**EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT**

**CALLING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL**

Telephoning your legislator’s office is a useful way to communicate your opinions, especially on issues where an action is pending, such as a vote. You will not speak to the legislator directly. As with letters, legislative staff track the number of calls they receive on various topics. Just a couple phone calls into an office over a short period of time can bring an issue to the attention of your legislator and have a big impact.

**HERE'S WHAT TO DO:**

1. **How to reach them**: In the case of congress persons, decide if you are going to call their office in Washington, D.C. or the closest district office. Legislative and policy matters are typically handled by the Member’s office located in Washington, D.C., so it’s a good idea to begin there. Local district offices generally focus on aiding constituents who have a particular need to rectify, such as problems with Social Security benefits. **To call their D.C., offices, call directly or through the switchboard.** If you do not have the direct number, you can reach US representatives by calling the switchboard at 202-225-3121, and US senators by calling 202-224-3121. Ask the operator to connect you to the individual office.

Your congressional representatives should have district office phone numbers listed on their website. If you do not know the names of your members of Congress or want the direct line to their office, you can find their names and contact numbers via several sources on the web, including [www.fairus.org/get-involved/take-action](http://www.fairus.org/get-involved/take-action).

If you wish to reach a state legislator, call their district offices, as they do not have offices in Trenton. To find their phone numbers, you can go to <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/members/> or use printed guides such as those issued by the League of Women Voter of NJ.

1. **Who to ask for: Ask to speak to the aide who handles the issue about which you are calling.** Your call will be more influential if you speak to the correct aide. However, Congressional aides, in particular, are very busy, and this is not always possible. If you cannot speak directly with the aide, leave a message stating your views.
2. **How to identify yourself: Let them know that you are a constituent.** Elected officials are most interested in your opinions if you are their constituent, so be sure to say the city and state you are from.
3. **When to call them**: Call during business hours to guarantee that you'll speak to a staffer.
4. **What to say**: Know what message you want to convey. Do you want your legislator to vote a specific way on a bill? If so, have the bill number and name ready. Do you want to voice your opinion on a non-legislative issue? Have your opinion ready. Do you have a question about where a bill is in the legislative process? Or how your representative plans to vote on a bill? Have the name and number ready for the staff member to look up. Do you need help with a specific casework issue? Make sure it's something that this level of government covers - and be ready to [fill out a casework form.](https://www.boxer.senate.gov/?p=agencyform)
5. **What not to say**: Don’t ask the person who answers your call how he/she personally feels about specific immigration issues, for example. Staffers are responsible for representing their Member of Congress or legislature, not themselves. They are also unlikely to have specialized knowledge of legislative issues like immigration, so don’t expect him or her to answer detailed questions about your Member’s views.
6. **How to act**: Be patient, kind, courteous and respectful: Staffers may not have every answer, but they will do their best to help you. They can take hundreds of calls in one day, but they're here to serve you. Staffers deal with ranting callers every day and will tune out any callers who yell or employ insults and obscenities. Comments of callers who are rude or disrespectful are often thrown in the trash, if they are even written down at all.
7. **Calling outside your district**: Don't be afraid to call a member of Congressional or Legislative Leadership, such as the Speaker of the House, Senate Majority Leader, OR a Member of government who tends to wield particular influence over a certain policy matter. However, keep in mind that if you are not a constituent of that Member’s district, the person answering your call may refuse to take your comment. At that point, you may ask them to forward you to your own representative’s office, if you wish.

### **ADDITIONAL TIPS AND RESOURCES**

* **Know your facts:**  Be sure you have the basic information about your topic in front of you when you call. You should be able to specifically describe the topic about which you are calling and state your opinion about what your legislator should do.
* **Note your expertise**. If you have professional experience on the issue on which you are calling, be sure to mention it. It will help to establish your credibility on the issue and may event prompt the aide to ask you for some guidance on the issue.
* **Be brief**. Aides receive a high volume of phone calls every day, so keep your call short.
* **Be timely**. Timeliness is especially important when you are phoning. If the vote on your issue is imminent, the aide is much more likely to pay attention to what you say.
* **Consider calling the local office**. Calling the office in your district or state, can sometimes be very effective. If you are calling about a vote or other timely issues, always call the office located where they vote. But, if you are calling generally about an issue that affects your district or community, calling the local office can be a good way to make them aware of an issue.