

# Calling Policymakers

Calling your policymaker is one of the **EASIEST** and most **EFFECTIVE** ways to speak with policymakers on issues of interest and priority.

When calling your policymakers, **do so on your own time with your own phone**, as your employer might not share your views on the topic.

Be sure to **keep a record** of the date and time of your call(s) and the person with whom you spoke or for whom you left a message. Sometimes the phone logs are lost, and you may need to follow up with the office to ensure a response.

## How to make a successful call to your policy maker:

- ◇ Once connected to your policymaker's office, **identify yourself as a constituent** to the receptionist. Clearly state your first and last name, your hometown and why you are calling. If you know the health legislative assistant (HLA), be sure to ask for that staffer by name. If not, ask for the staffer's name and request to be transferred. Sometimes, the receptionist will indicate that you will need to leave your comments with him or her. If that is the case, you still should ask for the name of the HLA, so that you have that information. Record it for future reference.
- ◇ If transferred to the HLA personally or if you are put into the staffer's voicemail, reintroduce yourself and **immediately identify the topic you are calling to discuss**. If you are instructed to leave a message with the receptionist, repeat your name and continue with your message that you wish to deliver.
- ◇ **Make a few brief points** as to why the issue is of concern to you, your community and the nation, and why the policymaker should take action. You may want to use written notes to help you stay on topic and remain clear while articulating your case.
- ◇ **Be clear as to what you are asking the policymaker to do** (e.g., cosponsor a particular bill, vote for or against a specific measure, sign a "Dear Colleague" letter).
- ◇ **Be polite in your tone and language**. The staffer on the other end of the phone is overworked, overwhelmed, underpaid and receives dozens – if not hundreds – of calls a day. In fact, in some offices, you may be speaking with a junior staffer or a college intern, so be sure to be patient and forgiving. Also, be sure not to use any "lingo" or "slang". You should not assume the person on the other end of the phone is familiar with the issue you are discussing, so be as clear and concise as possible.

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## How to make a successful call to your policy maker:

- ◇ **Keep it brief.** Limit your call to no more than five minutes, unless the staffer or policymaker asks you questions and seems engaged in the discussion. Offer to send additional or follow-up information and request the preferred mode of communication (e.g. email, fax, mail).
- ◇ **Specifically request a written response** from the office on the policymaker's position or action on the issue you addressed.
- ◇ **Provide your full name**, mailing address, email address and telephone number.
- ◇ **Thank the staffer** for his or her time and indicate that you appreciate his or her willingness to listen and record your comments. Be sure to record the name of the staffer and the day and time you spoke, so you can have it for future use and in case you need to follow up.
- ◇ **If you do not receive a response within a reasonable timeframe** (approximately a month), either call or write to follow up and request a response. Reference your phone call and mention with whom you spoke and the topic to help facilitate a meaningful reply.

## Voicemail Tips:

- ⇒ Leave a brief, clear message for the staffer (write his or her name down for future reference)
- ⇒ Provide your full name, contact information and the nature of your call and specific request
- ⇒ Be clear that you would like a return call and/or a letter from the policymaker on the topic about which you are calling

## Developing a Relationships with Your Policymakers

Be sure to keep in touch with the offices of your policymaker to establish a relationship and make yourself available as a local resource. There are times when you and an elected official will have to “agree to disagree,” but over time, you also may find that the policymaker may be supportive and helpful on other matters.

If you take the time to foster friendly relationships with policymakers, you will see the investment come back to you in the form of support for expanding or defending funding streams, assistance in facilitating alliance and partnerships to strengthen your work and public support for your efforts.