

# Legislative Advocacy

## Ten Rules of Advocacy

“Advocacy” is the work of making change. It provides an opportunity for citizens to have their voices heard and their rights, concerns and needs are acted upon. Building relationships is fundamental to effective advocacy.

### 1. Do your homework

- a. Know the issue – be able to explain the effects on constituents. Know the strengths and weaknesses of the opponents’ arguments. Anticipate questions and have answers ready.
- b. Know the legislator – know their background, interest areas, voting record, and public statements.
- c. Know the staff – often overlooked, they are key. They have time to understand and absorb the facts, they are trusted by the legislator, and can be an advocate for your issue.

### 2. Start early

- a. Be ready when the time comes and everything takes longer than you think it will.
- b. Develop your strategy early with allies.

### 3. Tell the truth

- a. Legislators rely on you for good information. You will never regain your credibility if you lose it.
- b. If you don’t know the answer, say so. If you promise to find an answer or information, do it.

### 4. Keep it simple

- a. Work on the KISS principle – (Keep it Simple and Short). Prepare for THREE minutes.
- b. Think about what you want and why you want it.
- c. Legislators are busy and appreciate concise summaries of what you want.
- d. Legislators EXPECT you to make an *ask* or have a point of view.

### 5. Take your friends where you find them

- a. Find your allies and work with them – a friend is someone who helps you when you need it.
- b. NEVER count anyone in; never count anyone out. Your opponent today may be your ally tomorrow.

### 6. Know your legislative opponents

- a. Don’t waste time trying to convince those who are publicly committed to their positions.
- b. Put your energy into swaying undecided votes.
- c. Keep lines of communication with your legislative opponents open for possible compromises.

### 7. Think BIG, but know your bottom line

- a. ALWAYS ask for more than you think you can get.
- b. The legislative process is one of compromise – legislators try to give everyone something.
- c. Have something you can give up to your opponent.

### 8. Build coalitions

- a. Work from a united front. Find groups who agree with you on an issue and work with them.
- b. Don’t expect them to agree with you on every issue or expect that the coalition will last forever.
- c. It doesn’t matter who gets the credit as long as it gets done. Grabbing credit is divisive and gives your opponents something to exploit. (Don’t air your dirty laundry.)

### 9. Work at the local level

- a. Legislators pay most attention to their constituents.
- b. Legislators are attentive to LOCAL media/locally elected officials/key opinion leaders and allies.

### 10. Thank people that help

- a. Everybody likes a pat on the back – regardless of outcome.
- b. Solicit advice from various legislators/groups about how to move forward.

# How to Contact Your State Legislator

## Identifying your State Legislator

You can find contact and other information by visiting the University of Kansas Institute for Policy and Social Research website: [www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/vote/](http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/vote/)

## Contacting your State Legislator by Phone

You can call your legislator either at their district office or, during the legislative session, at their Topeka office. The Topeka office switchboard can be reached at 1-800-432-3924. You will most likely speak to a legislative aide rather than the legislator, but rest assured that officials take your input seriously.

## Tips for an effective phone call

- Introduce yourself by name and identify yourself as a constituent. Provide your address and telephone number if it is requested. If you are calling about a specific piece of legislation, identify it by name and bill number.
- If your legislator has supported your cause in the past, show your appreciation.
- Briefly explain your position and how you would like your legislator to vote.
- Remember to always be courteous and respectful.
- If additional information is requested, take care to provide it as quickly as possible.
- Keep track of your legislator's actions and follow up with a letter expressing thanks or disappointment. You can check the status of a bill at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org).

## Visiting your State Legislator

Taking the time to personally visit your legislator demonstrates your commitment to an issue. You can visit their district office or, during the legislative session, you may be able to meet them at the Capitol in Topeka. (Visiting in Topeka, however, can be very difficult, and meetings at the Capitol are often cancelled or delayed.)

## Before the visit

- Learn basic information about your legislator. Find this at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org) or the legislator's own website.
- Preparing bullet-pointed, written statements to leave behind is often useful.
- Call ahead to make an appointment. Be as flexible as possible – legislators' schedules are extremely busy.
- If you are visiting in Topeka and are unable to meet your legislator in their office, you may be able to call them off the House or Senate floor when they're in session. Go to the third floor outside the appropriate chamber and hand a card listing your name and organization to the doorman. Your legislator may be able to come out and speak for a few moments in between votes. If you choose this route, be prepared to wait for a while.

## During your visit

- Introduce yourself. Identify yourself as a constituent and point out any connection you may share with your legislator, such as a common school.
- If your legislator has supported your cause in the past, show your appreciation.
- Present your written statement. Be concise. And be clear about what you want your legislator to do. Identify the bill number. Try to get a specific commitment.
- Be courteous and respectful. Don't take it personally if your visit is brief.

## After the visit

- Report your experiences to others working on your issue.
- Send a brief thank-you note to the legislator for their time.

- Keep track of your legislator's actions and follow up with a letter expressing thanks or disappointment. You can check the status of a bill at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org).

## Contacting your State Legislator by Letter or Email

One of the best ways to influence the legislative process is by writing or emailing your legislator. Address a letter as:

The Honorable John Doe  
State Representative/ State Senator  
Address

Dear Senator/Representative Doe:

### Tips for effective writing

- Include your address and sign your name legibly. (Your legislator will want to make sure you're a constituent)
- Use your own words. If possible, give an example of ways the relevant legislation will impact you personally.
- Make your position clear and state what you would like your legislator to do.
- Be brief and to the point. Identify a bill by number and title.
- Form letters or postcards are not as effective as an original letter.
- Be courteous. Even if you disagree, never be angry, threatening or rude.
- Ask the legislator to reply and explain his or her position on the issue.

### After you send your letter

Keep track of how your legislator votes. You can check their votes at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org). Follow up with a thank you note or a letter expressing disappointment depending on how he or she votes.

Remember to contact your legislator in support of their actions when appropriate. Often, legislators only hear from individuals and organizations opposed to legislation. It is refreshing for them to receive positive messages from the constituents they are working to represent.