. Grow thick skin.
13. Know you are making a difference.

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HOW TO WRITE A (GOOD) LETTER TO YOUR LAWMAKER

A personal letter only takes a small investment of your time, yet it can yield real dividends when it comes to swaying “yea or nea” votes on legislation.

An effective, well-reasoned letter to your senator or representative really can make a difference. When lawmakers receive a significant number of letters on a particular issue, it does influence their vote.

Hint: To find your Pennsylvania legislator, go to: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/find.cfm>

Unless they hear from YOU, your legislators may not be aware of how strongly their constituents feel about a particular issue. Your well-chosen words can help!

Some tips on writing a letter that registers:

- Use your own words and preferably your own stationery. A handwritten or neatly typed letter is best, as long as it is legible. *Form letters, photocopies, and pre-printed postcards generally have little impact.*
- Be concise: A one-sheet letter is more likely to be read than a rambling, multi-page letter.
- Be up front and personal. People remember a good story: let your lawmaker know why the issue matters to your family, your neighbors, and your community.
- Identify your subject clearly. If possible, refer to legislation by both name and bill number.
- Stick to one issue per letter! Don't muddy the waters.
- Ask for something specific. For example, ask your representative or senator to vote for a particular amendment, request hearings or co-sponsor a bill.
- Ask for a reply to your requests, questions or concerns. Include a return address on your letter.
- If you have the time, use “snail mail.” Most congressional offices still tend to pay more attention to letters that arrive by conventional mail.