

Tips for effective legislative communication

ONA depends on its grassroots network of nurses across the state to accomplish our legislative goals. You are our most effective advocates for change at the state Capitol. Whatever the issue at hand, there are several universal techniques that can make your legislative advocacy more effective.

These guidelines apply to visiting a legislator's office, to phone calls, direct mail, email and to social media communications.

Be polite

Of course, this is a good rule to follow in your daily life, as well. Even if a legislator disagrees with you or refuses to support your side of an issue, be open to listening, be friendly, respectful and polite. Don't argue. Thank them for taking time to listen as you leave.

Don't insult or demean legislators

Sure they disagree vehemently with each other and put out scalding press releases, but legislators look out for one another. There are friendships and associations that extend across party lines and throughout the Capitol. If you offend one legislator, you run the risk of offending many!

Know your legislators

Legislators want to hear from their constituents — the people who can vote for them. Everyone has one state representative and one state senator. If you're unsure who your legislator is, you can find out at www.oklegislature.gov. When you meet, be sure to identify yourself as a constituent. (Note: If you are not yet registered to vote, be sure to register before your visit! Many legislative assistants check voter registration before you meet with your legislator.)

Know your bill number

Legislators are often happy to talk about issues with their constituents, but they may not be familiar with every issue or every bill filed. Each session sees thousands of bills filed in the House and Senate. If you know your bill number ahead of time, it helps legislators keep track of where their voters stand on pending legislation.

Be specific

Be clear about what action you would like the legislator to take.

Respect their time

With the large number of bills filed each year, committee meetings and appointments with constituents, lobbyists and officials, legislators are pressed for time. Don't waste it.

Say "thank you"

Once again, a great rule for everyday life. Always be sure to thank a legislator for their time. Thank them for their support, as well, if they've indicated they will support your side of an issue. If they don't agree with you, thank them for their time.

Follow up

If you visited a legislator's office, send a thank you note. Not only does this show your appreciation to them for their time and efforts, it's also a good opportunity to remind them of what was discussed and the action you'd like them to take on a particular piece of legislation.