

A Guide For WVRWA Members

COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

AT STATE AND FEDERAL LEVELS

A. Contacting State Senators, Delegates, and the Governor

Personal face-to-face contact is always the most effective means of communication, particularly when contacting state representatives. A phone call is also a very productive option when lobbying state senators and delegates. However circumstances such as travel and a tight legislative schedule can render direct forms of communication hard to achieve. Often, the most feasible approach is a letter or a facsimile. The fax number for the West Virginia Senate is (304) 357-7829 and the House of Delegates fax number is (304) 340-3240.

WVRWA recommends the following guidelines when writing state representatives:

I. Always use the proper salutation and the correct address. Letters should be addressed as follows:

The Honorable Senator _____
Dear Senator _____:

or

The Honorable Delegate _____
Dear Delegate _____:

The Governor should be addressed as:

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Governor of West Virginia
Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25301

Dear Governor Manchin:

II. Always be sure of your facts. Make certain you comprehend the bill in question. Many times there are various measures dealing with the same basic subject. WVRWA will be happy to provide you with copies of bills and inform you of the association's position regarding that legislation.

Be advised, a bill can be changed so dramatically through the amendment process that WVRWA's recommended position may also have changed as a result.

III. In your letter, it is imperative you identify the bill by both title and subject. Given the hundreds of bills that are proposed in the course of one legislative session, it is asking a great deal to expect a senator or delegate to recall a bill by number alone.

IV. Direct and to the point is the best approach. Concise, clearly stated facts and opinions are more likely to stand out among the countless other letters your letter will be competing against. Aim for a well-conceived one page letter. Many legislators maintain files on each bill so write one letter per each bill in question.

V. Be original in writing your letter. This is another means of catching the attention of lawmakers and having a more memorable effect upon the reader.

VI. Be professional. Never make demands or use harsh words and phrases. Lawmakers are often caught between conflicting interests. His or her final vote may be against WVRWA's position or your own opinion, but always be professional. Never burn any bridges or write anything harmful to you or your agency.

VII. Never stop writing letters. Do not forget, each bill must be voted on by different groups of legislators as it makes its way through the process. Write to members of the various committees to which the bill is originally assigned. When the bill has had a second reading and is approaching a floor vote, be sure to write to leadership of the House, Speaker Bob Kiss, or Senate President Earl Ray Tomblin. If a bill has made it through both houses and is forwarded to the Governor, be sure to write him regarding your views about the bill.

LEGISLATIVE REPORTING and BILL SERVICES

The West Virginia Legislature's Reference and Information Center provides informational services to legislators, the Media, and the general public. The address is:

West Virginia Legislature's Reference & Information Center
MB-27, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305

The Information Center, (304) 558-8905, provides information to the public through a **toll-free line (1-800-642-8650)** which permits citizens to obtain bill status information, leave messages for lawmakers during session, request copies of legislation, or obtain governmental information. The office also produces publications such as *A Guide Through the Legislative Process*, *How a Bill Becomes Law*, and the *Director of the Legislature*. In addition, the Center publishes *Wrap-up* and *Interim Report* which provides a synopsis of the actions of the Legislature as well as an in-depth review of bills.

Legislative Library, (304) 558-2153, provides lawmakers with a variety of research materials. The library contains the *West Virginia Code*, the *Acts of the Legislature*, and the Journals of both the House of Delegates and Senate. The librarian keeps numerous items on the Legislature's actions through current and past newspaper clippings.

B. Contacting U.S. Senators and Members of Congress

In an ideal world, we could all have immediate access to each of our elected officials which of course would lend itself to personal face-to-face means of communication. Given the great distance and the time demands upon our federal representatives such encounters rarely occur. The letter remains the most popular choice of communication with a congressional or senatorial office. Most offices maintain e-mail addresses but those should only be utilized in a last minute situation.

WVRWA recommends these suggestions when writing federal representatives:

- I. Clearly state your purpose in the opening paragraph. If the letter pertains to a specific bill, identify that item by the appropriate number, e.g., House Bill: H.R. ____, Senate bill: S. ____.
- II. Be professional and courteous and include any key information to support your reason for writing. Try using some examples to support your beliefs.
- III. Keep your letter to one page and be concise and to the point. Stay on one issue per letter. This will help drive home your viewpoint.
- IV. Always use the correct address and the proper salutation. Letters should be addressed as follows:

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Senator _____ :

or

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
Dear Representative _____ :

- V. When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, address them as: Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman or Dear Mr. Speaker.

Suggestions for Visiting a Senate or Congressional Office

- I. Plan your visit carefully. Be clear about what it is you hope to achieve. Determine ahead of time which member or committee staff you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.
- II. Make an appointment by contacting the appointment secretary. Explain your purpose and who you represent and your relationship to the area represented by the member.
- III. Remember the four P's. Be prompt, be patient, be prepared and be political. Arrive on time however, it's not uncommon for a congressman to be late or have a meeting interrupted due to a crowded schedule. If these occur, be flexible. Be sure to bring materials supporting your views and demonstrate clearly the benefits of that viewpoint. Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Wherever possible, illustrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the member's constituency. Describe how your organization can be of assistance to the members office. Where it is appropriate remember to ask for a commitment. Be prepared to answer questions and provide additional information.
- IV. Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter that outlines the different points covered and send along additional information and materials requested.

West Virginia Congressional and Senate Addresses and Phone Numbers

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
United States Senate
Hart Building, Room 311
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 224-3954

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
United States Senate
Hart Building, Room 531
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 224-6472

The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan
United States House of Representatives
2346 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-4172

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall II
United States House of Representatives
2307 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-3452

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
United States House of Representatives
1431 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: (202) 225-2711