

The information here is provided to assist you in communicating effectively with members of the Iowa legislature. This is not a definitive guide to legislative communications. Its purpose is to provide you with support for effective grassroots advocacy, which has its greatest impact coming from local constituents.

## Tips for Meeting with Elected Officials

Meeting with your elected officials and/or their staff is the best way to assure that your voice is heard. This is an excellent opportunity for you to personally educate your elected official about how child abuse prevention programs help families and keep kids safe. To find your legislators, go to <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/FindLeg/>.

The following tips will help ensure a successful visit.

1. Call and make an appointment – Ask for the elected official’s clerk. Introduce yourself and briefly explain why you want to meet with the official. **Be sure to mention that you are a constituent.** Keep in mind that elected officials’ schedules can change without notice. Always call to confirm appointments.
2. Prepare for the meeting – Your elected officials have a limited amount of time to spend with you. It is essential that you prepare yourself in advance and make the most of your time. Think carefully about the issues you want to discuss and decide the best way to present them.
3. Research your elected official’s previous support for child abuse prevention – Make sure you know who you’re talking to. Think of ways to link child abuse prevention with other things the official cares about such as education or strong, healthy families.
4. Bring materials to leave behind – Leave your elected official with a profile of your program and any other materials that describe your program’s benefits for kids and families in your community.
5. Leave the door open for another meeting – This lets your elected official know that you are interested in developing a relationship and gives you another chance to help him or her understand the value of child abuse prevention. Offer to provide him/her with your expertise in prevention on an ongoing basis.
6. Send a thank you letter – This is a great way to keep your particular prevention program on their radar screen (and gives them ‘bragging rights’ about what they have done for local constituencies).

## Tips for writing an effective letter or email to your legislators

\* Individually written letters or emails, rather than mass-generated form letters, make a greater impression on your legislator. Provide your name, address, and phone number in the correspondence. You can find email addresses here:

Senators: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/asp/Legislators/SenateEmail.aspx>.

Representatives: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/asp/Legislators/HouseEmail.aspx>

\* The Iowa State Legislature is in session January through April. Letters to legislators during that time may go to their Capitol address (see below). Outside of that time, mail should go to the legislators’ home address.

\* 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 File: HF\_\_\_\_\_, Senate File: SF\_\_\_\_\_. Information on specific pieces of legislation can be found here: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/Legislation.html>. 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 his/her position on the issue.

- \* Follow up. If you agree with your legislator's vote, take the time to let him/her know that. Similarly, if you disagree with his or her vote, inform your legislator.

- \* Addressing correspondence:

To a State Senator:  
The Honorable (Full Name)  
State Capitol Building  
East 12<sup>th</sup> and Grand  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

To a State Representative:  
The Honorable (Full Name)  
State Capitol Building  
East 12<sup>th</sup> and Grand  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

## **Tips for phoning your legislators**

Keep in mind that most state legislatures are only in session part-time, so if the legislature is not in session, you will have to phone your legislator at home. Telephone calls are often taken by a clerk and not the actual legislator. If you speak with someone other than your legislator, write down the person's name, title and phone number in case you want to contact him/her again.

Upon reaching your state legislator (or staff) on the phone, follow these four basic steps:

- \* IDENTIFY yourself by name and the organization you represent and the town from which you are calling.

- \* EXPLAIN why you are calling: "I am calling to support/oppose House File: HF\_\_\_\_\_, Senate File: SF\_\_\_\_\_." Be polite and concise. Creating one or two talking points (key messages) will focus the content of your message. Too much information may confuse your message.

- \* ASK your legislator his/her position on this issue. Don't assume that your legislator has prior knowledge of your issue. Be calm, respectful, and be prepared to educate, using local examples and stories to accentuate your point.

- \* REQUEST a written response to your phone call if you did not speak to your legislative member. If the legislator requires further information, provide it as soon as possible.

- \* THANK the person who took the phone call for his or her time and consideration.