



Quick Tips for Contacting Your Elected Official

Phoning, Emailing and Meeting

Phoning Your Legislature

- Phone calls should be very brief; if what you have to say takes more than a minute or so, write a letter.
- Introduce yourself with your name and where you live.
- You will most likely be unable to speak directly with your representative, so relay your message to his or her staff. Ask to speak with the person in charge of your particular issue.
- Briefly state the purpose of your call and explain which bill you would like your legislator to support or oppose.
- Ask what your legislator's stance is on the particular issue.
- Thank whoever took your call.

Emailing Your Legislature

- Be polite.
Even if you disagree with your legislator or their opinions always be respectful and considerate. If you oppose his or her stance on a particular piece of legislation express your disagreement without resorting to rude or threatening language.
- Be concise.
Keep your letter short and to-the-point. Include all the relevant details, but don't go on for longer than necessary. State your purpose by explaining why you are writing and what action you would like your legislator to take. For example:
"I am writing to ask you to support HR 121." When referring to legislation, make sure you cite the bill correctly and with the appropriate numbers.
- You can include facts or statistics (NAMI's website is a good source) about mental illness if it supports your point.
- Give a little bit of background on yourself or your family if relevant, and briefly explain why your legislator's action on a particular piece of legislation is important to you.
- Thank your legislator for their support.
- Restate your purpose.
- Leave your contact information. Include your address, phone number, and email.
- You can also email your legislator using the same general format as a letter.

Meeting With Your Legislature

- **Scheduling:**
 - Schedule your meeting a few weeks in advance. Be sure to confirm the date and time a few days before the meeting.
 - Explain the reason for your visit and who will be attending the meeting.
 - Although meeting directly with your legislator is ideal, it isn't always possible. A meeting with a member of his or her staff can be just as convincing.

- **Preparing:**

- If you plan to meet in a group, make sure everyone is on the same page before the visit. Assign one person as leader or spokesperson. Divisive or disorganized groups are highly ineffective.
- Expect to meet with your legislator or a staffer for about fifteen minutes; plan accordingly.
- Be prepared for your meeting. Have some facts or statistics ready and be prepared for questions. Know what points you want to make and how to make them.
- Be knowledgeable about your legislator and the legislative process. It can be helpful to know his or her voting history on the particular issue (the tracking sites, govtrack.us and ilga.gov, are helpful here.)
- Bring a printed 'leave behind' document for your legislator. This should include all the main points that you will make during your visit and any other relevant information.

- **The Meeting:**

- Do not keep your legislator waiting! Plan to arrive early.
- Thank him or her for seeing you, and for supporting related legislation if applicable.
- Once the appropriate pleasantries have been exchanged, make your case. Plan on being brief and be prepared to wrap up quickly if he or she has limited time. Have more information prepared in case he or she has extra time.
- Explain why you have come, your issue, and any relevant legislation. When referring to legislation, make sure you have the proper name and number of the

bill. Give your reasoning as to why your legislation is good or bad policy. Offer some personal anecdotes that relate to your issue; a personal story will stand out in the legislator's mind and may have more sway than any number of statistics.

- If the legislator asks you a question to which you do not know the answer, respond that you don't know but will get back to him or her with the relevant information. If you say you will do so, do so.
 - Ask for the legislator's support or opposition on your issue. You may receive a noncommittal answer, but ask anyway.
 - Thank your legislator for his or her time and support.
- **Afterwards:**
 - Send a thank you note! Not only is this polite, but it allows you to reiterate your point. Thank the legislator for meeting with you. Repeat your request for their support or opposition on the legislation in question. This is also a good place to include any information that the legislator requested.

Thank you NAMI DuPage County for allowing NAMI Seattle to use this information as part of our advocacy toolkit.