

A Guide to Communicating with the Illinois General Assembly



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Making a Difference in the Legislative Process

It is critical to realize how you--an individual--can effectively help influence the outcome of legislation. Ask any elected official who is the most effective lobbyist they have ever met, and chances are they all will deliver the same response: their constituents. All politicians are keenly aware of the fact that it is their constituents who hold the key to their political futures. Therefore, constituent concerns are of the utmost concern to politicians.

Your elected officials rely on their constituent's input to be good legislators. The only way that your legislators will know about and understand how voters feel, is through ongoing communication with their constituency.

As a PT or PTA, your responsibility for communication with your state Senators and Representatives is particularly important. No other health care professional understands the complex nature of physical therapy practice better than you do.

Typically, constituents send letters and emails, make phone calls and pay personal visits to legislators to bring their message to the legislator's attention. In addition to using postal mail, letters can be faxed or emailed and a phone call is more personal than an electronic message and may have more impact.

You CAN make a difference by contacting your legislators about issues of concern to the profession. You can be most effective by relating issues to your own personal experience and professional expertise, and telling your elected officials about the likely effects of proposed legislation on their constituents.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

DO

- Clearly identify the subject(s) of your interest, as well as Senate and House Bill numbers
- State why you are concerned about the issue(s). Use your own personal experience to tell a story. Explain how you think the issue(s) will affect your patients and clients, the physical therapy profession, the health care system, your community or your family.
- Put the message in your own words. The IPTA can provide model letters, but if a member of the General Assembly receives many letters with identical wording, he or she may discount them.
- Establish an ongoing relationship with your representative and senator. This will give you more influence as a constituent.
- Become involved early in the legislative process by communicating while legislation is being considered in committees, as well as when it on the House or Senate floor.
- Find out which committees and subcommittees your representatives and senators serve on. Your representative and senator will have more influence over legislation within their subcommittee or committees' jurisdiction.
- Be in touch with the IPTA for information about legislative initiatives. Make sure that you are on our list serve to receive legislative alerts.

DON'T

- Threaten. Don't even hint that you won't vote for the legislator unless he or she does what you want. Present the best arguments in favor of your position and respectfully ask for their consideration and support.
- Link campaign contributions to legislative support.
- Pretend to represent the entirety of the physical therapy community. Contact your senator and representative as a constituent, not a spokesperson for the IPTA.

How to Stay in Touch



Correspondence

Letters can be emailed, faxed or delivered by the postal service. Written communication is most effective early in the legislative process. To find out who your legislators are and their addresses, you can visit the APTA legislative action center at www.apta.org. Be sure to log in with your member identification to gain access to the action center. Information is also available from the Illinois State Board of Elections at <http://www.elections.il.gov/DistrictLocator>

Your letters count! Avoid “form letters” and tell YOUR story.

Easy Tips for Writing to a Legislator

1. The purpose of your letter should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If you know the bill number of a specific piece of legislation, identify it as **HB (number)** (House bill, when writing to a member of the House of Representatives) or **SB (number)** (Senate bill, when writing to a member of the Senate). For example, **SB 2137**.
2. Explain your interest in the topic. Be courteous, to the point and include key information and use examples to support your position.
3. Comment on only one issue in each letter, and as possible, keep the letter to one page.

State Senators and State Representatives receive correspondence from their constituents at both their home and Springfield offices. It usually is better to write to them in Springfield when the legislature is in session

Sample Salutation for a Senator:

**Senator John J. Doe
Senate Post Office
State Capitol
Springfield, Illinois 62706**

Dear Senator Doe:

Sample Salutation for a Representative:

**Representative John J. Doe
House Post Office
State Capitol
Springfield, Illinois 62706**

Dear Representative Doe:



Phone Calls

Phone calls can be an effective way to communicate your views to your elected officials. Because of the legislators' schedules in Springfield, you may speak with a member of the legislator's staff to discuss your views. You can also use phone calls to find out where your legislator stands on issues of interest to you, that you can use in a follow up letter. Phone calls are also very useful when time is of the essence, such as right before an important vote or committee meeting. If you don't know your legislator's phone number, you can visit the APTA legislative action center at www.apta.org. Be sure to log in with your member identification to gain access to the action center. Alternatively, you can get information about the Illinois General Assembly at www.ilga.gov, District information is also available from the Illinois State Board of Elections at <http://www.elections.il.gov/DistrictLocator>



Personal Visits

By far, the most effective way to articulate your views to your elected officials and to positively affect the outcome of legislation is to sit down and speak with your lawmakers face-to-face. While these personal visits are extremely productive, they also require the most amount of planning to ensure success. Personal meetings with your lawmaker, as well as attending town meetings, can yield impressive results. When planning a personal visit, refer to the following guidelines.

1. **Schedule an Appointment.** Elected officials have extremely hectic schedules. To ensure that you will have time allotted for you to speak directly with your legislator, call in advance to set up an appointment. If possible, bring some friends or fellow antique car owners along with you to emphasize the support for your position.
2. **Explain How Proposed Legislation Will Directly Affect You.** Use specific examples to show your lawmaker how related bills will jeopardize your rights, the lives of law-abiding citizens, and unduly burden those engaged in lawful hobbies. If the proposed measure will strengthen your rights or benefit car owners, specifically cite examples to support this position.
3. **Always Be Polite.** Nothing is more detrimental to a visit with a lawmaker than rudeness, vulgarity, or threats. Even if you disagree with the position of your legislator, be courteous. Dress professionally to convey the seriousness of your visit.
4. **Follow Up Your Visit With a Letter.** Regardless of how your meeting goes, send a letter to your legislator thanking him for his time, and reiterating the points you discussed. This gesture will go a long way, and possibly allow for future meetings.
5. **If Your Lawmaker Is Unavailable, Meet With His Staff.** Many times your representative may not be available for a meeting. In such cases, try to schedule an appointment with the staffer who is responsible for related issues, or someone on his staff who can bring your concerns to your legislator's attention. Send a follow-up letter to the staffer you met with as well.