

How to Communicate With Your Legislator

1. Call or write the Representative or Senator who represents you. They will pay attention to you because YOU are a constituent. Legislators don't mind personal calls at their homes, but remember, they have lives and families, and limit your calls to reasonable hours (not after 9 pm, and not early on weekend mornings).
2. Identify yourself clearly. Let them know that you're registered to vote in their district. Make it clear whether you're contacting them as a private citizen or as a representative of your agency or employer. Provide your address and a telephone number so they can respond.
3. Use your own words, and if you're writing as a private citizen, use your own stationery. If you hand-write your letter, be sure it is legible. Try writing a draft first. Avoid using pre-printed postcards or form letters – your own words mean a lot to your legislator.
4. Be specific. If possible, you should identify a bill by its title and LD number. (LD stands for Legislative Document.) If you don't have the title and number, describe the subject in enough detail for the legislator to understand it and distinguish it from other bills. In a typical session, there are about 2,000 bills, and many legislators can get involved in several hundred of them!
5. Explain YOUR position. Always start with your personal viewpoint so that you're speaking for yourself. Then, you can mention any organization or agency you're involved with, and its stand on the issue. Tell your legislator how the bill will affect you, your family, or the people you work for or with or for whom you provide services. If you are calling to oppose a bill, and you have thoughts about a better approach, be constructive and offer those ideas to your legislator.
6. Be polite. Don't threaten, cajole, or present yourself as having great political power or influence. (If it's true that you do, it's likely that your legislator already knows that.) If the legislator asks for more information, offer to contact an appropriate person or organization to obtain that information for them.
7. Be brief. Be factual. Your letter or your phone call should be to the point and as brief as possible while getting the message across. One-page letters are effective because they're easier to read and take in. Don't overdo it – overkill will take away from your message.
8. Ask for a response, but don't be upset if you don't get one right away. As the Legislative Session progresses, legislators get extremely busy. Encourage your legislator to take action on the issue and to respond to you, and be sure you give them your address and phone number so that they can. You can follow-up, but be patient and polite – there may be many reasons why they didn't get back to you.

*Provided to the Maine Dental Access Coalition Members and Interested Parties.
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