



## **Communication With Your Local, State and Federal Decision Makers**

Well-informed, knowledgeable decision makers are better able to act in a way that benefits everyone. Furthermore, they clearly want as much information as possible on issues that are of importance to them and have come to rely in particular on constituents to provide it. A communication from a constituent will always merit a decision maker's attention.

The goal of communicating with lawmakers is to inform them of a problem and persuade them to take appropriate action. Obviously, the skills of advocacy and negotiation are involved. There are certain basic principles that have proven to be very effective in handling legislative matters. These principles are not necessarily original. In fact, many involve good old-fashioned common sense. Unfortunately, however, the basics are sometime overlooked.

Remember, you have the right to communicate to lawmakers and state your views, just like the right to vote. However, it must be exercised, and legislators cannot translate the views of their constituents into legislative action unless they know what those views are.

### **Writing to Legislators**

Writing to legislators is one of the most effective means of communicating with elected officials. When a legislator receives fifteen letters from a constituent on an issue, he or she knows that there are probably more constituents that feel the same way and takes that into consideration when developing a position on issues. The following are tips on writing to legislators.

- Write on your company stationary. It is important for lawmakers to see where your company is located.
- While it is preferable to email or fax your letter due to security concerns, you may also wish to send a hard copy version as reinforcement.
- Identify the issue. Give the bill number or the popular title, if possible.
- Identify yourself and mention the state, legislative district, and the city or county in which you are a voter; if applicable.
- Be knowledgeable. If you feel strongly about the issue, the force of your feelings combined with thorough knowledge of the issue can make your communication more effective.
- Describe your concerns clearly. Legislators handle many issues – make sure you differentiate your topic of concern.

- Keep it short and to the point. Time is valuable and a concise letter will get better attention. A typewritten letter should not be longer than one page and a handwritten no longer than two pages. Quality, not quantity, will get a legislator's attention.
- Communicate in your own words. Demonstrate how the issue will affect your company and your employees.
- Present the best argument. End by asking for consideration of your position or desired outcome.
- Be polite. Never threaten or argue. After a vote is taken, it is valuable to write your lawmaker again, either thanking them for their time or for considering your views.

### **Communicating by telephone**

- Phone calls can be an extremely effective means of grassroots communication. If the decision maker is unable to speak to you, be sure to let the staff person you are speaking with know that you want to leave a message. Your views and opinions will be registered and staff will tabulate the issue of the calls for the legislator.
- If the legislator is unavailable, ask to speak to the person handling the issue. Identify yourself and state the issue.
- Know what you will say. Prior to your call, prepare talking points outlining the points you want to make.
- Follow up with a written letter. A written letter on company stationery should be prepared citing the day you called, the person with whom you spoke, and the issues you discussed. Always request a response to your letter.

Information on your selected decision maker may be found through [www.NRMCAVoice.com](http://www.NRMCAVoice.com) or maybe even the website for the state you're located in.