

Fact Sheet: How to Call Your Elected Officials

The best way to contact your elected officials is by phone. Phone calls work better than written forms of communication like letters or email. This is because the person on the other line has to listen to what you have to say. They can't just skim the words like they could with something written.

Phone calls also take more time for an elected official's staff to respond to. This means that if you can get a lot of people to call about a certain bill or law at the same time, it will make it hard for people in that government office to do anything else but answer calls. This shows elected officials that the public really cares about a problem. That could affect how they choose to vote for the law.

Elected officials keep track of how many people call about each problem. So if one problem is getting a lot of calls, it may make them think more about that problem.

Remember that members of Congress have both national and district offices. And, members of the State Legislature may have more than one office. The best thing to do is call all their offices. But if you can only call one, that is also okay. If you have to choose one office to call, you should call the district office closest to where you live. The person you talk to will not be your elected official; instead, it will be someone who works for them. This person's job is to let the elected official know what you said.

Before you call, it is a good idea to prepare a script so you know what you want to say. You should talk about your personal experiences. That will show why the problem you are calling about is important to you. Be careful to keep your call short. That way, the person you are talking to understands the main point of what you are saying.

The person you are talking to may ask if you are a **constituent**. This means that you live in the area that your elected official represents. Elected officials care the most about the calls coming from the people that can vote for them. So, you shouldn't call any elected officials who don't represent your area. To make it easier for the person you are talking to, say where you live at the beginning of the call.

The person you are talking to may also ask if you would like your elected official to respond to your call. This means that your elected official will send you a letter about how they feel about the issue you are calling about. It is your choice how you want to answer this question.

If there is a specific law that you would like to talk with your elected official about, it is also important to include the name of that law (or bill number) in your message.

Sample script

Here is a sample of a good script for calling your elected official about a law:

You: Hello, I would like to make a comment to **[elected official's name]** about **[problem or policy]**.

Staff member: Certainly. Please go ahead.

You: Thank you. My name is **[your full name]**, and I live at **[address]**. I'm calling to urge **[elected official's name]** to support laws that **[fix the problem you are calling about - explain that here]**. I care about this because **[reason]**.

Staff member: I will give your message to **[elected official's name]**. Would you like for him/her to send a response to you?

You: **[Yes OR No]**. Thank you for your time, good-bye.

Staff Member: Thank you for your comments. Have a good day.

Example: Calling an elected official's office

Sally Jones is from Normaltown, California. In her town and in towns all over the United States, swarms of angry bees are showing up everywhere. They are attacking people and making people feel afraid to go outside. It is also costing people and the government a lot of money to pay for health care for people hurt by the bees.

Sally is part of the Stop the Bees Community Group. The group works to make elected officials aware of the bee problem. Recently, a bill called the Beekeeping Act was introduced in Congress. If this bill passed and became a law, the government would give money to help build a colony for the bees away from the cities and towns. Sally wants to talk with her U.S. Representative, Anne Smith, to ask her to support the Beekeeping Act.

Here is what Sally might say if she called Representative Smith's office on the phone:

Sally: Hello, I would like to make a comment to Representative Smith about the Beekeeping Act.

Smith's staff member: Certainly. Please go ahead.

Sally: Thank you. My name is Sally Jones, and I live at 99 Community Lane in Normaltown, CA. I'm calling to urge Representative Smith to support the Beekeeping Act. I care about this because many members of my community have been attacked by bees, and it is making us all afraid to go outside. The Beekeeping Act would give the bees somewhere else to go so they would leave our town, and then we could all be safe again.

Staff member: I will give your message to Representative Smith. Would you like for her to send a response to you?

Sally: Yes. Thank you for your time, good-bye.

Staff Member: Thank you for your comments. Have a good day.

What if I can't talk on the phone?

You can use an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device, like an iPad, to type out what you want to say. Then, use text-to-speech to have your text read out loud while you are on the phone with an elected official's office. You don't have to wait for the staff member to respond to you if you want to have your whole comment read aloud at once. If the staff member has questions for you after you make your speech, you can let them know you need some time to answer.

Sample script

Here is a sample AAC script:

Hello, I'm a real constituent who is using a text-to-speech device because of a disability. I would like to make a comment to **[elected official's name]** about **[problem or policy]**. My name is **[your full name]**, and I live at **[full address]**. I'm calling to urge **[elected official's name]** to support laws that **[fix the problem you are calling about - explain that here]**. I care about this because **[reason]**. I **[would like OR would not like]** a response from **[elected official's name]**. If you need more information, please let me know and give me a little time to type the answer. Thank you.

Another option for AAC users is to use the script for non-AAC phone calls to type out an answer for each part of the call, then hit each part in the right order to talk with the person on the phone.

You can also write out your script and have someone else read it for you over the phone. All they have to do is tell your elected official at the beginning of the call that they are speaking for you by saying "Hi, my name is **[their name]** and I am calling on behalf of **[your name]**, who can't speak." Some people are making groups in their communities to volunteer to make calls for people who can't speak. Try checking social media to see if there is a group like this near you, or you can make one of your own.

If you are able to speak but get anxious when talking to people, you can also call your elected official after their office is closed (usually after 5 p.m., or on the weekends). This way, you will get an answering machine to leave a message instead of talking to a person. Elected officials and their staff members do listen to phone messages, so it is still helpful to do.