



NRA-ILA

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Communicating With Lawmakers - How To Influence Your Elected Officials

Did you know that you can effectively influence the outcome of legislation? It's true! Ask any elected official who is the most effective lobbyist they have ever met, 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 number one concern of all politicians is to get re-elected, be sure you communicate your concerns with your own elected officials first!* Listed below, you'll find tips on effective communication strategies with your elected officials. But if all you need to know is how to contact your lawmakers, just use our "[Write Your Reps](#)" tool.

WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO YOUR LEGISLATORS

If you haven't communicated with an elected official before, and you want to get started, the simplest thing you can do is utilize a results-oriented method -- LETTER WRITING. 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 a particular issue and keep that vote in mind come 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 other 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. Here are three quick tips you'll want to refer to when drafting your letter, followed by a sample letter for your review:

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 them as "Mr. Chairman" or "Mr. Speaker."
2. **Be Brief, Specific, & Always Be Courteous!** Ideally, 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. 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 our cause.
3. **Ask Them To Write Back!** Always ask for a response to your letter. You'll want a hard copy of your

legislators` positions on these issues for future reference and to document their positions.

In addition to writing letters, you may also want to take advantage of newer technology and correspond with your lawmakers by fax, E-mail or mailgram. Keep in mind that although this correspondence will arrive faster, it`s also more expensive, and therefore will require you to limit your message so that your point is conveyed succinctly and relatively inexpensively.

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 check out our ["Write Your Reps"](#) tool.*

E-mail

Although not yet as widely available as fax, E-mail (electronic mail) also allows you to communicate with your representatives quickly and easily. Again, follow the basic guidelines for a written letter when you send an E-mail message. As efforts to get the federal government on the "information superhighway" continue, you can be sure more and more Congressmen will be accessible via E-mail. For more information on your lawmakers` E-mail addresses, please be sure to utilize our ["Write Your Reps"](#) tool.

Mailgram/Telegram

Not all of us have access to fax machines or E-mail, but you can still get a message to your legislators quickly using Western Union mailgrams and telegrams. Because mailgrams and telegrams are much more expensive than any of the other means of electronic communication, you will want to keep your message brief and to the point. For example: "I strongly urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 1234, the (name of the bill)." Mailgrams are sent via Western Union and arrive at your legislators office in about one to three days by regular U.S. mail. To send a mailgram, call your local Western Union office, and recite your message to the clerk. Your message will be printed and sent to your representative. You will be charged for the mailgram on your telephone bill or on your credit card, depending on the length of the message. To save time and money, compose your message before calling. Telegrams, while more expensive than mailgrams, will reach your legislator much quicker, usually within four or five hours, because they are delivered directly by Western Union. To send a telegram, call your local Western Union office and recite your message to the clerk. Telegram delivery is available in Washington, D.C., but not in all cities.

PLACING 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 legislator immediately to let him know of your position on gun-related issues, 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:

1. **Identify Yourself As A Constituent!** As someone who lives and votes in the district or state, your phone calls carry the most weight. Calls to representatives outside your district or state are helpful as well, however, be sure to contact your 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 only a few minutes. Let them know why you're calling, giving a bill number if possible. **REMEMBER: ALWAYS BE COURTEOUS! NEVER** threaten or use abusive language. This only discredits you, and harms our mutual cause.
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, have your legislator take the time to respond. Get his position in writing on issues important to you!
4. **Do Not Identify Yourself Solely as an NRA Member!** Unfortunately, many anti-gun politicians are under the impression that NRA members only say what the NRA tells them to say. If you identify yourself as an NRA member as well as a voting constituent, community or business leader, PTA, VFW, American Legion member, or homemaker, lawmakers will find it harder to dismiss your call as "NRA propaganda."

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 ensure that you will have time allotted for you to speak directly with your legislator, call in advance to set up an appointment.
2. **Explain How Proposed Legislation Will Directly Affect You.** Use specific examples to show your lawmaker how firearms-related bills will jeopardize your rights, the lives of law-abiding citizens, and unduly burden those engaged in lawful shooting sports. If the proposed measure will strengthen your 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 staffer responsible for firearms-related issues, or a staff member who will bring your concerns to your legislator's attention. Send a follow-up letter to the staffer you met with as well. Keep in mind many congressional staffers later run for office themselves!

ATTEND TOWN MEETINGS

Lawmakers often host town meetings in their districts 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 the Second Amendment for the record, in an open and public forum.

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 meetings. If they do not have such a list, ask for information on the next meeting. When you receive word that a town meeting is scheduled, be sure to make plans to attend, and share this information with the NRA-ILA Grassroots Division and the pro-Second Amendment community in your area.
2. **Prepare Questions Ahead Of Time.** Have specific questions in mind, e.g., ask for your legislator`s position on a specific bill or issue, e.g., Right To Carry, a ban on gun shows, H.R. XXX, or S. YYY.
3. **Get An Answer.** Ask your question clearly, and as simply as possible. If your legislator hems and haws and doesn`t answer your question, calmly repeat the question, e.g., "Do you support Right To Carry/Do you oppose gun bans?"
4. **Follow-Up With a Letter.** Whether you had the opportunity to ask your question or not, follow up with a letter to your representative. 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. This letter will ensure your lawmakers take you and your views seriously, and will allow for you to obtain a written response addressing your concerns!

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

Find this item at: <http://www.nraila.org/ActionCenter/GrassRootsActivism.aspx?ID=6>