

How to Engage Your Representative

Confused?

Often people are not certain just which level of government they should contact regarding a matter. When they reach out to their local, state or federal representatives and are redirected to the appropriate level of government, they feel as if they are getting run-around.

- Be gracious to the staff person you are speaking with and thank them for directing you to the correct level of government's office or agency.
- Ask if they can possibly provide you with a telephone number and name of the contact person you should speak with.
- When contacting the agency, office or person you to which you were referred, politely inform them that you were advised by (name the legislator's office you initially contacted) to contact them regarding your issue.

Courtesy is the Key in receiving Results

Civility is very important! When contacting your legislative representatives be courteous. If you do not understand the information being provided, politely ask for an explanation. Although all elected officials, their staff, government agencies and public employees are supported by our tax dollars and in essence are our employees, civility will take you further in dealing with them than being discourteous and rude.

Contacting Local Government Elected Officials

Your local government elected officials are the ones that are closest to you and easiest to access. Generally they are elected to serve in a part-time capacity as elected officials, and work a regular full-time job. In all localities in Virginia, except Richmond, local elected officials do not have their own personal staff. If they are City Council members, the City Clerk and his/her staff provide administrative assistance to them. If you are unable to directly reach a member of City Council, you can contact the City Clerk and request they contact you.

Contacting State Government Legislative Elected Officials

In Virginia, the Delegates and Senators are also considered part-time legislators. The majority of the either own businesses, or work full-time for a company. When contacting these elected officials, more than often, you will speak with their legislative staff personnel. You may request to speak directly with your legislator, but you probably will not have immediate access to them due to the numerous duties. However, you will have a greater chance at having your call returned by your state elected officials, than your federal elected representatives.

Contacting Federal Government Elected Officials

All federally elected officials (Representatives and Senators) are full-time legislators. They maintain staffed local offices in various portions of their districts, and when in they come home from D.C., they are periodically in their district offices. Your ability to directly speak with them is greater when they are in their district offices than when they are in D.C. These meetings are generally made through scheduled appointments with their local staffers. While they are in D.C. it is much harder to meet with or speak directly with them, not because they do not wish to engage but because of their numerous duties and assignments.

Who is readily available to assist you?

If it is a local elected official, and for whatever reason, you are unable to contact them directly, contact the City Clerk's office. For State and Federal legislative elected officials, speak with their staff personnel. Their staffers handle constituent services, and more than likely, will be the ones that will assist you with your issue.