



Easy Read Edition

**They Work For Us:
A Self-Advocate's Guide to
Getting Through to your
Elected Officials**

Part 4: Making a Phone Call

4. Making a phone call

Why are phone calls important?



The best way to talk to your elected officials is by phone.



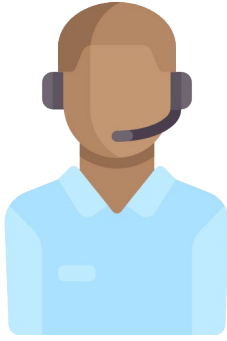
Phone calls work better than letters or email.



This is because the person on the phone has to listen to what you have to say. They can put down a letter, but it's rude to hang up on you when you call.



Getting *a lot* of people to call at the same time works very well.



When a government office gets lots of calls, it is hard for people in that office to do anything except answer calls.

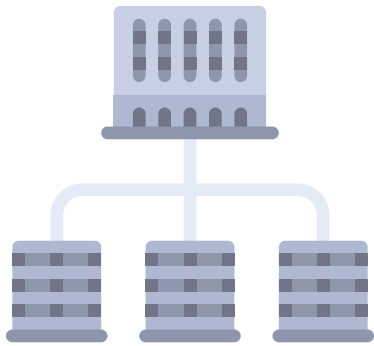


This is good. It means they are spending a lot of time thinking about the phone calls.



Elected officials keep track of how many people call about each problem. So if a lot of people call about one problem, their elected official will think more about that problem.

What should I know before I make a phone call?



Remember that members of Congress have national offices *and* district offices. And members of State Legislatures might have more than one office.



If you're trying to call an elected official who has more than one office, the best thing to do is call *all* their offices.



If you can only call one office, that is also okay. Call the district office that is the closest to where you live.



The person you talk to will not be your elected official. Instead, it will be someone who works for them. This person's job is to let the elected official know what you said.



Before you call, it is a good idea to get a script ready so you know what you want to say.

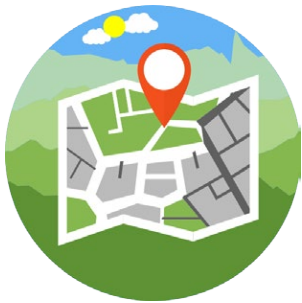


You should talk about your personal experiences. That will show why the problem you are calling about is important to you.

What will happen when I make a phone call?



Keep your call short. That way, the person you are talking to understands the main point of what you are saying.



The person you are talking to might ask if you are a **constituent**. This means that you live in the area that your elected official represents.



Since you will be calling one of your own elected officials, you should say, "Yes, I am a constituent."



Elected officials care the most about the calls coming from people who can vote for them. So you shouldn't call any elected officials who don't represent your area. To make it easier for the person you are talking to, say where you live at the beginning of the call.



The person you are talking to might also ask if you would like your elected official to respond to your call. This means that your elected official will send you a letter after your call. It is your choice how you want to answer this question.



If you want to talk about a specific law, it is important to include the name of that law in your message.

Script for calling your elected official about a law



You:

Hello, I would like to say something to **[elected official's name]** about **[problem or issue]**.



Staff member:

Certainly. Please go ahead.



You:

Thank you. My name is **[your full name]**, and I live at **[address]**. I'm calling to ask **[elected official's name]** to support laws that **[fix the problem you are calling about - explain that here]**. I care about this because **[reason]**.



Staff member:

I will give your message to **[elected official's name]**. Would you like them to send a response to you?



You:

[Yes/No]. Thank you for your time,
goodbye.



Staff member:

Thank you for your call. Have a good
day.

Example: Calling Representative Smith



Sally Jones is from Normaltown, California.



In her town and in towns all over the United States, swarms of angry bees are showing up everywhere. The bees are attacking people and making people feel afraid to go outside.



It is also costing people and the government a lot of money to pay for health care for people who get hurt by the bees.



Sally is part of the Stop the Bees Community Group. The group tells elected officials about the bee problem.



Recently, Congress introduced a bill called the Beekeeping Act. If this bill passed and became a law, the government would give money to help the bees move away from the cities and towns.



Sally wants to talk with her U.S. Representative, Anne Smith, to ask her to support the Beekeeping Act.

Here is what Sally might say if she called Representative Smith's office on the phone:



Sally:

Hello, I would like to say something to Representative Smith about the Beekeeping Act.



Smith's staff member:

Okay, go ahead.



Sally:

Thank you. My name is Sally Jones, and I live at 123 Community Lane in Normaltown, CA. I'm calling to ask Representative Smith to support the Beekeeping Act. I care about this because lots of people in my town have been attacked by bees, and it is making us all afraid to go outside.

The Beekeeping Act would give the bees somewhere else to go so they would leave our town, and then we could all be safe again.



Staff member:

I will give your message to Representative Smith. Would you like her to send a response to you?



Sally:

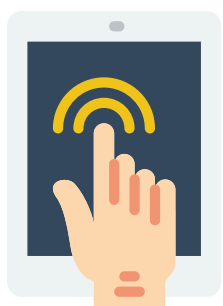
Yes. Thank you for your time, goodbye.



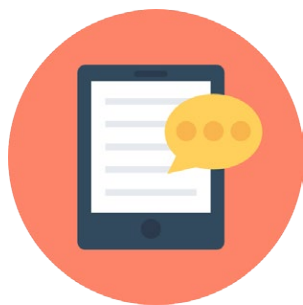
Staff member:

Thank you for your comments. Have a good day.

What if I can't talk on the phone?



You can use an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device, like an iPad, to type out what you want to say.



Then, use text-to-speech to have your text read out loud while you are on the phone.



It is important to say first that you are a person who is using AAC. If you don't say that first, they might hang up on you.



You don't have to wait for the staff member to respond to you if you want to have your whole comment read aloud at once.



If the staff member has questions for you after you make your speech, you can let them know you need some time to answer.

Example: Script for calling with an AAC device

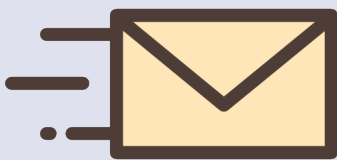
Here is a sample AAC script:



Hello, I am a real constituent who is using a text-to-speech device because of a disability. I would like to say something to **[elected official's name]** about **[issue]**. My name is **[your full name]**, and I live at **[full address]**.



I'm calling to ask **[elected official's name]** to support laws that **[fix the problem you are calling about - explain that here]**. I care about this because **[reason]**.



I **[would like/would not like]** a response from **[elected official's name]**. If you need more information, please let me know and give me a little time to type the answer. Thank you.



Another option for AAC users is to use the script for non-AAC phone calls to type out an answer for each part of the call, then hit each part in the right order to talk with the person on the phone.



You can also write out your script and have someone else read it for you over the phone. All they have to do is tell your elected official at the beginning of the call that they are speaking for you. They can say:

Hi, my name is **[their name]** and I am calling on behalf of **[your name]**. **[Your name]** can't use the phone because of a disability.



Some people are making local groups to volunteer to make calls for people who can't speak. Try checking social media to see if there is a group like this near you, or make one of your own!

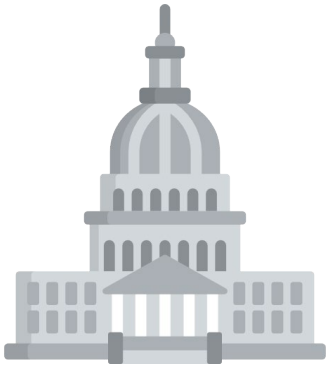


If talking on the phone makes you nervous, you can also call your elected official after their office is closed. Offices are usually closed after 5 p.m., or on the weekends.



If you call an office that is closed, you will get an answering machine to leave a message instead of having to talk to a person. Elected officials and their staff members do listen to phone messages, so this makes a difference.

Glossary



Congress

The part of the federal government that makes laws.



constituent

If you're a constituent of an elected official, that means that you live in the area that the elected official represents.



elected officials

Politicians that we elect to the government are our elected officials. Elected officials listen to the problems that people have. Then, they make laws to fix these problems.



Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.