



Effective Advocacy

A guide to communicating with
your Legislator's office



Produced by the Office of Senator Richard T. Moore

Dear Citizen:

As your state senator, I want to be sure that my staff and I answer your questions, address your concerns and, if we have to disagree on an issue, explain why as quickly and clearly as possible. This guide contains tips for communicating effectively with me and my staff to ensure that your communication is handled appropriately and receives the attention it deserves.



Quite simply, communicating with any elected official really comes down to four simple steps:

1. **Knowing What You Want** - This section explains why it is important to ask for something specific and how to find out more about legislative initiatives in the Legislature.
2. **Knowing Who to Ask** - Under our representative system of government, it is always most effective to work with the elected officials who represent you. That's why my office focuses on the needs of the residents of the Worcester and Norfolk District.
3. **Knowing How to Ask** - This section includes tips and techniques for ensuring that your message is heard.
4. **Knowing How to Follow-Up** - Almost as important as your initial communication is knowing how you follow up. In this section, I provide you with some advice on timing and how to be most effective.

These following pages explain these four steps in more details and provide some great tips for getting the most out of your contact with your legislator's office.

I hope you find this guide helpful and informative..

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard T. Moore". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Richard T. Moore
State Senator

Knowing What to You Want

The communications that receive the most attention in our office often ask for something specific, such as signing on to a specific piece of legislation, or voting in a particular way on a bill. Of course, we always appreciate updates and general information on issues you care about. However, you should think about whether there is something specific you would like Senator Moore to do.

To find out what bills have been introduced on any topic, try a keyword search on the General Court's website at www.mass.gov/legis/ltsform.htm. To find bills sponsored or co-sponsored by Senator Moore, visit his website: www.senatormoore.com/issues/legislation

When considering what you want, be sure that you are asking for something that is actually a state issue. For example, fixing a pothole on the road in front of your house is something that should be directed to your local elected officials. These are some of the kinds of things that you might want to talk to Senator Moore's office about:

- **Request to Sponsor, Cosponsor, or Vote for or Against Legislation:** On a daily basis, your state legislators make important decisions on state policy issues, and you should let him or her know when you strongly support or oppose a certain piece of legislation.
- **Meetings and Site Visits:** If you would like to ask Senator Moore to visit your program or facility schedule an appointment by visiting www.senatormoore.com/calendar. The senator also holds regular coffee and office hours to meet with constituents. A the complete schedule of all events can be found here: www.senatormoore.com/calendar.
- **Letters of Support:** Whenever you make a grant request for funds from a state agency, contact your state legislators' offices and ask for a letter of support. Legislative offices receive these types of requests often, and if there are no conflicts with other constituents, are usually happy to oblige.
- **Research and Reference Information:** Senator Moore's office has access to a wide-range of research materials from the State Library, the Secretary of State's office and other state agencies which you can ask for by topic.
- **Tours:** Senator Moore and his colleagues frequently welcome visitors and groups to the State House. You can learn more about State House tours at www.senatormoore.com/services/tours

Knowing Who to Ask

Once you've figured out what you want, it's time to think about who to ask. All of your communications should be directed to the member of the Senate who represents where you live or work - that's how representative democracy works! Believe it or not, constituents are the most important and relevant people Senator Moore and his colleagues deal with on a day-to-day basis. One of the most common questions you'll hear in an elected official's office in reference to letters, phone calls, or meeting requests is "Are they from the district?" If the answer is yes, your questions, comments, or concerns must be dealt with in some way.

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That's why it is vitally important that you communicate with your own elected officials -- those who represent you directly or who represent your employees. They are the individuals over whom you have the most influence. Senator Moore represents the Worcester and Norfolk District. His attention is focused on addressing the needs of individuals who live within that area. If you aren't sure which Senate District you live in, double-check using the zip-code look-up capability at www.wheredoivote.com. To find your Senators, go to www.mass.gov/legis/memmenus.htm. And remember, these jurisdictions can change after redistricting, so be sure to double-check.

Knowing How to Ask

Legislators and their staff need you to tell them how you feel about particular issues. But you have to be sure to deliver your message in the right way. Otherwise, your communication will be lost in the flood of mail, e-mail, phone calls, and faxes that come in to a legislator's office everyday. Here are some tips and techniques that will help ensure that your voice is heard above the fray.

- **Method of Communication.** The methods of communication you chose should depend on the type of message. A simple request to vote for a particular bill can easily be relayed over the phone, while a more complicated message might better be put in writing. Think also about what works best for you in terms of time, energy, personal preference, and money.
- **Volume Does Not Necessarily Equal Effectiveness.** Highly controversial issues can result in a flood of communications to a legislative office. Many offices consider the numbers when making a decision, but only to a point. Sometimes ten thoughtful and well-argued letters can have an equal impact to that of hundreds of calls or postcards.
- **Always Identify Yourself.** It is a waste of time to communicate with your legislator's office without identifying yourself. Unidentified information will generally be ignored and thrown away. Because the main duty of a legislative office is to represent the people who live in a particular district, they need to know who is trying to communicate with them.
- **Be Specific.** If you are interested in a particular piece of legislation, ask your legislators to cosponsor. If your concern is with a state agency action, ask him or her to send a letter. Whatever it is, the best way to ensure that the office pays attention to your issue is to ask for something specific.
- **Prioritize Your Requests.** If you ask for too many things without making it clear what your top priorities are, the legislator's office may feel overwhelmed. Let the office know what actions need the most attention or time your requests so that you are not asking for more than a few things at once.
- **Offer To Be a Resource.** Legislative staffs usually are not experts in the issue areas they cover and often turn to trusted outside experts. Knowing that there's someone in the district who really understands a complex issue can be very useful to staff. If you are an expert in your field, let your legislator's office know that you can answer any questions they may have.

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- **Be Polite.** Treat the staff and the office with the same respect you expect. If you are disagreeable, it will make the staff far less likely to want to work with you in the future. You can be forceful about your views and opinions without being rude.
- **Always Tell the Truth.** Legislative staffs turn to outside individuals for advice and assistance on important policy issues all the time. They must feel that they can trust the individuals with whom they are dealing. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell them that and let them know you will get back to them.
- **Don't Vilify Your Opponents.** At the very least, you should refrain from labeling those who disagree with you as unenlightened idiots. In fact, you can go even further by fairly

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Effective Letters and Phone Calls

The key to being effective in your written communications is ensuring that someone on staff actually thinks about what you have to say. This means taking a personal, thoughtful approach, explaining why you're relevant to the office, reaching the right person and, perhaps more important, asking for a response.

- **The Personal Approach.** The most compelling and effective letters and phone calls combine a thoughtful approach to policy issues with a careful explanation of why it's important to you and the legislator's community. In most offices, it is these letters or phone messages that the elected official actually sees, not the letters or messages generated by mass postcard, form letter, or call-in campaigns.
- **Why Are You Relevant?** You are relevant to the legislator's office because you are a constituent, and you can demonstrate that connection by including your postal address on every correspondence and as part of every discussion, whether it's e-mail, fax, or traditional letter.
- **Ask for a Response.** Given the limited time and budgets in legislative offices, priority will always be given to letters and inquiries that require an answer. Asking for a response means someone on the staff has to think about what you've said and, in some way, address your concerns or comments.
- **Reaching the Right Person.** Correspondence requesting a meeting or site visit should be sent to the Executive Assistant or Scheduler. Educational and informational correspondence about your work or a particular project should be sent to both the legislators and staff person assigned to your issue. You can find out who the appropriate person in Senator Moore's office is by calling the office at 617-722-1420 and asking.
- **Do You Need a Phone Appointment?** If you want to have a substantive discussion about a particular program or policy issues, you should ask for the staff person who handles that issue and see if you can set up a phone appointment or arrange a meeting in the State House. That way, you can be sure that they have set aside time to talk with you, as opposed to catching them in the middle of a busy day.

Effective Meetings

In order to have an effective meeting, you must consider the context. Elected officials and their staff often have meetings all day long on a variety of topics. One minute it may be state or local officials, the next minute it may be people concerned about education, and then people with health insurance questions. Jumping from subject to subject can be somewhat confusing and rather chaotic for elected officials. Your job is to bring order to chaos by following these few simple steps:

- Be cognizant of your legislator's time limitations. Don't ask for more than one or two meetings per year. Sometimes your message is best delivered by phone or through a staff person.
- Decide where you want to meet. (State House, at local office hours or some other location)
- Decide who should deliver your message. Some members may respond better to powerful figures in the community who support you. A real live constituent is always best.
- Limit the number of people you bring to the meeting. Most legislative offices cannot fit more than five people.
- About three weeks before the proposed meeting time, fax the scheduler a meeting request, including a brief description of what you want to discuss and attendees. You can fax your request to 617-722-1944 or visit our scheduling requests page at www.senatormoore.com/calendar
- Follow-up with a phone call to the scheduler about one-week after sending a written request. Be prepared to send the request again, if asked. This can be frustrating, but it is best to grin and bear it. With the high volume of paper moving through the office, it is not surprising that some requests are misplaced. To contact Senator Moore's office, call 617-722-1420 and ask for the scheduler.
- Send a "one-pager" about your program before the meeting, nothing more. Most staff and Members do not review materials before meetings - they expect YOU to brief them.
- Be very flexible - your meeting may take place standing up in the hallway, on the run to a vote, or may be cancelled with no warning. Legislators have to deal with sudden and dramatic shifts in their schedules on a daily basis. Unfortunately, this can affect the people they are planning to meet with.
- Make sure you know "who's who" in the meeting, and take down the names of any staff people you may need to deal with in the future.
- Leave behind short, concise, and consistent information.
- Follow up after the meeting on any request you made and information you promised to provide.

presenting the other side's argument and then explaining why you have the stronger counter-argument. It's a great way to build credibility, especially since the staff person you are dealing with most likely will hear from the other side. He or she will realize that you have developed your position based on a careful evaluation of the facts.

- **Don't Talk About the Campaign with Staff.** Many legislative staffs get very nervous or even offended when people they are meeting with mention the member's campaign. The laws against staff involvement in political activity are very strict. In particular, any suggestion that the staff person's help on a legislative issue may translate into a campaign contribution is strictly forbidden. Such a suggestion may, in fact, make a staff person avoid helping you because they are worried it would look bad for their boss.
- **Persistence Pays.** Perhaps the most important thing to remember in dealing with your legislators and their staffs is that persistence pays. In many cases, you may have to ask more than once before your legislator's office is able to respond to your request.

Knowing How to Follow-Up

What you do after your initial contact with your legislators may be the most important part of the communication process. Taking steps to capture the discussion, share feedback, and follow-up on any requests is the only way to ensure that you and your work will remain on the elected official's "radar-screen." The best way to achieve that goal (without becoming a pest) is through effective follow-up.

It's important to follow-up on your request within three weeks of your initial meeting or other contact. But remember, while following-up and asking again is valuable, being a pest is not. You should follow-up on your request within three weeks, and then about once every three to four weeks until you have a definitive answer. In some cases you may want to let the elected official set the pace. For example, if the staff indicates that they simply cannot respond to your request for two months, then make a note to yourself to call back in two and one-half months.

Related Resources

Senator Moore's Official Web Site [www.senatormoore.com] Get the latest news and information from the senator's State House Office, find legislation and position statements, view the senator's calendar and schedule appointments or invite the senator to your event, learn about the ways to contact the senator for assistance or to express your opinion on the issues important to you.

Massachusetts General Court [www.mass.gov/legis] Find the text and status of every bill filed in the House and Senate for the current session. View member and committee profiles and find out about upcoming public hearings.

Mass.gov [www.mass.gov] The official web site of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts includes links to each branch of government, links to all agencies and allows visitors to conduct online business with the state.