

Communicating with Legislators

Communicating with your elected officials is an important part of living in a democracy. Whether it's through direct lobbying, a phone call, an email, or a personal letter, when legislators hear from their constituents about issues that are important to them, it has a direct impact on their decision making.

Here are a few helpful tips:

Consider Yourself an Information Source

Legislators have limited time, staff, and interest on any one issue. They can't be as informed as they might like on all issues—or the ones that concern you. Keep the meeting short and focused and leave a copy of your factsheet(s).

Make a Personal Connection

Start by introducing yourself and thanking the legislator for taking time to meet with you. Mention that you are a voter in their district. Make a personal connection by letting them know if you have any friends, relatives, or colleagues in common.

Tell the Truth

There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give misleading information to a legislator. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something. If a legislator wants information you don't have or asks a question you don't know the answer to, acknowledge it, and offer to get back to them with the information they are looking for. It's a great excuse to follow up!

Be Specific about What You're Looking For

If you want a vote, information, answers to a question—whatever it is—make sure you ask for it directly and get an answer.

Don't Burn Any Bridges

It is very easy to get emotional over issues about which you feel strongly. Be sure that no matter what a legislator's decision on an issue, you end the conversation on good enough terms that you can go back to them.

Take Notes

After the meeting, jot down notes from the visit while they are fresh in your mind.

Follow Up

Find out if your legislator did what she/he said they would. Then, thank them or ask for an explanation as to why they did not vote as they said they would. Consider submitting a letter to the editor to hold your legislator accountable to their constituents.



Natural Resources Council of Maine

3 Wade Street • Augusta, Maine • 04330 • www.nrcm.org

Writing a Letter to the Editor

The letter to the editor section of your local newspaper is an ideal forum for making your case on an issue to your neighbors and legislators. Here are a few guidelines for getting your letter to the editor printed.

- Keep your letter short and only address one subject —250 words is a good length.
- Use short, punchy sentences and avoid big words. A catchy first line is helpful, too.
- Personalize your letter—tell a story. Explain how the issue has affected or will affect you.
- When possible, mention a related article already printed by the paper. This increases the chances that your letter will be published. Mention the article in your first sentence.
- Write with the average person in mind, and use phrases and arguments that resonate with them.
- Don't repeat claims made by opponents on your issue.
- Be as factual as you can, but use statistics sparingly because they can get boring, confusing, and overwhelming very quickly.
- Send letters to weekly community newspapers, too. Sometimes it is easier to get your letter printed there and it is likely that your legislators read the local weekly papers.
- Encourage your friends and neighbors to write letters to the editor as well.
- Sending the letter to your legislator or to members of the appropriate legislative committee can also be effective.
- Include your full name, address, and telephone number. The newspaper will contact you before they print the letter to verify that you are the author.

Portland Press Herald: 300-word maximum
Email: letterstotheeditor@mainetoday.com
Phone: 791-6485

Kennebec Journal: 300-word maximum
Email: letters@centralmaine.com
Phone: 621-5665

Bangor Daily News: 250-word maximum
Email: letters@bangordailynews.com
Phone: 990-8203

Morning Sentinel: 300-word maximum
Email: letters@centralmaine.com
Phone: 873-3341



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