

# HOW TO LOBBY

AND

## UNDERSTANDING

THE

## LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



For text and status of current legislation go to [www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html)

# HOW TO INFLUENCE YOUR LEGISLATOR

“In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation... Every voice matters in the public forum...Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power.” —U. S. Bishops’ *Faithful Citizenship*, 1999

## LET YOUR LEGISLATOR KNOW WHAT YOU THINK. . .

Legislators are interested in what their constituents are thinking. There are many ways of contacting your legislator—in person, by mail, through petitions.

Legislators are also glad to speak to local church, club or professional groups. Invite them through their local office.

## FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS. . .

As a rule, personal contacts are the most effective.

### IN SACRAMENTO

Legislators are very receptive to visitors in their offices in the State Capitol. An appointment helps but is not necessary. Because Legislators rely heavily on their staff, meeting with the staff person who works on the issues you are interested in can be as valuable as meeting directly with your legislator.

### AT HOME

Legislators are often available on Fridays and over weekends during the session. Appointments can be made through their local offices.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONAL VISITS. . .

Set up an interview together with several friends, or invite your legislator to a home meeting for discussion and exchange of ideas.

## GUIDELINES FOR YOUR INTERVIEW. . .

Keep your group small, not more than 5 or 6 people. If your group is too large, your legislator will make a speech!

The group should be informed about the legislator’s record on specific issues. Ask him/her for elaborations on the points on which you have little information and for clarification on his/her position on others.

Someone in your group should be appointed spokesperson to introduce members of the group and start the conversation.

Questions should be specific. General questions, such as, "What is your stand on social welfare?" permit vague and evasive answers.

Attempt to discover areas of agreement as well as of disagreement, and to explore new ideas. If you succeed, both you and your legislator will gain from the interview. Be brief!

## TIMING IS IMPORTANT. . .

The most effective time to communicate with your legislator about a bill in which you are interested is before it comes up for committee hearing. Your legislator's office can let you know when the bill is scheduled for hearing.

You can get a single copy of any bill free from the Bill Room, State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814.

If you plan to attend a committee hearing, check by phone with the author's office before leaving, to find out whether the bill is still to be heard that day.

## WRITING LETTERS. . .



If a personal visit is not possible, you can express your opinion by letter.

When writing, keep in mind the following:

- ❖ Write about only one subject in a letter. Be brief!
- ❖ Make your letter courteous and legible.
- ❖ If writing about a specific bill, have its number or popular name.
- ❖ Begin with a commendation for a vote or speech if possible. Support a courageous stand and encourage continued leadership.
- ❖ Give reasons for your stand in your own words. If possible, draw on your personal experience.
- ❖ Raise questions. A well-formulated question can express a viewpoint and encourage response.

## FORMS OF ADDRESS



Address state legislators:

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_

State Capitol

Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Assemblymember \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Governor \_\_\_\_\_

## PHONE CALLS



Person-to-person calls, especially if you have had previous contact with your legislator, are likely to get through.

To call a state legislator in Sacramento, phone (916) 657-9900 and ask for the legislator. If he/she is unavailable, speaking to a knowledgeable staff person can be very valuable. Calls to District Offices are also effective.

# YOUR LAWMAKERS DO HEAR YOU!

If you write a letter to your Representative or Senator, does it do any good? Yes, says a study published by the American University's Institute for Government Public Information Research.

According to the study, Congressional Representatives and Senators consider constituent mail and telephone calls to be "the most important kind of communication in developing positions on issues and legislation."

The 32-page report, entitled *Special Washington Report: Communications and Congress*, was based on panel discussions and questionnaires given to 123 Congressional staffers. Participants were asked to rate 96 different types of communications according to how visible and effective they are in influencing Senators and Representatives.

The top rankings were:

1. Spontaneous letters from constituents
2. Telephone calls from constituents
3. Reports from Congressional Research Service
4. Articles in the major daily newspapers
5. Editorials in the major daily newspapers
6. Visits from constituents
7. Articles in district daily newspapers
8. *The Congressional Record*
9. Editorials in district daily newspapers
10. Government publications

*Don't ever underestimate  
the impact you can have!*



COMMUNICATE

## YOUR POSITION

If you are concerned about issues let your legislator know. Call the district office. Write a letter. Meet with your legislator or a member of his/her staff. You have valuable information that can help him/her decide how to vote.

## GUIDELINES

### Write to your legislator:

- Address your letter properly. Elected representatives are addressed as *The Honorable* followed by his or her name.
- Write about one subject only.
- Be brief and to the point. A rambling letter that takes up 10 pages and never quite gets to the point will not be as persuasive as one that builds a case.
- Use your own words. You are the expert. Explain what the impact will be and why your legislator should vote as you ask.
- Write legibly. Your letter doesn't need to be typed.
- Be courteous. Most people, including legislators, don't respond positively to threats.
- Timing is critical. The best letter in the world won't have much impact if it arrives after your legislator has already voted on the bill.

## A SAMPLE LETTER

April 2, 1999

The Honorable Joe Smith, Chair  
Senate Education Committee  
State Capitol, Room 2037  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Smith,

I am writing to ask you to vote in support of SB 194 by Senator Blake.

SB 194 would provide support programs to help keep pregnant and parenting teens from dropping out of school. Without a high school education a teen parent cannot provide for herself and her child. She is much more likely to spend years on welfare.

I was a teen parent who graduated from high school. I am now able to support myself and my son, Jason. I wouldn't have made it without the child care and the counseling that are such an important part of these programs.

Please support SB 194. Please keep me informed on this.

Sincerely,  
Susan Doe  
143 City Street  
Small Town, CA 00000

### Visit your legislator:

- Legislators come from different backgrounds, with different areas of expertise and different experiences. Ask the legislator's staff which committees he/she serves on. Check with associations or groups to which you belong for information on issues.
- Be prepared. Review the information you have learned about your issue.
- Be on time for your appointment and stay within your allotted time. If you overstay your welcome you may have hurt your cause.

# CONSTITUENT VISIT

Group meetings with legislators are most productive if a few guidelines are observed. Here is a list of those guidelines.

- Arrive on time.
- Dress appropriately.
- Try to send a delegation representing diverse constituencies from your coalition or organization
- Know your legislator's background on the issue and understand what role your legislator will play on the issue.
- Target your presentation to the needs of the district.
- Select a spokesperson; assign portions of the presentation; practice.
- Get to the point of your visit quickly; clearly articulate the reason for the visit; don't bring up extraneous items.
- Observe common courtesies: Don't interrupt the legislator, do make eye contact and pronounce the legislator's name correctly.
- If you are meeting concerning a bill, have the most current version of the bill with you. A one-page fact sheet would also be extremely helpful.
- Have a debriefing session and report back to your organization.
- Follow-up with a thank you note; send along any additional information that could be useful or that you promised to send.





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Conference

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