

COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS



There are multiple ways for you to get in touch with your elected officials to let them know your perspective on road safety issues. These include writing a letter, sending an email, telephoning them, and meeting with them in person. Read through the following tips on ways to successfully communicate with your elected officials and ensure that you are heard!

Tips On Writing Your Elected Officials

Letters from constituents are very important to elected officials, but they get thousands of them every day. Here are some tips to help your letters get attention -- and action.



- Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H.R. ____, Senate bill: S. ____.
- Be courteous, to the point, and use specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others.
- Address only one issue in each letter.
- Keep your letter short -- one page letters are best.
- State any professional credentials or personal experience you may have pertaining to the subject of your letter. In this case, your experience as a teenager, and potentially a teen driver, connects directly to the most pressing issues of road safety. Your story and perspective are important!
- Clearly state what it is you want done or recommend a course of action.
- Thank the official for taking the time to read your letter.
- Be sure to address your letter correctly. Also make sure your contact information is on the letter so that he or she can respond.
- Fax a copy to the Girl Scout Council Office at (202) 274-2161 or e-mail it to programaa@gscnc.org. We love knowing about your advocacy efforts!

U.S. Congress-specific Tip:

- When writing members of the U.S. Congress, it is usually best to write only to the Representatives and Senators from your district or state. Mass-mailings to all Members of Congress rarely have much impact. You can find contact information for your Representative/Senator at: www.govtrack.us/congress/findyourreps.xpd

Addressing Correspondence Examples:

To a Senator:

The Honorable (full name)
__(Rm.#)__(name of)Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

To a Representative:

The Honorable (full name)
__(Rm.#)__(name of)House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

*Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as:

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman:

Dear Madam Speaker or Mr. Speaker:

SAMPLE LETTER TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

The following letter is an example for a potential letter writing campaign. This letter's focus is the Safe Teen And Novice Driver Uniform Protection (STANDUP) Act, or H.R. 1895, federal legislation that was introduced in 2009 (For a good additional activity, find out what the status of this legislation is – has it been passed, is it still being debated in Congress, etc).

Dear [Your city/county/state/federal representative's name],

The epidemic of teen driver crashes is a major threat to public health and safety. More than 7,500 people are killed, and tens of thousands more are seriously injured, every year in the United States in crashes involving teen drivers ... that's more than 80,000 deaths since 1999.

Research has shown the benefits of licensing laws that gradually introduce new teen drivers to the responsibility and skills of operating a motor vehicle. We know which laws work to reduce crashes and save lives. However, state teen driving laws - often referred to as Graduated Driver Licensing programs, or GDL - still vary widely in strength and effectiveness from state to state. A national law is needed to close gaps in state laws and encourage states to upgrade weak GDL laws.

Federal legislation, H.R. 1895, the Safe Teen And Novice Driver Uniform Protection (STANDUP) Act, has been introduced to ensure that every teen in every state is protected by an effective GDL law. The legislation is based on extensive research showing the success of GDL laws, as well as recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board. The bill establishes minimum requirements for state GDL laws, rewards action with incentive grant funds, and - after 3 years - imposes a reasonable sanction or financial penalty to encourage states to meet those requirements. This approach is similar to the one Congress used to encourage all 50 states to adopt a Minimum 21 Drinking Age and the Zero Tolerance BAC law to combat underage drinking and driving. Both laws are credited with saving more than 25,000 lives since their adoption. When Congress enacted federal legislation using this approach, every state acted by the deadline and no state lost a single dollar of federal highway funds. The STANDUP Act has the potential to save thousands of lives and it is time for Congress to act.

H.R. 1895 was introduced by Representatives Tim Bishop (D-NY), Michael Castle (R-DE), and Chris Van Hollen, Jr. (D-MD). This bill is supported by the Saferoads4Teens Coalition, a coalition of more than 110 national and local groups representing teens and parents, consumer, health, safety, and medical organizations, law enforcement as well as business leaders in the insurance and automobile industries. As your constituent, as well as a teenager directly impacted by this legislation, I ask for your support, too.* I personally believe this legislation will help keep my friends and I, as well as our greater community, safer on the road.

Please help prevent crashes and save lives by co-sponsoring H.R. 1895, the STANDUP Act.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe
Girl Scout Troop #0001
100 MyStreetName Rd
Anywhere, USA 00000

*If you have a personal story involving road safety – you were in a crash, a friend/family member was in a crash, etc – or if you want to talk about the impact from the DASHboard Road Safety program, you could include that in this paragraph/section.

Tips On E-mailing Your Elected Officials



Generally, the same guidelines apply as with writing letters to elected officials. However, it is important to note that in our technology-driven society, e-mail has become a popular, cost-effective and quick way to share personal views with elected officials. Because of these benefits, legislators receive a high volume of electronic communication. When sending an e-mail, **be sure to include the bill number/issue topic in the subject line.** This will help ensure your message receives proper consideration.

To find your U.S. senators' and representative's email addresses, you may use the U.S. Government's searchable online congressional directory at www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/congdir.tf or call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at **(202)224-3121** and ask for your senators' and/or representative's contact information. For your local elected officials, search online for their official websites to find their contact information.

Tips On Telephoning Your Elected Officials



- Remember that telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member, not the elected officials themselves. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment.
- Make sure to identify yourself as a constituent.
- Tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S.___/H.R.___)." You will also want to state reasons for your support or opposition to the bill.
- Keep your message to three minutes or less.
- Ask for your senators' or representative's position on the bill.
- You may also request a written response to your telephone call.
- Thank the staff person for his or her time.

*Remember the best time to call is before a bill is placed on an agenda for a vote or before a decision is put before a local committee, so time your call out if you can!



Tips on Scheduling an In-Person Meeting with Your Elected Officials



Letters and phone calls are effective, but not as effective as meeting one-on-one. Meeting your elected official in person is a great way to have a real impact on an issue, and ensures that your perspective is heard!

- Make an appointment early! Elected officials maintain busy calendars, so making an appointment ensures that you will have the opportunity to speak to someone. Give at least two to four weeks advance notice.
- Make an appointment by calling the elected official's office and requesting to speak to the scheduler.
- Let the scheduler know you are a member of the elected official's district and what issue or specific legislation you wish to speak about.
- Be prepared: Know what you want to say and what you want the result of your meeting to be. Practice ahead of time in front of a mirror and other people.

- Dress appropriately and arrive on time, but don't expect your legislator to arrive on time. They are busy and may have multiple meetings in a row.
- Always be courteous.
- Your meeting will be brief. Prepare a three-minute speech (or shorter) to give to each lawmaker or decision-maker you are meeting with.
- Tell them why the issue is important to you, and what your solution is.
- Make sure you "make the ask." Be prepared to ask the staffer or elected official to support a specific issue or piece of legislation.
- Depending on the legislator's availability, you may meet with a staff member instead of the elected official. The elected official's staff is trained to hear constituent concerns and will relay those to your elected official.
- Thank them for their time. If you meet with a staff person, indicate you will look forward to a response from the elected official.
- Always send a thank-you note.

Tips on Testifying at Hearings and Public Committee Meetings

One last powerful form of communication with your elected officials and your surrounding community is to share your testimony at a legislative hearing or public committee meeting. This can be the most effective way to get your voice heard by multiple decision makers at once.



The thought of testifying in front of a number of elected officials may seem daunting, but it's doable AND empowering! Malia, a Girl Scout who was awarded the 2009 Young Woman of Distinction award for her Gold Award project, testified before the California State Legislature's transportation committee, advocating for a law to ban trucks from driving a dangerous highway route that had resulted in a number of accidents (learn more about her project by checking out the "Youth Who INSPIRE" cards in the program kit).

Here are some things to keep in mind as you prepare to testify publically.

- Practice, practice, practice. Run through your testimony ahead of time and get feedback.
- Arrive early to sign up for a slot to speak. Time is limited at these hearings.
- Prepare written copies of your full testimony to pass out to the committee members. They may not be able to get to you during the meeting.
- Your time will be limited when you testify. Keep your speech to less than three minutes. Make sure to hit the key points on your issue.
- Provide a clear and concise description of your position on the issue or bill.
- Present your testimony effectively using a friendly, relaxed tone of voice.
- If possible, make an attempt not to read directly from your testimony. Sometimes bullet points can be more helpful than a full text script.
- If you don't understand a question you are asked, simply restate your position, and be honest.
- Ask for the committee's support before you sit down.
- As with the previous forms of communication, remember to be polite and respectful before, during, and after you testify.

Make sure to always check in with trusted adults before you contact elected officials – they can be powerful allies and resources in making your advocacy count!