

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Communication is a two-way process of sending and receiving ideas, opinions and information. In order for your message to be received by your legislator, you need to follow a few guidelines to help you communicate effectively.

You should first consider the method of communication to be used. Is the message urgent? Do you want a written record for review and reference by the recipient? How personal should it be? Should you telephone, fax, e-mail or write a letter to the legislator? How about a face-to-face meeting? Your choice should be determined by the timing and length of the communication as well as your own personal relationship with the legislator.

Personal meeting:

This is probably the most effective method of communicating, but also requires some careful planning. Refer to "How to Introduce Yourself to your Legislator," and remember not to rush into issues before you have made a positive impression.

Emphasize that you are a constituent from back home and recognize that legislators are usually back in their home districts on Mondays and Fridays when the legislature is not in session. Try to meet at his/her convenience at a restaurant or at your office.

If you can't arrange a meeting, write a personal letter.

Letters:

Use personal or business letterhead with typed or word-processed copy. Sign your name above the typed signature.

Identify yourself, your position/company and your subject clearly in the first paragraph. If writing about legislation, be sure to refer to the title and bill number.

Be brief and to the point, preferably not more than one page.

Use your own words. Form letters are likely to be ignored.

Clearly state your reasons for your position, especially as they affect the customers you serve, not yourself or your profession.

Be constructive. State how the bill could be improved if you disagree with its language or purpose.

Be specific and use verifiable facts to support your points.

Address the letter correctly:

**The Honorable (full name)
State Senator
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536**

**The Honorable (full name)
State Representative
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514**

Dear Senator (last name):

Dear Representative (last name):

E-mail:

Electronic mail is a technology-based communication, and all legislators have addresses listed on the Michigan Legislature website. But high tech is not necessarily high touch. Your message will be more personal on your own letterhead and signed in your own handwriting, so use that approach first. Save e-mail until you are on a first-name basis with your legislator and there is a need for speed in your communication.

Fax:

Only slightly more personal than e-mail, a fax is appropriate if there are copies of documents or other photocopied items that must be communicated in a hurry, especially if responding to a request for information. Fax messages should be typed whenever possible.

Telephone:

Use the telephone only if you have already established a good relationship with your legislator and know him/her well.