

## How to Share Your Story with Your Legislator

Sharing your point of view with your legislators is an important part of our democracy. It is their job to represent you and they really do want to hear from you. Your legislators need to hear directly from their constituents on how the programs and laws they create or remove will affect the lives of their constituents.

Some people may be nervous to contact their legislators for various reasons. Hopefully this document will give you the confidence you need to make your voice heard with communication options that are convenient.

**Tell a story** - All communication with your legislator should be based on how their decisions will affect your life.

A good story includes the following pieces:

- It is about you or someone close to you.
- It is on topic—it is linked to a specific program or piece of legislation.
- It is short and clear but includes messages about how the programs are important to you.
- It helps the legislator better understand the issue.
- It is a reminder of the real impact of their decisions.
- It includes a statement of request and your contact information.

**Make a phone call or send an email** - Both options are quick, convenient and easy ways to contact your legislator. Tips for an effective phone call or email message include:

- Explain to your legislator how you feel about an issue through your story.
- Request their support or opposition for a bill.
- Include your contact information.
- Keep it brief: Emails should be one page or less and phone calls should be five minutes or less.

**Personal Meeting with Your Legislator** - In-person meetings are a very effective way to educate elected officials and/or their staff about the current issues that may affect you and your family. Here's what you can expect in your meeting and the best way to incorporate your story:

- Establish some ground rules with the legislator's staff before the meeting. For example: How long will the meeting be? Will media be invited?
- Expect to meet a staff member. Staffers make recommendations and advise legislators regarding particular issues. Meeting with a staff member is worthwhile.
- Provide a one page fact sheet to emphasize generally the importance of the issue and provide basic facts for the legislator or their staff. Use these facts to highlight parts of your story.
- Avoid acronyms and technical terms that may not be commonly used by people who do not have intimate knowledge of the program or topic addressed in your story.
- Don't disparage the government or the legislator's political party.
- If they ask a question you don't know the answer to, don't guess the answer. Get back to them with answers at a later time. Accurate information later is more important than quick, inaccurate information.
- Follow up with thank you email that includes contact information and any other information you promised during the meeting.

**Connect Online** - More and more legislators are using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to post about topics and legislation about which they are making decisions. Follow your legislators and use their posts as an opportunity to comment with your opinion or tag them in your posts with your story.