



Effective Communication with a Legislator

As a Floridian, one of your greatest responsibilities is to help elect the legislators who represent you and the state's more than 14 million other residents. But your role in the democratic process of government does not end at the polls. By sharing your opinions and ideas with your representatives and senators in Tallahassee, you help them decide what to do about the issues and pending legislation that affect us all. They value your suggestions and encourage you to express them.

Your legislators receive a huge amount of phone calls and mail from their constituents. Unfortunately, their full agendas limit their ability to personally read and respond to it all. How then, can you be sure your voice is heard? Here are some tips to help you get the most impact out of your communications with your legislators in Tallahassee.

General Tips:

- Know who your legislators are and how to contact them. If you don't know who represents you, you can find out by using the find your legislator tool at: <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/myrepresentative.aspx>. Your senator's flsenate.gov page will give you his or her mailing addresses, phone numbers, and email address.
- Make sure you understand the legislative process. Even the most basic understanding of the process will help you effectively express your ideas.
- Contact your legislator about an issue before the Legislature takes action on it. Most matters coming before the Legislature are well publicized before session.
- Use a variety of communication methods. You might choose to telephone, write, email, fax, or visit your legislator. You might also choose to give testimony at public hearings held by the Legislature. (To give testimony, you would need to contact the appropriate committee administrative assistant before the hearing to sign up.
- Tell your legislator what effect you think a bill, if it becomes law, will have on you, your children, business, or community. Be concise, but specific.
- Be polite, even if you disagree strongly with the legislator you are addressing. Lawmakers cannot please everyone. Your communication will be more effective if you are reasonable in your approach.
- Suggest a course of action and help. Don't make promises or threats. Policy Priorities

Writing Effective Letters:

Address letters to members of the House of Representatives as follows:

*The Honorable John Doe Florida House of Representatives
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300*

Address letters to members of the Senate as follows:

*Senator Jane Doe
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100*

- Be certain you spell your legislator's name correctly and use the correct address. If you don't, you could lose your audience.
- Type or print legibly. Sign your name neatly and give your address correctly so they can respond to your letter.
- Keep letters, email, and faxes brief. Never write more than one page. Concise written correspondence is more likely to grab and keep the reader's attention.
- Identify your issue or opinion at the beginning of the letter, don't bury your main point under trivial text.
- Cover only one issue per letter. If you have another issue to address, write another letter.
- Back up your opinions with supporting facts. Your letter should inform the reader.
- Avoid abbreviations or acronyms, and don't use technical jargon. Rather than impressing your reader, such terms will only frustrate him or her.
- Don't send the same letter to more than one legislator. Personalized letters have more impact.

Calling or Visiting Your Legislator:

- Plan your call or visit carefully. Keep to the point and discuss only one issue. Organize your thoughts ahead of time and make notes to help you stay on track.
- When planning to visit your legislator, make an appointment. Don't just drop by your legislator's office and expect him or her to drop everything to see you. Call or write for an appointment as soon as you know when you are going to be at the Capitol.
- Prepare a one-page fact sheet concerning your issue to give to your legislator. This will help him or her better retain what you present.