

Contacting your Legislators: Protocol and Things to Remember

California state Senators and Assembly members want to hear from you, their constituents and voters in their district. Often, the contact from constituents and business owners in their district can sway a legislators vote.

Below are some guidelines to follow for contacting your legislator in person, by letter or by phone:

- **Be thoughtful.** Commend the right things your legislator does. Treat them the way you would want to be treated.
 - **Be reasonable.** Recognize there are differences of opinion. It is just as important to listen to the legislator's views as well as sharing yours.
 - **Be realistic.** Don't expect that everything will go your way, and don't be too critical when it doesn't. Remember, most controversial legislation is the result of compromise.
 - **Be accurate and factual.** Just because you do or do not want a piece of legislation isn't enough. Make certain you have all the materials and information necessary to present your case, in some cases CTA may be able to provide some of this information.
 - **Learn to evaluate an issue.** Just because legislation was introduced, does not mean it will become law. Before you get too excited about it, learn the who, what and why.
 - **Be understanding.** Put yourself in the legislator's shoes. Try to understand his/her problems and outlook. Looking at a situation from their prospective can sometimes help in him/her understanding your issues.
 - **Don't be an extremist.** Remember your legislator represents many other constituents from both sides. Don't condemn him/her for supporting an issue you don't.
 - **Be friendly.** Don't contact your legislator only when you want his/her vote. Take time to keep in touch throughout the year.
 - **Give credit where credit is due.** If an issue goes your way, remember your legislator has the vote not you and they deserve credit first.
 - **Support your Legislator.** Don't become aloof when your legislator needs your help.
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 - **Be cooperative.** If your legislator makes a responsible request, do your best to comply with it. You can help by giving him/her the information they need.
- Explain exactly how the proposed legislation affects *you* and *your* business, why do you support or oppose it.
 - Don't try to give "expert" opinions – they want to here how the legislation affects *your* business through *your* knowledge and experience.
 - Be sure to ask your legislator what their position is – request that they take a specific action by telling him/her what you desire. State the facts from your perspective and experience.
 - Be constructive. If a bill address a problem you admit exists, but you believe it is the wrong approach, tell them what you think the right approach would be.
 - Be sure to keep communications respectful and friendly. Thank them for taking time to consider your views.
 - Letters should always s be written on your personal or business letterhead, and sign your name over your typed signature.
 - Envelopes sometimes get thrown away, be sure your exact contact information is on the letter.
 - Always be sure to send your kingpin coordinator a copy of your letter and a copy of the response you receive.

Address all letters in the following manner – unless you are on a first name basis:

- Assembly Member

The Honorable [first name, last name]
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room [room #]
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember [last name],

- Senator

The Honorable [first name, last name]
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room [room #]
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator [last name],

Letter Writing

Guidelines for writing and effective letter:

- Be brief!
- Be sure to address that you are a constituent who does business and/or lives in the legislators' district.
- Always refer to bill numbers when possible.

Guidelines for District Visits

The following are guidelines that might be helpful when you make visits to your representative's district office:

- It is important to maintain some familiarity with the district office staff. Members of the legislature rely heavily on their staff for a major portion of their responsibilities, i.e. scheduling, advice on legislation, etc.
- Typically, the legislative schedule permits the legislator to visit his district office Fridays and holidays. Keep this in mind when calling to schedule a meeting.
- Be sure to call in advance for an appointment and explain the purpose of the meeting. As a business person you are an important constituent in your legislators district, the member and his staff are eager to get acquainted.
- If the purpose of the meeting is to discuss a specific piece of legislation, review the background information, statements and letters available from CTA and use the bill numbers whenever possible.

We encourage you to consider other activities, and occasions as a way to effectively build and maintain a relationship with your legislator.

- Invite your legislator to lunch with yourself and other CTA members.

Legislative Process

- **Senate:** 40 members
- **Assembly:** 80 members
- **Regular Session:** Convenes on the first Monday in December of each even-numbered year and continues until November 30 of the next even-numbered year.
- **Special session:** May be called by the Governor and is limited to a specific subject. Length is not limited and may be held concurrently with the regular session.
- **Effective Date of Laws:** January 1 of the year following enactment.

Procedure of a Bill

- **Introduction:** A bill is introduced by a member of the Senate or Assembly, read for the first time, and then assigned to a committee by the Senate Rules Committee or The Assembly Speaker.
- **Committee:** Hearings are held in committee and testimony is taken from both sides. Generally the committee will amend, pass or fail to pass a bill.
- **Second Read:** Bills passed by committee are read for a second time and then sent to the full floor for debate.
- **Floor Debate** (In house of origin): The bill is read a third time, debated and voted on. Most bills need a majority to pass (21 for Senate, 41 for Assembly). Bills with urgency clauses, appropriation measures and some tax-related bills need two-thirds majority (27 for Senate, 54 for Assembly). If a bill is passed it is sent to the second house.
- **Second House:** After a bill passes the house of origin, a bill follows the similar

- Don't communicate with your Legislator only when important bills are on the table, this is how you build a working relationship.

Telephone Procedures

- When the Legislature is in session call the Capitol office, on Fridays and during recess contact the district office.
- Ask to speak directly with the legislator, if he/she is unavailable ask to speak to the administrative assistant, or the legislative aide handling that specific legislation
- Be sure to address that you are a constituent who does business and/or lives in the Legislators district.
- Always refer to bill numbers when possible and state the reason for the call.
- Don't attempt to give expert opinions, tell how the legislation would affect *you* and *your* business. Explain why you support or oppose it.
- Discuss only one issue per call.
- Keep all communication brief and friendly.
- Always thank the legislator or aide for their time and considering your views

procedure in the second house. Read by the desk, sent to committee and then to the floor.

- **Amendments:** If the second house passes a bill with amendments, the bill must be passed a second time by the house of origin for concurrence. If the amendments are rejected, a conference committee is formed to iron out the difference between the two houses.
- **Enrolled:** Once a bill passes both houses it is enrolled and then sent to the Governors desk for signature.
- **Governor:** The Governor must act on any bill that passes the Legislature within 12 days during legislative session. For bills after the legislative session has ended, the Governor has 30 days to act upon them. Bills not acted on (signed or vetoed) by the Governor automatically become law. A two-thirds vote of both houses is required to override a Governor's veto.