

The “Do’s & Don’ts” of Effectively Engaging Legislators

Influencing legislators and their decision-making is one of the most important opportunities provided to American citizens. Providing legislators with information on issues and the impact of pending legislation ensures that legislators are exposed to the varying implications of every law and regulation. However with competing issues, limited time, and hectic legislative schedules it is important that contact with your legislator provides maximum benefit to your issue/program. Whether you write, call, or personally visit, the following “Do’s & Don’ts” provide examples of how you can effectively engage your legislator.

- Do** be brief and concise in any initial written materials. More detailed information can be provided if the legislator asks.
- Do** make clear what your position is and what exactly you would like your legislator to do. Whenever possible refer to a specific bill by name and number.
- Do** let the legislator know if you are a constituent or your program serves their district.
- Don’t** lie or mislead a legislator about the importance of an issue, the opposition’s position or strength, or any other matter.
- Don’t** promise anything you cannot deliver.
- Do** make sure you thank your legislator for his/her time and if provided their assistance with your law or issue of concern. If they vote on your issue as you requested be sure and show your appreciation for their support.
- Do** provide your legislator with “real world” examples of how the issue/legislation will affect you, your program, or their constituents. This provides the legislator with the best evidence of how they should respond.
- Do** show legislators courtesy at all times, even when they disagree with your position.
- Don’t** waste a lot of time on legislators who are publicly committed to an opposing position. You should instead focus your energies on contacting legislators who are neutral or are keeping an open mind on the issue.
- Don’t** overstate what it is you actually know. If a legislator contacts you with a question and you do not know the answer let them know that. Promise to contact them back later with the answer, and be sure to do it!
- Do** activate your grassroots support. Legislators care most about issues that affect their own constituents. When constituents contact legislators with letters or telephone calls in support or opposition of an issue, legislators take notice.

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