

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

HOW TO GET INVOLVED IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Disability Rights Louisiana (DRLA) is a statewide non-profit agency providing free legal services to people with disabilities.

WHY SHOULD I GET INVOLVED?

Elected officials make decisions that influence your life in big and small ways every day. Elected officials are accountable to you and all voters for the decisions they make.

Elected officials want to hear from voters. Most elected officials hope to continue to be elected – the best way to ensure this happens is to be responsive to voters.

GENERAL TIPS

Make sure you are contacting the elected official(s) who can impact your issue.

Make it personal. When you communicate with the elected official, you don't need to supply statistics or in depth analysis. Let your elected officials know why the issue is important to you and how it will impact your life, your family or your community.

Be sure to identify yourself as a constituent (someone who lives in their district). Politicians prioritize issues that affect potential voters.

If you are aware that an elected official acted to support your cause or position, follow up with a call, letter or email thanking him or her. Elected officials appreciate this and it will also benefit you if you need their help in the future.

TIPS FOR MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS IN PERSON

- Call to schedule the appointment as far in advance as possible.
- Do your homework. Prepare what you want to say in advance.
- Be on time.
- Be prepared to meet with staff. Often, staff members brief elected officials on issues.
- Present your concerns simply and directly. Be brief, direct, courteous and positive. Presentation of each topic roughly should follow this outline:
 - **Background:** Explain the issue in the simplest possible terms.
 - **Impact:** Explain how the issue directly affects you.

- **Recommendation:** Indicate what you would like the elected official to do.
- Politely answer questions and concerns, but if you disagree, make your point and move on.
- Make sure you don't do all of the talking. Give the elected official opportunities to ask questions or state his or her opinion. Elected officials and their staff will appreciate the chance to be heard, and you will learn much more by listening. Also, ask questions.
- Stay away from jargon and acronyms.
- Thank the elected official if he or she has been supportive previously. They receive thanks far less than they get criticized. They will appreciate your recognition and this will let them know that you follow their actions on your issues.
- Be sure to thank the elected official for his or her time.
- Send a note thanking the elected official or staff person for meeting with you. Briefly summarize the main points of the meeting.

TIPS FOR CONTACTING ELECTED OFFICIALS VIA MAIL OR EMAIL

- Type or print your letter, if possible. Your elected official can't respond if he/she can't read your handwriting.
- Try to keep your letters and emails brief, and put your message in your own words. Correspondence should be short, to the point and polite.
- Ask the elected official to reply, and ask very directly whether he or she will support your position.
- Be sure that the elected official receives the letter or email before action is taken on the issue. Act quickly.

TIPS FOR CONTACTING ELECTED OFFICIALS VIA TELEPHONE

- If you can't get through to an elected official directly, ask to speak to the staff member who is handling the issue. Otherwise, convey your message to the person who answered the phone.
- Keep your call brief - let the other person know in short and concise terms why you are for or against something -- most calls to elected officials only last a few minutes.
- Thank the elected official for his/her attention to the matter, and let him/her know that you are looking forward to seeing how he/she votes.

For Assistance:

Call: TOLL-FREE 1-800-960-7705 (Voice or Relay)

To request services in Vietnamese, call 1-800-960-7705, extension 4. Để đòi hỏi những công tác (dịch vụ) bằng tiếng Việt, xin gọi 1-800-960-7705, mở rộng 4.

For information in Spanish, please call 1-800-960-7705, ext. 3. Para información en español por favor llame 1-800-960-7705, ext.3.

Write: 8325 Oak Street, New Orleans, LA 70118

Visit our website: <http://www.disabilityrightsla.org/>

DRLA has offices in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette