

Contacting Your Legislators

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The 2013 Legislative Session began on Monday, January 14 and runs 105 calendar days (ending April 28).

Staying in touch with your legislators and the legislative process is an important part of active citizenship. Legislators are responsive to their constituent concerns, but there are some tips to maximize your input.

- You can find contact information for all the districts at: <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/legislature>. You can find most information that you will need at this site including the text of bills, committee hearing schedules, and contact information. You can sign up for automatic notifications of committee hearings, electronic newsletters and other regular communications.
- Another great source for legislative information is <http://www.tvw.org/> They live stream the various committee hearings and floor action in both the House and Senate.
- Do your homework: Subscribing to the weekly WOVE Legislative Update is your best source of information related to Career and Technical Education. Be sure you know the levels of government and the issues covered by each. State legislators can help you with issues related to state government and state agencies. They should be able to guide you to the right resources/people to help you with your problems with federal or local issues.
- Legislators need constructive input from their constituents. If you support or oppose a particular issue, explain why. How an issue affects you personally is very important information.
- Decisions about legislation are based on facts and verifiable information. Pre-printed postcards, mass emails and petitions are important ways to let your elected representatives know your position on issues, but they are not as effective as personal communication. Letters, phone calls and emails are all good ways to keep in touch. Remember to use your personal phones, computers while on you own time.

On all messages of any kind, be sure to include your full name, address and phone number. This will facilitate responses from your legislator.

Letters:

If you write a regular postal service letter, be sure to include your name, address and phone number on the letter itself. Letters can be separated from the envelope and contact information can be lost. It is a myth that a handwritten letter receives more attention than a typewritten letter. Handwritten letters are nice, but only if your penmanship is legible!

Phone calls:

A phone call can be very effective, but it is important to remember that the legislators are seldom in their offices to speak to you personally. They spend most of their time in committee hearings, caucus meetings and meetings with constituents, etc. The legislative assistant will take a message and pass along the information. If you get the office voicemail, leave a complete (brief) message with your contact information. The voicemail system allows for easy retrieval and storage of messages.

E-Mail:

Legislators receive literally hundreds of e-mails each day. To make yours an effective communication be sure to use your actual name in the "From" line, include your full name, address and phone number in the message, and use a descriptive "Subject" line such as "Please support HB 1111, water rights" or "Oppose expanded gambling".

If you filter your e-mail, be sure to include your legislators in "accepted" incoming mail. It is very frustrating to respond to an e-mail and have a message come back that the sender has been blocked.

In all your communications, please remember that legislators are contacted hundreds of times each day. Each legislator has only one legislative assistant (Senators get an extra helper during session only) so you may not receive an immediate response. Be assured that your message is received and noted by your legislator.

Requests For Appointments:

All legislators want to make your visit to Olympia a positive experience. Legislators will make every effort to be available to meet with their constituents. The legislators all have very full schedules. Because of conflicting committee meetings and other legislative activities, it can be difficult to find a time to meet. It is best if you can be as flexible as possible.

Each office has a different system for handling appointment requests. You should start with a phone call to the office. The Legislative Assistant will let you know whether they prefer a call or an email request. E-mail is often easier to track.

If you go to Olympia, remember that winter weather can cause travel problems. Give yourself plenty of time and be safe. Legislative offices are often located in different buildings, so give yourself time between appointments to get to a new location. It is sometimes possible to meet jointly with multiple legislators. It is OK to ask for that option, but it will depend on their diverse schedules. Parking close to the capital is limited in space and time allowed. The cheap and easy way to park is to park downtown by the water front in the farmer's market area and then use the 'DASH' free bus ride up to the capital. The DASH runs every 12 minutes during the week.

Food service is very limited at the Capitol. It is always a good idea to bring a sack lunch/snacks with you. Wear comfortable shoes! ☺

For good information on the legislative process, parking information and building maps:

<http://www.leg.wa.gov/legislature/pages/visitingthelegislature.aspx>