

Methods for Communicating with your Legislator

Always include the bill number in your communication.

Send a letter

This method can be effective, especially if you are trying to encourage large numbers of advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) to communicate with their respective legislators throughout the state. Template letters allow APRNs who are unable take the time to contact their legislators to do so. Individual letters, however, that include personal experiences that address the issues in the bill (i.e., a patient in your district needed care but could not receive it due to current barriers) are more powerful than template letters and help clarify issues for the legislator.

Send an e-mail

All the same comments apply to e-mail as to letters, except e-mail has the advantage of immediacy and allows for quick, easy responses from legislators or their staff. In our technological age many APRNs access e-mail daily; this is invaluable when the bill goes to committee or is up for a vote and legislators must be contacted quickly. Creation of a listserv for legislative action is a must. Usually this is managed by state nursing organizations.

Call the office

This technique can also be very effective. It is best to keep it simple. Introduce yourself to the administrative assistant; don't negate the influence of the person who answers the phone. Give your name and tell the staff person you would like the legislator to support (bill number). They will ask for your address and maybe your phone number. Your contact information is used to establish that you are a constituent. This call does not require you to understand every nuance of the bill. The staff will not ask you any questions about the bill itself. You may ask to speak to the legislator if you would like, otherwise let the office staff know you are available to answer questions at their convenience.

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Visit the office

Even if you know the legislator is not in the office, staff will be there. You can always stop by and leave a message for the legislator, such as: "I would like the senator to support (bill number)." This can be very effective, especially if others are taking the same action. You do not need to expound on the bill. Keep it short. The staff will record your message and probably ask for your address (to establish if you are a constituent). Legislators do receive these messages.

Personal appointment

This is the most effective way to communicate with your legislator. It conveys that you felt the bill was so important that you took **your** personal time to discuss it with them. If possible, talk with the chief of staff. Bring a copy of talking points to leave behind and make your visit brief. Follow their lead; if they want more information, accommodate them. They will ask about the position of the opponents to the bill. A good response is: "We are in negotiations at this time." **Never criticize the opposition.** Politicians like consensus. An agreed upon bill is easy to pass. The more wrangling and controversy, the less likely they are to support it. After the first meeting, follow up with a thank you card. If they support the bill, call to thank them.

Every little bit counts when attempting to pass legislation. Make an effort to contact your legislators in any way you can. It does make a difference!

