



Illinois Library Association

READY SET ADVOCATE

Library Advocacy Tool Kit



Communicating Your Legislative Message

Communicating your legislative message can take many different forms. The best way to communicate is to do so in person. The Illinois Library Association (ILA) hosts annual Library Legislative Meet-ups throughout the state at the beginning of each legislative calendar year, usually in the months of February and March. You should be aware of the Meet-ups and make sure you not only attend, but know if your state or federal representatives are attending. If you or your representative can not attend, make sure you follow up with them afterwards so you can make sure they have the important library advocacy messages they need to move any library votes forward with success.

Remember, advocacy does not stop with one event or one meet-up. It continues all year long. Both the American Library Association (ALA) and ILA will reach out to you with high alert advocacy messages throughout the year and ask you to reach out to your representative to let them know how their vote will affect the library. You can communicate with your representative with a letter, phone call, or email. Below are some tips on how to do that with success.

Letter Writing

Letters are a simple and powerful way to let a legislator know how you feel. Legislators will pay attention to a letter because letters represent votes, and each letter is deemed to represent several like-minded citizens. Remember; with the new security measures, your letter may take up to two to three weeks to get delivered. As a result, for urgent matters it is okay to email your letters. Visit www.ila.org/advocacy to look up your state and federal officials.

- Individually written letters, rather than mass form letters, make a greater impression on a legislator.
- Make sure you use proper salutations for each representative.
- Always be specific. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, be sure to identify its full name and number, e.g. House Bill: HB_____, Senate Bill: SB_____ . Try to send your letter while the issue is still alive.
- State your position. Explain why you support or oppose this particular issue. Keep in mind that local examples concerning the impact of this legislation are very powerful. Be courteous and to the point, keeping your letter focused on one issue.
- Ask for a response. Indicate to your legislator that you would appreciate a reply containing their position on the issue. "Sincerely yours" is a proper way to conclude your letter.
- Follow up. If you agree with your legislator's vote, take the time to let them know that. Similarly, if you disagree with the vote, inform your legislator.
- It is recommended that all written correspondence to your federal legislators be sent to their Illinois district office. This is due to the fact that written communication sent to Washington DC must go through a large amount of security checks and by the time it gets to the legislator it is damaged and the content obsolete. You can find your federal legislators' address by checking their websites.
- Check the Illinois General Assembly website at www.ilga.gov to find out when the Illinois legislature is in session. When the legislature is out of session it is more effective to send your letter to your legislator's district office.



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Telephone Calls

A personal phone call to a legislator or his staff is an effective form of communication. If you already have a relationship with your legislator, it is most likely your phone call will take top priority. Remember, do not get discouraged if your call does not get past the legislator's receptionist. The receptionist will make note of your call and log it as "for" or "against" an issue and relay the message to the legislator or his/her aide.

- Begin your call by giving your name and address.
- If calling about a bill, give the bill name, sponsor, and number.
- Be brief in explaining your position and give examples if possible.
- Add concrete information to support or not support a bill or issue.
- Ask if the legislator has decided on the bill or issue you are calling about.
- If possible, ask if the legislator will co-sponsor the bill you are supporting.
- Always be pleasant and thank the person you are speaking with.
- Always get the person's name that you are speaking with and follow up with a thank you note.

Email

While email can be very effective with some legislators, please remember that most legislators get hundreds of emails and a phone call or a letter is really the most effective. However, when time is of essence an email should be used. Having a personal relationship with your legislator will make your email more effective. You should follow the same general rules as when writing mailed correspondence.

- Put your name and address at the top of your message so it is clear that you are a constituent.
- Be very brief and personal. If you are working from a form message, personalize it.
- Make your view known in the subject line (e.g., "Support the library") and do not expect a response. Staff may check only the subject lines to gauge public opinion on a particular issue.
- Avoid attachments, because they are rarely read.
- Use e-mail sparingly to avoid being considered "spam."
- Proof carefully, especially when writing in haste. Mistakes may cost you credibility.
- Make sure you include your full name and your complete mailing address, and telephone number so that the legislator knows how to contact you if they find it necessary.
- Illinois legislators have a drop-down box for email on their legislator websites and you can use this when you want to email a legislator.