



NRA-ILA

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Effectively Communicating With Your Lawmakers

As a voting constituent, you have a tremendous ability to influence the outcome of legislation. Ask any elected official which individual's concerns are most important to him, and chances are they all will deliver the same response: his constituents'. All politicians are keenly aware of the fact that it is their constituents who hold the keys to their political futures. Therefore, constituent concerns are of the utmost concern to politicians. The best way you can affect the outcome of legislation is to directly communicate your views to your lawmakers. **REMEMBER:** Your lawmakers work for you! Since the primary concern of all politicians is to get re-elected, be sure you communicate your concerns with your own elected officials first! Then, if you wish to express your views to others who don't directly represent you, you can do so. But make sure your legislators hear from you first! First some general information. NRA's Institute for Legislative Action's (NRA-ILA) website -- www.NRAILA.org -- has a wealth of information to assist you when you contact your lawmakers. Of particular note is our "[Write Your Representatives](#)" feature, which will enable you to identify and contact your lawmakers directly from our site. Also, keep in mind many times you will not be speaking directly to your elected official, but rather to a member of his staff. Contact with legislative staff is critical to the process, as staff has major input with lawmakers and has expertise in most issues on which legislators will vote -- including gun-related issues. Listed below, you'll find some additional tips on effectively communicating with your elected officials

WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS

One of the most often-utilized methods of communicating with your lawmakers is by writing a letter. As a voting constituent, a letter is an easy way for you to let lawmakers know your views on specific issues, encourage them to vote your way, and let them know you'll watch how they vote on particular issues and keep those votes in mind on Election Day! Personally-written letters allow you an opportunity to present your position to your lawmakers without interruption. With that in mind, you'll want to keep the letter short and to the point, with just enough facts and figures to further enhance your statement. Never lie or make a statement you can't back up with evidence. Always let your lawmakers know how a specific issue will affect you personally, and make sure he understands that you live and vote in his district or state, and therefore, what affects you may affect your fellow constituents as well. If you own or operate a business, use your company letterhead. If you're a member of the PTA or other civic group, don't hesitate to mention that. Taking these steps will enhance your message and ensure your concerns are taken seriously. Here are three quick tips you'll want to refer to when drafting your letter, and [click here to review a sample letter](#).

1. **How To Address Your Representative.** Address your letters to "The Honorable _____," and begin the letter "Dear Senator" or "Dear Representative." If writing to a Committee Chairman or Speaker of the House, address him as "Mr. Chairman" or "Mr. Speaker." (You may obtain your lawmakers' addresses by calling the NRA-ILA Grassroots Division at (800) 392-8683, or using the "[Write Your Representatives](#)" feature at www.NRAILA.org.)

2. **Be Brief, Specific, & Always Be Courteous!** Letters shouldn't exceed one page, and the purpose of your letter should be stated clearly in the first paragraph. If your letter pertains to specific legislation, identify it accordingly (use the bill number, if known, and the title of the bill and/or a brief description). To make sure your letter is as productive as possible, always be courteous, even if you disagree with your representative's position! Never threaten or use abusive language. This only hurts your cause.
3. **Ask Them To Write Back.** Always ask for a response to your letter. You'll want a hard copy of your legislator's positions on these issues for future reference and to document their positions. Always send copies of any responses you receive to NRA-ILA's Grassroots Division. ([Contact information here.](#))

E-MAIL

E-mail is becoming a more popular way to communicate your views to your lawmaker. While not every lawmaker can receive e-mail messages, most are able, and more and more elected officials are utilizing it. Tips for transmitting an effective e-mail message are similar to writing a letter, though this format is usually less formal and allows you to be a bit more brief in your message. A major advantage of e-mail versus a personally-written letter is the speed in which your message will be received. Be prepared for some lawmakers to "respond" to your e-mail message with a canned reflector message that may not specifically address your concern. Whether you receive a specific response to your message or not, be sure that you request your lawmaker's position in writing so you can document his position easily. Send this response to ILA Grassroots for our information and records. (You can find your lawmakers' [federal and state] e-mail addresses AND directly send them an e-mail message utilizing the "[Write Your Representatives](#)" feature.)

FAXING

Faxing has become increasingly popular as more and more Americans have gained access to fax machines. In fact, nearly all U.S. Senators and Representatives have published fax numbers. What's more, faxing allows you to send a full, letter-length message to your representatives in a matter of minutes for just the cost of a phone call. When preparing a fax message to a lawmaker, follow the same basic guidelines used when mailing a letter via regular mail. You also want to make sure your fax number is clearly visible, in case your legislator wishes to respond to you via fax. (You may call the NRA-ILA Grassroots Division at (800) 392-8683 for your lawmakers' fax number or utilize the "[Write Your Representatives](#)" feature.)

EFFECTIVE TELEPHONE CALLS

You will often find that, as bills move through the legislative process, there simply isn't enough time to write your legislators prior to a key vote. When you need to get in touch with your lawmakers immediately to let them know of your position on gun-related issues, and if you don't have e-mail capabilities, your telephone calls become the most effective means for you to communicate your views. Below are several tips for you to refer to when placing your calls. (As with other contact information for your elected officials, the Grassroots Division can provide you with phone numbers for your legislators, and the "[Write Your Representatives](#)" feature can also provide this information.)

1. **Identify Yourself As A Constituent.** As someone who lives and votes in the district or state of the lawmaker you are contacting, your phone calls carry the most weight. Calls to representatives outside your district or state can be helpful as well. However, be sure to always contact your own legislators first.

2. **State Your Point Quickly And Clearly.** Be sure to limit your telephone call to one subject. Be brief but specific. Your phone call should last at most only a couple of minutes. State the reason you are calling, giving a brief description of the bill and bill number if possible. REMEMBER: ALWAYS BE COURTEOUS! NEVER threaten, or use abusive language.
3. **Request That Your Legislator Follow Up Your Call With a Letter.** Be sure to give your name and home address and request that your legislator follow up with a letter. You took the time to call, so have your legislator take the time to respond. Get his position in writing on issues important to you and furnish these responses to ILA Grassroots.
4. **You Do Not Always Have To Identify Yourself Solely As An NRA Member!** Unfortunately, many anti-gun politicians are under the misguided impression that NRA members only say what NRA tells them to say. If you identify yourself as a voting constituent; community or business leader; PTA, VFW, or American Legion member; or homemaker, lawmakers will find it harder to dismiss your call.

PERSONAL MEETINGS

By far, the most effective way to articulate your views to your elected official and to affect the outcome of legislation is to sit down and speak with your lawmakers face-to-face. While these personal visits are extremely productive, they also require the most amount of planning to ensure success. When planning a personal visit, refer to the following guidelines:

1. **Schedule An Appointment.** Elected officials have extremely hectic schedules. To help increase the chance that you will have time allotted for you to speak directly with your legislator, call in advance to set up an appointment. In all likelihood, most of your personal meetings will be scheduled at your lawmakers' district offices, so be sure you contact these offices to make your appointment.
2. **Explain How Proposed Legislation Will Directly Affect You.** Use specific examples to show your lawmaker how firearm-related bills will jeopardize your rights or the lives of law-abiding citizens, and unduly burden those engaged in lawful activities. If the proposed measure will strengthen our rights or benefit gun owners, specifically cite examples to support this position.
3. **Always Be Polite!** Nothing is as detrimental to a visit with a lawmaker than rudeness, vulgarity, or threats. Even if you disagree with the position of your legislator, be courteous. Dress professionally to convey the seriousness of your visit.
4. **Follow Up Your Visit With A Letter.** Regardless of how your meeting goes, send a letter to your legislator thanking him for his time, and reiterating the points you discussed. This gesture will go a long way, and possibly allow for future meetings.
5. **If Your Lawmaker Is Unavailable, Meet With His Staff.** Your representative may not always be available for a meeting. In such cases, try to schedule an appointment with the staff member responsible for firearm-related issues. Legislative staff will bring your concerns to your legislator's attention, have great influence on legislators' voting decisions, and often have expertise on gun-related issues. Send a follow-up letter to the staff member you met with as well. Keep in mind many congressional staff members later run for office themselves, so these relationships can be invaluable in the future!
6. **Bring Ample Materials To Share With Your Lawmaker And His Staff.** These materials

will bolster your point and serve as valuable reference materials after your meeting has concluded.

ATTEND TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Lawmakers often host town hall meetings in their districts -- especially during congressional district work breaks -- to tout their achievements and solicit feedback from their constituents. Such meetings are a prime opportunity for you to ask your lawmakers to state their position on firearm-related issues for the record, in an open and public forum. The following guidelines should be helpful when planning to attend town hall meetings.

1. **Get On The Invite List And Attend The Meetings.** Write your lawmakers and ask to be put on the invitation list for the lawmaker's town hall meetings. If they do not have such a list, ask for information on the next meeting. When you receive word that a town hall meeting is scheduled, be sure to make plans to attend, and share this information with the NRA-ILA Grassroots Division so we may alert your fellow NRA members and encourage them to attend as well.
2. **Prepare Questions Ahead Of Time.** Have specific questions in mind, such as asking for your legislator's position on a specific bill or issue, e.g., Right-To-Carry, a ban on gun shows, lawsuit preemption, H.R. 123, or S. 456.
3. **Get An Answer.** Ask your question clearly, and as simply as possible, e.g., "Do you support Right To Carry/ Do you oppose gun bans?" If your legislator doesn't answer your question sufficiently, politely repeat the question.
4. **Follow-Up With a Letter.** Whether you had the opportunity to ask your question or not, follow up with a letter to your lawmaker. Let him know you attended his last town meeting. Ask your question in your letter if you didn't have an opportunity to do so at the meeting, or address his response to any firearm-related questions other constituents may have asked. This letter will ensure your lawmakers take you and your views seriously, and will allow you to obtain a written response addressing your concerns that you should also share with ILA Grassroots.

For a list of town hall meetings in your area check our [Event Calendar](#).

Find this item at: <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GrassRootsActivism.aspx?ID=11>