

Phoning Your Legislative Representatives

Influencing Public Policy via the Phone

Above all, don't be afraid of your legislator. Legislators can be intimidating because of their importance in our government, but the bottom line is that they need easy access to the people they serve. They represent us and need to hear from us and, in fact, rely on us to ensure that they are doing their job as our spokesperson.

Checklist for telephone calls

Phone calls should be made with the understanding that you must communicate your position in as little time as possible. Most legislators' offices keep a running tally on hot issues and sheer numbers do count. When calling a legislator in these situations, be prepared to simply state that you are very concerned about the pending action and would strongly urge the member to vote accordingly. In these cases, staff merely records a call in support of opposition of the issue and the legislator uses these numbers to gauge voter preference.

Effective Telephoning Techniques

Phone calls are an easy way to let legislators know what you think. The effectiveness of phone calls varies from legislator to legislator. In general, they are not as effective as letters, but are important when time is a major factor. A phone call is much better than nothing at all.

The following are some pointers for making phone calls to legislators:

- Clearly state your name and where you live so the legislator's staff member knows that you are from the district.
- Be prepared to make your point in several sentences. If you are calling about a specific bill it is helpful to know the number of the bill.
- The staff member answering the phone is making brief notes about the subject of your call and your opinion. If you have something to say that cannot be said in several sentences, write a letter.
- Ask for a response that includes the legislator's position on the issue.
- Realize that the staff member answering the phone may have been instructed not to make detailed comments about the issues; this is done in letters, so that the legislator's position is not misrepresented.
- Try to get as specific answer as you can either by phone or in writing.
- Follow-up with a letter if possible, mail, fax or e-mail it to the legislator's office.

Record the name of the legislator's aides and their direct phone numbers if available. Keep track of your calls and correspondence; make follow-up calls if you do not receive timely replies.