**Contacting Congress 101**

**Identifying Who to Contact in Congress**

Visit <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/map> and enter your address.

The results will identify your one Representative and two Senators and provide links to their official websites. Follow the links to their official websites and scroll down to the bottom of the home page on each site to find their office addresses. List the address of the Representative and Senator’s Washington, D.C. offices here:

Representative:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Washington, D.C. Office Address:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Senator #1:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Washington, D.C. Office Address:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Senator #2:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Washington, D.C. Office Address:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Finding out where your members of Congress stand on the issue.**

While you are on your elected officials’ websites, you should search for the stances that they have taken on the issues that you plan to write about. Each official’s website has a section for “Issues” or “Priorities” with information about their positions on a range of different policies. It’s useful to have a sense of where your elected officials stand on the issue you’re writing about and reference their current position in your contact.

**Your contacts should follow this basic template:**

* Identify yourself as a constituent by stating your town and your zip code
* State clearly your specific reason for reaching out and what action you want your member of Congress to take
* Share your personal connection to the policy and explain why you feel that your member of Congress should take the action you’re asking for on the issue
* Close by asking again for the specific action you’d like to see and ask for a response from the office

Find more details on this template on the back on this handout

Ready to contact your representatives, but not sure what to say? We’ve got you covered with a few suggestions on how to structure your contacts with Congress.

* **Identify yourself as a constituent.** In any form of communication, you should begin by identifying yourself as a district resident. You can mention the town that you live in, as well as your zip code. This will confirm for the office staff that you are a constituent.
	+ E.g.: “I’m Talon the Osprey from Galloway, NJ, zip code 08205”
* **One issue at a time.** Each contact you make should focus on only one issue. You can reach out to the office about multiple issues, but each contact you make should address only one at a time. Otherwise, the office struggles to categorize your contact and log your opinions, making it less effective.
* **Be specific.** Contacts to Congress can express your position on an issue, but they are more effective if they include a clear action that you’d like for your member of Congress take.

What do you want your elected official to do? Support a bill, oppose a bill, or take some other action (co-sponsor a bill, issue a statement)?

Is there a specific bill that you are referring to? If so, include the bill name or bill number, and be clear as possible which bill you are referring to.

* + E.g.: “I am concerned about X policy, and bill number XYZ in particular. I would prefer that the representative [support/oppose/co-sponsor] bill number XYZ.”
* **Be brief and to the point.** Keep your message succinct and to the point. You want to make your position as clear as possible; it’s easier on the staffers when you clearly say whether you are for or against a policy or issue.
* **The** **more personal, the better.** Heartfelt and personal stories from constituents about how a policy or a specific proposal will impact them directly are incredibly valuable to representatives. Include your story, and be specific about how a piece of legislation or other policy action in this issue area will affect you directly.  The individual stories that you might share are the things that will most likely change the minds of lawmakers.
* **Be respectful!** Keep the tone polite and appropriate. Even if you disagree with your elected officials, you aren’t likely to win them over to your views with an aggressive tone. The representatives and their staff members who are reading or hearing your messages don’t want to be yelled at, just like you probably don’t want to be yelled at.