

## More Tips on How to Communicate with Legislators

### Phoning your legislator

#### Preparation

- Determine your goal and list points you wish to make in the course of the telephone conversation.
- Know number of appropriate bills, dates of introduction and any subsequent amended versions. Be familiar with provisions of bills and your rationale for support or opposition.
- Know how bills affect schools in the legislator's district.
- Secure name of specific staff person to be contacted.

#### Suggestions for conversation

- State your name, position you hold and district.
- Ask to speak to appropriate legislative staff (if calling about a bill).
- Ask for appointment secretary or personal secretary if calling to make an appointment.
- As briefly as possible, express your questions or your views on the issue.
- Do not argue. Do not antagonize.
- Determine position held by legislator on the bill or issue, if possible.
- If it is favorable, express appreciation.
- If the legislator is undecided: "What kind of information would assist in taking a position? How can we help?" or "Would a meeting with us to discuss the issue be of some help?"
- If opposed: "We hope they will take another look at this issue. Would they be willing to meet with us to discuss it?"
- Secure the name of staff person responding to your call.
- Remember to follow up by sending a letter to your legislator acknowledging your call to the office and the assistance given by staff.

### Writing to your legislator

Legislators want to know how voters in their districts feel about the problems which challenge effective government. Public officials need to understand what individuals and organizations like and dislike.

Constituent letters, if well written, can be a potent vehicle for making our voices heard in Sacramento. When you write to your legislator, follow these suggestions to make your message more effective.

Address your legislator correctly:

The Honorable (full name)  
Member of the California State Assembly (or Senate)  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Dear Assembly Member or Senator (last name):

#### Structuring your letter

- Keep your letter short: Make your point but don't waste words. You should try and keep your letter to one page. A longhand letter is perfectly proper, but it too should be kept short.
- Use appropriate stationery: If you're writing on behalf of your district, be sure to use a printed letterhead.
- Write to your own representatives: Tell your views to the legislators who represent you. Legislators care about what their constituents think.

- Introduce yourself: Tell who you are in your letter. A simple statement such as “I am the principal at Elmwood High School” is important. If not writing on letterhead, remember to include your full name, address, and phone number. Also, reference if you have previously met the legislator or his or her staff at a local community event.
- Be specific: Identify the issue and desired action within the first or second paragraph. Clearly identify the particular legislation that you are writing about, such as AB 75 (Steinberg), instead of “I’m writing about the administrator training bills discussed in the newspaper article last Sunday.” Moreover, because bills are amended often, it is helpful to identify the specific provision or amended version that you are discussing. For example, “I am writing about AB 75 (Steinberg), as amended on April 5, 2002,...
- State your case: Tell your views as concisely as possible. What the legislation means to your school and community is your most potent argument. And, whenever possible, discuss legislation in terms of your school district, its unique needs, problems, and assets. Give specific reasons why a proposal warrants support or opposition and exactly what steps you are asking the legislator to take.
- Ask for a response: Whenever appropriate, include a question in your letter which will elicit an answer. Ask the legislator for his or her view on the matter of its impact on your school.
- Try telephone, fax, overnight mail or e-mail: These are especially useful when time is limited and your message is urgent.

Always:

- Be concise and factual.
- Put your name and return address on the envelope as well as in the proper place on the letter itself.
- Write legibly and avoid careless errors in spelling and grammar.
- Use plain or personal stationery when you are writing as an individual. If you are writing as a representative of a group, use organization stationery.
- Let the legislator know how the particular measure will affect schools in their district.
- Include enough pertinent facts and reasons to substantiate your position.
- Be courteous and sincere.
- Identify the bill with which you are concerned, using title and number wherever possible.
- Write a letter of appreciation when your legislator does something of which you approve.

Do not:

- Overstate or exaggerate your position.
- Flaunt the fact that you are a “citizen” and “taxpayer.”
- Guess at the name, the number or the contents of the bill.
- Base your comments on rumors or guess at the facts.
- Use mimeographed letters, printed postal cards or form letters.
- Limit yourself to generalities.
- Leave out, or assume the reader’s knowledge of, essential details.
- Use threats or personal attacks.
- Use insincere flattery or flowery terms.
- Write only letters of criticism.
- Use inflated or untrue facts to back up your position.