Effective Communication with Your Representative

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| As a Floridian, one of your greatest responsibilities is to help elect the representatives who represent you and the state's more than 14 million other residents. Your role in the democratic process of government does not end at the polls. By sharing your opinions and ideas with your representatives and senators in Tallahassee, you help them decide what to do about the issues and pending legislation that affect us all.  They value your suggestions and encourage you to express them.   Your representatives receive a huge amount of phone calls and mail from their constituents. Unfortunately, their full agendas limit their ability to personally read and respond to it all. How then, can you be sure your voice is heard? Here are some tips to help you get the most impact out of your communications with your representatives in Tallahassee.  **General Tips**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | arrow | Know who your representatives are and how to contact them. You can find who they are and get their full contact information on the online guide. | | arrow | Make sure you understand the legislative process. Even the most basic understanding of the process will help you effectively express your ideas. | | arrow | Contact your representative about a particular issue before the Legislature takes action on it. Most matters coming before the Legislature are well publicized before session. | | arrow | Use a variety of communication methods. You might choose to telephone, write, e-mail, fax, or visit your representative. You might also choose to give testimony at public hearings held by the Legislature. (To give testimony, you would need to contact the appropriate committee secretary before the hearing to sign up.) | | arrow | Tell your representative what effect you think a particular bill, if it becomes law, will have on you, your children, business, or community. Be concise, but specific. | | arrow | Be polite, even if you disagree strongly with the representative you are addressing. Lawmakers cannot please everyone. Your communication will be more effective if you are reasonable in your approach. | | arrow | Suggest a course of action and offer assistance. Don't make promises or threats. |   **Writing Effective Letters**  Address letters to Members of the House of Representatives as follows:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | arrow | The Honorable John Doe Florida House of Representatives The Capitol Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300. | | arrow | Address letters to senators this way: Senator Jane Doe The Capitol Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100. | | arrow | Be absolutely certain you spell your representative's name correctly and use the correct address. If you don't, you could lose your audience. | | arrow | Type or print legibly. Sign your name neatly and give your address correctly so they can respond to your letter. | | arrow | Keep letters, e-mail, and faxes brief. Never write more than one page. | | arrow | Identify your issue or opinion at the beginning of the letter; don't bury your main point under trivial text. | | arrow | Cover only one issue per letter. If you have another issue to address, write another letter.  Back up your opinions with supporting facts. Your letter should inform the reader. | | arrow | Avoid abbreviations or acronyms, and don't use technical jargon. Rather than impressing your reader, such terms will only frustrate him or her. | | arrow | Don't send the same letter to more than one representative. Personalized letters have more impact. |   **Calling or Visiting Your Representative**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | arrow | Plan your call or visit carefully, keep to the point and discuss only one issue. Organize your thoughts ahead of time and take notes to help you stay on track. | | arrow | Make an appointment. Don't just drop by your representative's office and expect him or her to drop everything to see you. | | arrow | Prepare a one-page fact sheet concerning your issue to give to your representative. This will help him or her better retain what you present. | |