

## Contact Your Legislator

### **Tell Your Story**

Thank you for your willingness to contact your legislator! You are the best person to help them make funding for the University and higher education a priority. Many people contact their legislators, but not many know the simple and effective techniques that will make them stand out from the others.

### **Do's and Don'ts**

Here are some general tips on the most effective ways to contact legislators.

- Your legislators like to hear opinions from home and want to be kept informed of conditions in the district. Base your communications on your own experiences and observations.
- Elected officials appreciate intelligent, well-thought-out communications that present a definite position.
- Even more important and valuable to them is a concrete statement of the reasons for your position-- particularly if you are writing about a field in which you have specialized knowledge. Representatives have to vote on many matters with which they have had little or no first-hand experience. Some of the most valuable information they receive comes from facts presented in letters from people who have knowledge in the field.
- Short letters and e-mails are almost always best. Legislators receive many communications each day, and a long one may not get as prompt a reading as a brief statement.
- Form letters and e-mails are not as influential as a simple letter drawing on your own experience.
- Do not engage in letter writing overkill. Quality, not quantity, is what counts.
- Threats are not effective. Be polite.

### **E-mails**

Keep e-mails short and to the point. Legislators receive hundreds of e-mails every day. If you receive an Action Alert from the Legislative Network, be sure to personalize your e-mail to your legislator. Your e-mail is more likely to be read and to have an effect if you personalize it with your own story and reasons for supporting the U.

- The subject line should reflect your main point and should be personalized.
- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Describe your relationship with the U.
- Clearly state what action you want your legislator to take
- Express your appreciation for their service.
- Ask for a specific response, if you want one.
- Sign your e-mail with your full name, address, and if you wish, phone number.

### **Phone Calls**

Calling your legislators at their office is a great way to help influence your legislators. Taking the time to call demonstrates an intense interest in an issue. It also lets legislators know that their actions are being followed. You may not connect with your legislator when you call, but be sure to leave a message with a staff person who will relay the message. When you call, you will be asked your name and address. This is to check to see if you are a constituent.

Before you make the call, identify:

- the key points you want to communicate; and
- the specific action you want your legislators to take.

Be sure to thank the staff person for their help.

## **Letters**

Legislators receive a large volume of mail so be sure to keep your letters brief and to the point.

- Cover only one issue so that your letter will be given the attention it deserves.
- Introduce yourself right away and indicate that you are a constituent.
- Explain why you are writing.
- Be specific – clearly state the action that you want taken.
- Describe your relationship with the U.
- Be helpful instead of threatening – show concern by offering to provide more information.