

## **COMMUNICATING WITH CONGRESS**

### **TIPS FOR WRITING CONGRESS**

Heightened security measures have dramatically increased the time it takes for a letter sent by post to reach a congressional office. More and more, citizens are using e-mails and faxes to communicate their concerns, and increasingly elected officials' offices prefer electronic communications for constituent contact. As a general rule, Members of Congress are far more likely to heed your message if you are one of their constituents.

#### ***Purpose of Your Letter:***

- State your purpose for writing in the first sentence of the letter.
- If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it. And make sure that you are referencing the correct legislation to the correct body of Congress. House bills are H.R. \_\_\_\_\_; Senate bills are designated as S. \_\_\_\_\_.
- Be courteous
- If appropriate, include personal information about why the issue matters to you.
- Address only one issue in each letter or e-mail.

#### ***Addressing Your Correspondence:***

- To a Senator

The Honorable (Full Name)  
United States Senate  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator (Last Name):

- To a Representative

The Honorable (Full Name)  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name):

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address him/her as:

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman:  
or Dear Madam Speaker:

### **TIPS FOR PHONING CONGRESS**

Telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment.

After identifying yourself as a constituent, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as “Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S. \_\_\_\_/H.R. \_\_\_\_).”

State your reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your senators’ or representative’s position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR A PERSONAL VISIT**

Meeting with a Member of Congress, or congressional staff, is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific issue or legislative matter. Below are some suggestions to consider when planning a visit to a congressional office.

**Plan Your Visit Carefully:** Be clear about what it is you want to achieve; determine in advance which Member or committee staff you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.

**Make an Appointment:** When attempting to meet with a Member, contact the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler. Explain your purpose and who you represent. It is easier for congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the Member.

**Be Prompt and Patient:** When it is time to meet with a Member be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for a Congressman or Congresswoman to be late or to have a meeting interrupted due to the Member’s crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a Member’s staff.

**Be Prepared:** Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and material to support your position. Members are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a Member may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share with the Member information and examples that demonstrate clearly the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.

**Be Political:** Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the Members' constituency. If possible, describe for the Member how you or your group can be of assistance to him/her. When it is appropriate, remember to ask for commitment.

**Be Responsive:** Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information in the event the Member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up the meeting with a thank-you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials requested.

### **THE ROLES OF CONGRESSIONAL STAFF**

Each Member of Congress has staff to assist him/her during a term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff.

#### ***Commonly used titles and job functions:***

**Administrative Assistant (AA) or Chief of Staff (CoS):** The AA reports directly to the Member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcomes of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The AA is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

**Legislative Director (LD), Senior Legislative Assistant (Sr. LA), or Legislative Counsel (LC):** The LD is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some congressional offices there are several LAs, and responsibilities are assigned to staff with particular expertise in specific areas. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the Member, an office may include a different LA for banking issues, health issues, environmental matters, taxes, etc.

**Press Secretary (Press) or Communications Director (CD):** The Press Secretary's responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the Member, his/her constituency and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the Member's views or position on specific issues.

**Appointment Secretary (Appt), Personal Secretary or Scheduler (Sch):** The Appointment Secretary is usually responsible for allocating a Member's time among the many demands that arise from congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The Appointment Secretary may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc.

**Caseworker:** The Caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the Member's signature. The Caseworker's responsibilities may also include helping resolve problems constituents present in relation to federal agencies, e.g., Social Security and Medicare issues, veteran's benefits, passports, etc. There are often several Caseworkers in a congressional office.

**Other Staff Titles:** Other titles used in a congressional office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manger, and Receptionist.