



## ADVOCACY 101:

### HOW TO TALK SO YOUR LEGISLATOR WILL HEAR YOU

As constituents, you can and should talk with your legislator any time of year; you don't need to wait until they're at the State House to get their attention. Get to know your legislators and let them get to know you; the best way is to interact with them often. In the meantime, here are some tips to help you maximize your impact.

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#### 1) Be prepared, be brief, be courteous.

- Keep in mind that most of your legislators do not have staff. This can mean that it's hard to reach them, especially if there is an issue of great controversy, but it also means that you have a chance to persuade them directly.
- A little background research can go a long way - you never know when you can give your legislator new information on an issue that interests you. Prepare to emphasize one or two points you really want your legislator to understand.
- Legislators are most interested in how the issue affects their constituents. Whenever possible, link your arguments back to yourself, your neighbors, or your community.
- Keep letters to 1-2 paragraphs and phone messages to a few sentences.
- If possible, include praise for a position the legislator has taken in the past. Let your legislator know if you disagree with them, but explain why rather than just criticize their position.

#### 2) Call them.

- Talk to your legislators. (You can find how to reach them below.) When you reach someone, state the issue, what you want them to do, and why it matters to you.
- If you get their voicemail, ask them to give you a call back. Then follow up later with another form of communication.

#### 3) Write them a letter.

- Personal letters can be very effective. A handwritten letter will especially stand out. If you're part of a letter-writing campaign, consider using your own words rather than copying a script verbatim.
- Legislators receive a lot of e-mail, so if you send an e-mail you should follow up later with a phone call or other form of communication. Some legislators ask that you put your address or zip code in the body of your e-mail so they know you're a constituent and they can pay special attention.

#### 4) Meet them face-to-face.

- Go to events like town halls, forums, and other meetings where they are speaking. Come prepared with a question. Be sure to introduce yourself after.
- Go to the State House. If your legislator is hard to pin down, you know they'll be in attendance for State House business. Contact them in advance to let them know you are coming. Testify before legislative committees on bills that interest you.
- Invite them to your home. Your legislators are your neighbors. Call and invite them to meet with you and other like-minded members of your community.

#### 5) Thank them.

- If your legislator has done something you agree with, let them know – especially if they were in the minority. This helps them to know their constituents are behind them the next time they have to make a similar vote.

#### 6) Contact info and more information:

- All legislators can be reached by mail at the State House: 82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903.
- Home contact information for most legislators is available on the General Assembly's website: [www.rilegislature.gov](http://www.rilegislature.gov).
- Find your legislator under the House or Senate tab, and then click on the "Biography" tab to find their address and/or phone number.
- If you're not sure who your legislator is, visit [vote.sos.ri.gov](http://vote.sos.ri.gov).

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## MORE INFO ON CIVIL LIBERTIES-RELATED LEGISLATION:

[www.riaclu.org/legislation](http://www.riaclu.org/legislation)

American Civil Liberties Union  
of Rhode Island  
[www.riaclu.org](http://www.riaclu.org)  
(401) 831-7171