



Legislative Guide

**A “How to Guide” for
Communicating
With Your Legislators**

Tips for Contacting Your Legislators



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Take the opportunity today to get involved in the legislative process. It is the only way that you personally can make a difference and help influence the outcome of legislation that will directly affect your practice and your patients' rights to see you for their healthcare. Grassroots lobbying is the best way for concerned citizens to work together to voice their opinion in a determined, positive manner. Together, we can make a difference in our futures! Getting involved in the legislative process can have a huge impact on your practice growth. Legislators are well known throughout your community. Often legislators will refer constituents to health care providers who the legislator has grown to know and trust. And attending legislative events such as fundraisers can be a good practice builder.

Enclosed are a few “tips” and suggestions to assist you in your efforts. Please contact the Unified VCA office or Legislative Committee with any questions, comments or suggestions.

[Virginia Legislation](#)

To find out about bills and follow them:
www.richmondsunlight.com

Tips for Contacting Your Legislators



General Assembly Information

Phone: 804-698-1500 or 888-892-6948

To Determine Who Your Legislator Is and Obtain Contact Information

1. Go to the General Assembly site: <http://legis.virginia.gov/>
2. Scroll down to the section on "Contacting Your Legislator"
3. Click on the link to "Who's My Legislator?"
4. Enter your home address

You can obtain information on your Senator and Delegate, his or her committee assignments, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and how to track a bill.

OR visit <http://conview.state.va.us/whosmy.nsf/main?openform>.

You may have a different Senator or Delegate for home versus office, so put in both your office address and your home address (separately). Both sites provide links so that you can e-mail a message directly to your legislator, but the second is a little more direct.

The General Assembly prefers that you obtain your legislator information via the web as outlined above. However, to find out who your legislator is and be forwarded to the legislator's office, you can also:

- Call the general toll-free # for the General Assembly, 877-391-3228
- Call the general toll-free # for the Senate, 888-892-6948
- Call the main House line directly: 804-698-1500
- Call the main Senate line directly: 804-698-7410

Whoever answers will ask for your address, input it into the "Who's My Legislator" tool, give you the pertinent information, then forward you to whichever Delegate office you specify.

Note: The Constituent Viewpoint Opinion Line has been permanently discontinued.

Fax

- To fax something to the House, dial 804-698-67__ (the desired district #).
- To fax something to the Senate, dial 804-698-7651.

Note: The generic/overall fax # for legislators has been permanently discontinued.

Tips for Contacting Your Legislators



Calling Your Elected Officials

A personal phone call to your representative is a very effective way to voice your opinion. This is true especially when a bill is coming up for a vote and time is short. Calls are most effective when they follow a letter or personal visit. You should keep in mind that many of the techniques outlined in the section on letter writing and personal meetings also apply to telephone calls.

Be aware that you will only have a few minutes for the conversation so you will need to be well prepared and concise when expressing your view. Often a legislative aid will be the one to take your call, as your Senator or Delegate may not be available during the busy General Assembly session. Many legislative assistants can be extremely helpful and can pass your name and concerns on to the legislator.

- Before you make the call, familiarize yourself with the issue and write down the points you want to cover.
- Always be sure to identify yourself as their constituent. Be polite and considerate.
- Keep your conversation brief and to the point (under 5-10 minutes).
- If you cannot speak directly with the legislator, leave your message with a staff person. Ask if there is a good time to call back where you could talk to the legislator directly.
- Remember to thank the Senator, Delegate or legislative aide for his/her time and follow up the call with information and a brief thank you note.

Meeting with Your Legislator

One of the best ways to keep your members of the legislature informed about your concerns is to visit them in person. Personal meetings, either to discuss a specific issue or just introduce yourself as a local constituent, are *the most effective* means of political communication.

The best time to visit is when the General Assembly is not in session. Information is gathered, legislation is drafted and agendas are set many months before the start of the General Assembly in January. The time to establish a rapport with your elected official is months before the session starts. Here are a few tips for a successful meeting.

- Call and make an appointment. Be on time. Do not overlook the opportunity to meet with a staff aide, particularly if he or she is working closely with the legislator on an issue of concern to you.
- Review the issues and prepare yourself to discuss them clearly and briefly.
- Be able to state your views in 10 minutes or less.
- Introduce yourself and explain that you live and/or do business in their district (you vote in the district where you live).
- Invite the legislator to visit your office.
- Answer any questions or concerns as completely as possible. If you do not know the answer to the question, admit it, and provide the information as soon as possible. All additional information requested should be provided promptly.
- If possible, send information before the meeting.
- Have a fact sheet of key points to leave with the legislator and staff at the conclusion of the meeting.

- After the meeting, send the legislator and his staff a thank-you note along with any additional information requested. Re-emphasize key points that were discussed.
- Advise the Unified VCA of your meeting and any specific requests or comments made by the legislator or his/her aide.

If you need to meet with your legislator during the Session, remember that schedules are hectic and unpredictable during the Session. The legislator's time is at a premium and you must be specific about what you want and state it simply. It is important to have the bill number, a fact sheet, your position on the bill and your name and phone number on a business card that can be left with the Senator or Delegate.

Maintaining a Constituent Relationship

The key to successful relationships with your legislator is to establish a personal relationship before you talk issues. Legislators are much more likely to accept and agree with issues if they are presented by somebody whom they know and trust. Start by taking your legislator to lunch or dinner just to get acquainted (with no issue discussion). Ask how you can help them. When you see your legislator's name mentioned in the news, drop them a hand written note. Favorable responses on specific issues are greatly enhanced when personal relationships are first established. Here are some ideas that may help you maintain a "strong" constituent relationship.

- Invite your legislator to visit your office.
- Invite your legislator to a local Association meeting.
- Ask to receive his/her newsletter.
- Sign up to receive VCA's Legislative Update fax.
- Attend political functions and fundraisers in your district.
- Serve on a campaign committee.
- Consider contributing to the candidate's campaign.
- Host a fundraiser in your home for the candidate.
- Host a "meet and greet" or non-fundraising reception in your home.
- Send your legislator information and key articles about chiropractic. These should be coordinated with VCA to maintain consistent message.
- Keep up with the voting record of your legislators.
- Thank your legislators at the conclusion of the Session for all their hard work and support.
- Stay on positive terms with the Senator and Delegate even if he/she voted not to support your issue. Thank him for his hard work and consideration. He may be an ally some day!

Writing to Your Senator or Delegate

A letter is an excellent tool that can be used to communicate your views in a clear and concise manner. A carefully written letter can explain an issue in detail as well as provide valuable information to the legislator. Constituent letters are particularly effective, so encourage your colleagues and patients to write letters as well. Here are a few tips for letter writing:

- Use the correct salutation.
- If at all possible, type the letter. Check for spelling errors. Ask a friend to review the letter to see if it is easily understood.
- Make sure you include your name, address and telephone number.
- Date the letter.
- Define the issue in the beginning of the letter and continue with supporting information in the body of the letter.
- Outline your concerns and explain the negative or positive impact the piece of legislation would have on your patients, your business and the community.
- Write about one issue at a time and include the bill number if possible.

- Be polite and ask his/her support. Be clear about what you would like the Senator/Delegate to do (support the bill, study the issue, etc.).
- Suggest new solutions. Legislators don't sit around creating legislation – the ideas come from those who have a good understanding of a specific topic.
- Be sure to share your opinion in a polite, positive way.
- Thank the legislator for his consideration and his time.

During the session, send mail to:

Senators

The Honorable _____
General Assembly Building
Richmond, VA 23219

Salutation: **“Dear Senator”**

Delegates

The Honorable _____
PO Box 406
Richmond, VA 23203

Salutation: **“Dear Delegate”**

Effective Legislative E-mail

- Send your e-mail messages on a Wednesday or Thursday for maximum visibility.
- Identify yourself up front as a constituent. Include your location in the subject box of your message. Otherwise, a legislative aid reviewing messages may delete your message as a non-constituent e-mail.
- If you have a connection with the legislator, start your message with mentioning the relationship. The legislative staff reading through the e-mail will know to give special attention to your message.
- Be specific. Demonstrate an understanding of the issue and an awareness of the legislative process. Be sure to use the bill number in your communications.
- Keep your message condensed and precise. Put your main points towards the beginning of the message.
- Keep the entire message to one screen in length. Avoid long, rambling sentences.
- Be courteous and avoid curt or offensive language or condemnation, which will not encourage goodwill or cooperation.
- At the end, ask for their support for your issue. Ask for a written response that clearly states their position on the issue.
- Provide your mailing address and contact information at the end.

Chiropractic-Specific Legislative News

The American Chiropractic Association: www.acatoday.org
 The International Chiropractors Association: www.chiropractic.org

Patient Advocacy

www.Chirovoice.org

www.Adjustthevote.org

Unified VCA members in good standing are welcome to download and reproduce this booklet for their reference and convenience. Should you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please forward them to the Unified VCA's Legislative Committee Chair (see committee listing under Leadership & Staff at www.virginiachiropractic.org) or to the Unified VCA office at PO Box 15, Afton, VA 22920, e-mail admin@virginiachiropractic.org, fax 540-932-3101.