



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY

P.O. Box 239
Columbia, Missouri 65205

A Citizen Guide to Crafting a Message for Elected Officials

Below are some easy tips for making an effective presentation to elected officials.

General Rules Any Way You Contact the Elected Official(s):

- Know your legislators. Familiarize yourself with their specialized interests and what committees they are members of.
- Always be positive, friendly and courteous.
- Always be prepared to provide reliable data/facts to support your position.
- Never threaten your elected official if they disagree with you, but never hint at rewards for their support.
- Always include your name, address, and phone number.
- Always remember to thank your elected official for their consideration.

Ways to Contact the Elected Official(s):

- Email – timely, but no hard copy and may not get priority response. Some elected officials consider it the same as form letters and respond accordingly.
- Fax letter – provides hard copy, make sure you use a cover letter.
- Letter – provides hard copy, but takes a long time to get through security, so not timely.
- Phone call – timely and personal. Take notes because there is no hard copy.
- In-person Meeting – you have the opportunity for dialogue and can show any research.

Messaging for Emails or Letters:

- State your issue of concern – one issue per communication.
- Be specific – what is your concern on the one issue.
- Personal touch – include any personal experience on that issue.
- Research – provide facts to support your position if appropriate.
- Be brief – keep the message to two or three paragraphs.
- Request action – include what you want the legislator to do (ex., oppose/support...)
- Proofread your message before sending.
- Don't send obviously printed or copied letters. Send original letters.
- Be courteous.
- Send Thank You after receiving response

Phone Calls:

- Issue of concern – one issue per call.
- Be specific – what is your concern on the one issue.
- Personal touch – include any personal experience on that issue.
- Be brief – keep the message to a couple minutes.
- Request action – include what you want the elected official to do.
- Write out your message and practice saying the message.
- Be courteous and polite.
- Thank the elected official or staff member for listening.

In-Person Meeting:

- Make Appointment – set up an appointment; confirm appointment; be on time.
- Know your message – include specific info such as bill number; write down the message.
- Identify yourself and the group you are representing, if applicable.
- Anticipate arguments – research the issue; provide data/facts to support your position.
- Be attentive and prepared for questions. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, but promise to get back with an answer; then do it.
- Leave a fact sheet – provide reliable facts and data to support your position.
- Be courteous and polite.
- Send a thank you note acknowledging the time and effort he/she spent on your behalf.

Testimony Before a Legislative Committee or other Elected Body (e.g., City Council)

- Find out the specific rules for providing testimony. If you are required to notify the committee or council in advance that you want to speak, follow the necessary rules.
- Prepare concise message.
- If there is a time limit on speaking, practice your message to be sure you won't exceed the time limit.
- Be knowledgeable about the subject and be prepared to answer questions.
- If you are representing an organization, verify that you have the authority to speak for that organization and that you have the correct information.
- If many people are speaking on the same subject at the hearing, you may be asked to avoid repeating comments already made, so pay attention to previous testimony.
- Take a deep breath before speaking.
- Be courteous and polite.
- Thank the committee or council for the opportunity to speak.

Sample Phone Call Preparation

- Prepare concise message
- Have the phone number. (Citizen Flyer has all the phone numbers)
- Take a deep breath.
- After the phone is answered: State your name and that you are a constituent of _____ elected official and that you are calling about _____.
- Provide zip code or address if requested.
- Be courteous and polite.
- Read or relate your message that you have prepared.
- Be ready for their response.
 - They may just thank you and say they will pass the information to the official.
 - Or they may read a prepared statement on that issue and you can respond with your position.
 - Or they may tell you that the official will or will not support that issue and you can respond with your position and that you think the official should reconsider, but do not argue or get flustered.
 - Take notes if you want a record of the conversation.
- Thank the staff person for listening and passing on your statement.
- Remember the call is usually less than a couple minutes.

Congratulate yourself for completing the call!

Sample Letter or Email

March 8, 2017

Rep. Bill Reiboldt
State Capitol
101 W. Capitol Ave.
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Rep. Reiboldt,

I am writing to you as chair of the House Transportation Committee in regard to HB 964 which proposes renaming a section of Providence Road in Columbia in honor of Mr. Sherman Brown, a very successful business owner from Columbia.

I encourage you and members of the Transportation Committee to consider approval of this legislation. Mr. Brown was a beloved member of our community who was not only a successful business owner but a mentor to many. I believe there will be no cost to the State as it will require only signage which will be paid by donated funds.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your name
Your address