

How to Communicate to Your Political Representative Effectively

I am writing this to help people to communicate and to be heard by your political representative (MLA or MP, county or city councillors, etc.).

One of the first things that you will have to realize is that these people have huge time constraints,...in other words, they are BUSY! Committee meetings, one on one meetings, parliamentary and public meetings, what they are involved in or places they have to be can be too much for one person to keep track of, so they have office staff and assistants to keep track of their scheduling and the amount of information they have to digest at any one time. With this in mind, any correspondence or letters you send will have to be short, polite and to the point if you want them to be read. I am not talking about a 5 to 10 page dissertation on a given subject, I mean something under 1 page. Ideally, 1 to 2 paragraphs to ½ a page MAX. If you cannot make your point without going over this guideline, you have not thought about it enough. No great explanations or history is needed....if any more information is wanted, they will contact you. Your job is to get their attention, pique their interest, and address your concern. Anything longer than 1 page will likely be ignored, or be fodder for the shredder. They simply do not have the time for more.

While talking to the person in charge (MP, MLA, etc.) is a good thing, it is better (in my opinion) to get to know the assistant, or staff in charge of the file that is concerning you. These people do the bulk of the work, and research for the person in charge, and will pass on the relevant information. The staff or assistants will have more time to talk with you and usually will know more about the details of a given topic. Get to know these people, talk with them often and visit the office when you can so they can connect your face and name. You also need to know who you are talking to. Rule of thumb for me is that if they do not know my name or recognize my voice, I am not talking with them nearly enough. Respect their time, and thank them for it.

When having a meeting, keep to the topic, be brief, polite, and to the point. If your representative wants to engage you in off topic conversation after you have made your point, let them. It will give you (and them) an opportunity to get to know and develop a relationship with you....always a good thing. Remember, respect their time, and thank them for it. Always have a hard copy of the points you want to discuss to give to them before you leave, as this will give them a permanent copy of your information if they wish to review, or use it later.

When presenting a problem or concern, (and think about this long and hard) always present possible solutions to the problem or concern. This will tell the person (MLA, MP, etc.) that you have thought about the problem or concern, and are willing to work with them to come to a solution. They would rather hear about how to solve a problem than to hear you bitch, whine, and moan, while offering no practical solutions to the problem.

When making and using a petition, again, use only a couple of paragraphs, or better yet a couple of sentences. The attention span of the general public is short, and they generally do not want to take the time to read through a long explanation of the given subject. I have had people look me in the eye ask me, "What is this (the petition) all about?", while not looking at or bothering to try and read it. Having a

good and short 1 liner to explain the petition will get them to sign, provided they agree. When formatting your petition, only allow 1 signature per page, there are several reasons for this. Room is needed for people to be able to record their information on the page NEATLY. Putting 'PLEASE PRINT' before the signatories information helps immensely, as any illegible information is rejected when the petition is handed in. This can and does happen when there are 10 or more signatories per page. The idea is to have as many signatures as possible accepted when the petition is handed in. The sheer volume of a good petition is also a very nice visual effect when it is handed in. The information is also good for your organization, as this will tell you who your supporters are more likely to be.

In summary; be short sweet and to the point. Be POLITE. Offer solutions. Tell them you appreciate their time, and MEAN IT.

One last thing,do your research on the topic, be accurate and stick to the facts, otherwise you will look like a fool.

Know your rights, or you won't have any

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