USE YOUR VOICE

Change Your World

Three most common ways to contact elected officials

1. E-mail
2. Mailed letter
3. Personal phone call

And the winner is — Personal Phone Call.

- A phone call counts as 28 people who agree with you!
- A personal letter counts as 15 people who agree with you!
- An e-mail counts as 3 people. Period.

How your correspondence is handled . . .

E-MAILS:
- Congressional representatives receive 10,000+ e-mails a day!
- Automated programs sort them and send automated responses.
- A daily report shows the number of people who e-mailed on each issue—but not how many are for or against an issue.
- No human ever reads e-mails.

MAILED LETTERS
- Your congressional representatives receive 5,000 to 6,000 letters every week.
- All letters are opened and read by at least two staff people.
- The issue and the person’s stand—for or against the issue—are recorded and then a form letter is sent to the writer.
- About 10 exceptional letters a week receive special treatment by being personally read and signed by your representative.

PHONE CALLS
- Each congressional office receives 400-600 calls a day from constituents.
- Every call is either answered by a staff person or by an answering machine.
- Either way, a staff person will take notes about your call—your issue and your stance on the issue.
- In addition, some of your actual words may be quoted at a staff meeting with your representative, and you will be counted among those who took time to call and voice your opinion.

Use Your Voice: Change Your World

A Versatile, Effective Message Structure

- Greeting
- Your name
- Where you live - You’re a constituent
- The issue you are concerned about
- Why you are concerned
- The action you want your representative to take

How to Get Back on Track

- What I’m most concerned about is . . .
- I’m not a policy expert, but what I do know is . . .
- I don’t know every provision in that bill, but I believe that . . .
- I haven’t looked into that aspect, but what’s most important to me is . . .
- What I’d like the Senator to remember is . . .
- What I want to focus on is . . .
- Let me tell you what I do know . . .

Virginia Organizing
2012

Use Your Voice: Change Your World
Web Resources

Find contact information for your Congressional Representative and U.S. Senators
Contacting the Congress
http://www.contactingthecongress.org

Find contact information for your Virginia Delegate and Senator
Virginia General Assembly: Who’s My Legislator?
http://onview.state.va.us/whosmy.nsf/main?openform
(Or Google “Virginia General Assembly” and click Who’s My Legislator)

Find an organization and join forces
Political Advocacy Groups directory from Washington State University
http://pag.vancouver.wsu.edu

On the Web: http://virginia-organizing.org
Follow on Facebook: Virginia Organizing
Follow on Twitter: @VAOrganizing
Use Your Voice
Change Your World

Virginia Organizing
• Non partisan, non profit
• Based in Charlottesville
• Chapters in 12 communities
• Fosters civic engagement by ordinary citizens
• Promotes social justice
• Real People. Real Change.

Our voices do count. It’s time to make ourselves heard.
What stops us from contacting our representatives?

www.contactingthecongress.org
Three most common ways to contact elected officials...
An email counts as 3 opinions received period.

A mailed letter counts as 15 people who agree with you.

And the winner is . . .
A phone call counts as 28 people who agree with you.

This structure works for any issue and method of communication.

- Greeting
- Your name
- Where you live
- The issue you are concerned about
- Why you are concerned
- The action you want your representative to take

How to Get Back on Track

What I’m most concerned about is . . .

I’m not a policy expert, but what I do know is . . .

I don’t know every provision in that bill, but I believe that . . .

I haven’t looked into that aspect, but what’s most important to me is . . .

What I’d like the Senator to remember is . . .

What I want to focus on is . . .

Let me tell you what I do know . . .
You can do this!

- Use the structure to focus and organize your thoughts
- Rehearse
- Keep your notes close at hand
- Get back on track if you have to
- Don’t forget: You’re the boss!

Get Organized!

- There's strength in numbers
- Get past the gatekeepers and the boilerplate
- Get help with strategic timing of your contact
- Work with Virginia Organizing for social justice
- Or find a group that you can work with

Political Advocacy Groups

- A Directory of Political Action Groups

Subjects
- Abortion & Reproductive
- AIDS & HIV
- Aging, Elderly & Seniors
- Asia Pacific
- Children
- Civil Rights
- Consumer advocacy
- Criminal Justice
- Disabilities
- Education
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Global Health & Foreign Policy
- Health Care Reform
- Homeland Security
- Human Rights
- Immigrant Rights
- International Relations
- Interest Groups
- Jobs & the Economy
- Labor
- Law Enforcement
- Legal Rights
- Military
- Mental Health & Substance Abuse
- Women's Rights

Get Involved
- Join a group
- Sign a petition
- Write a letter to your representative

www.pag.vancouver.wsu.edu