

Ten Tips for Calling Legislators

Making a phone call to your legislator is quick, easy and can be done at a moment's notice, making it an attractive method for legislative contact. For these same reasons, it is critical that the phone call be effective. You do not need to be an expert on the issue in order to be persuasive; you just need to give your personal perspective. Follow these ten steps for an effective call to your legislator:

1. **Plan:** Before you make the call plan what you are going to say. Your phone call will be very brief, so keep your message simple and to-the-point. Take a moment to think about it — you might even want to make some notes — and you'll find that your call goes more smoothly than if you were to call "off the cuff." Know your request (for example, vote for a specific bill) in as few words as possible.
2. **Message:** After identifying (and possibly writing down) your request, think about a key point or personal story that supports your position.
3. **Make the call:** If your legislator is in your home district on specific days or weekends, call when he is there. There is more time and less distraction, and your position as a constituent will be enhanced if you are on "home turf."
4. **Staff or message:** You may not be able to reach your legislator if you are calling his office during the legislative session. Be prepared to talk to one of the legislator's staff or to leave a message instead. Make sure you get the staff person's full name, and treat her with respect.
5. **Constituent:** Begin by stating that you are a constituent. Legislators are most responsive to the people who can keep them in office — their constituents. If you voted for the legislator, mention that as well.
6. **Persuade:** Get to the point. Following your plan, state the reason for the call. Try to get your legislator to state her position on the issue, and try to persuade her, using the points you developed.
7. **Thank:** If the legislator agrees to support your issue, thank him. Regardless of his position, thank the legislator for his time. Let him know that you will track the issue.
8. **Recruit:** Recruit a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to make a call as well. Particularly with phone calls, quantity is critical. Legislators pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue.
9. **Report:** When you are part of a grassroots lobbying effort, your participation is helpful only if the people mobilizing the effort know about it. Let them know that you made the call, and report anything important that the legislator said.
10. **Call back:** Call more than once. Quantity is as important, if not more important, than quality in grassroots advocacy, because a high number of calls indicates to a legislator that many people in the district care about an issue. As you monitor the issue, call back to ask for specific support or action as appropriate to the process.