

Elected officials do want to hear from their constituents as to their preferences on legislation. There are a number of ways to contact those who represent you. We'll list these in order of what we believe is the most effective.

But first, the most important thing is to know exactly who your elected officials are. To find your state and federal senators and representatives, go to [www.openstates.org](http://www.openstates.org) This will not only identify your senator or representative, but provide contact information. To determine who represents you for other offices, such as city council, go to that political entity's web site, and endeavor to determine district lines (sometimes this isn't easy). If in doubt, call numbers provided for those you think might be your council person or school board member and ask if your address is in their district.

Absolutely the best means: Developing a relationship with your elected official. Ways to do this:

- 1) Helping them in their campaign as a volunteer.
- 2) Donating to their campaign.
- 3) Being active in their political party, especially by being a precinct organizer.
- 4) Attending their town hall meetings. It is easy to find out when your elected officials are holding these events. Just send an email to your elected official indicating that you would like to be added to their email list.

Tips for All Communications:

- Reference the specific legislation, either by title, but even better, by bill number. For emails and letters, this should be in the subject line.
- State your position on the bill (Please vote yes or no). This also should appear in the subject line for emails and letters. Yes, they do keep count of constituent communications, and this makes it easier for them.
- Include personal stories that support your position, **but be concise**. Why does this bill matter to you?
- Be respectful of both your elected officials and others. Avoid referring to any others, including opposing legislators, in an offensive manner.
- Note that you are a constituent. Be sure to give your address so that staff can verify that.

*Is it valuable to contact elected officials who do not represent you?*

Generally, they do not accord much value to such communications, with the following exceptions:

- 1) They are on the committee hearing the bill of interest. In that case, it is fine to communicate with all on the committee, but with emails, it is better to do these separately.
- 2) You have a relationship with them, or

- 3) You have a story that has received a great deal of media attention, such as being a survivor of a relevant shooting.

### Capitol visits

In-person meetings are highly impactful, but also harder to achieve because of limited time of the legislator. You might end up talking with an aide. It is highly recommended to schedule a meeting ahead of time. Although you can “drop-in,” it is most unlikely you’ll be able to meet with the legislator. Be aware that legislators have significant time allotted to floor work and committee meetings. Generally, the House and Senate meet as entire bodies in the mornings, but sometimes these meetings run over, and your appointment may be bumped. It is also possible to confer with your representative during those sessions by sending in a card with the sergeant at arms with your name, and perhaps your concern. During some parts of their chamber’s session, representatives and senators may not take cards, and at other times a legislators may be reluctant to do so because of activities underway on the floor. Don’t be offended, this is just part of the whole process.

### Written Letters

In the past, written letters were considered the best communication, but because of the quick turnaround time at state legislatures, you need to write to them well in advance. For the Colorado General Assembly, the address is: Your Representative or Senator

Colorado State Capitol  
200 East Colfax Ave.  
Denver, Colorado 80203

### Emails

Emails are probably the most effective means in today’s legislative realm. Be aware, that some federal legislators will not even permit people to send emails (through their webmail sites) unless they are constituents. With an email, although you should be concise, you can convey a little more information than a phone call.

Organizations, such as Ceasefire, often provide pre-written notes that you can automatically send by clicking a button in an email. These are convenient, but legislators are wise to these. If you choose to utilize this means, it is best to alter the email to add information relevant to you. Generally, they do not let you alter the subject line, just the body of the message. For that reason, it would be good to enter your changes near the first of the message.

### Phone calls

If someone answers, it will likely be a staffer. In this case, you can ask if the senator or representative has taken a position on the bill. With that information, you can respond that you are pleased to hear that their position aligns with yours, or express disappointment if it does not. Additionally, if there is indication that the legislator has not taken a stance, encourage them to do so: Example:

“I would like to encourage Sen. Johnson to support the bill banning assault weapons, which were designed for war and should not be in civilian hands. Unfortunately, they are being used in more and more mass shootings, including in school shootings. After Columbine, Sandy Hook,

Parkland, and Uvalde, every day when I drop my kids off at school, I hug them wondering if it is the last time.”

It is valuable to write out what you are going to say before calling. Say it clearly and concisely. Be sure to give them your name at the start and your address at the end. You might wish to leave a phone number.

#### Thank you notes

Legislators hear so many complaints and demands, that they appreciate the compliment when they have voted in alignment with your preferences. If you heard them speak or write in support or opposition to a bill, you might reference that in your note. If you had an in-person meeting, a thank you note is also a great idea. This helps you in building a positive relationship with your elected official.