



Tooth Talk Tips

Advocacy

CONTACTING YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

A little known fact among voters is that it often only takes personal contacts (phone call, visit, letter or email) from five constituents to change the vote of a member of the legislature. That is why it is imperative that you take time to share your expertise about the dental safety net in Virginia. To search for your Senator and Delegate go to: <http://conview.state.va.us/whosmy.nsf/main?openform>. This site will let you know who your state representatives are and provide you with their contact information.

WRITING A LETTER

A personal letter from a constituent is a very powerful advocacy tool. In general, an effective letter is limited to one page. Start and end your letter by stating why you are writing and what it is you would like your representative to do. This is often referred to as 'the ask.'

The tone of your letter should always be professional and courteous, even when you disagree with a member's position, or are expressing disappointment about an action they took. Always address your legislator correctly, for example: *Senator Jones* or *Delegate Smith*. Envelopes should be addressed to: *The Honorable Delegate Smith, Virginia House of Delegate*. If an advocacy organization has provided a template be certain to personalize the letter. If time permits, mail your letter. Otherwise, fax it.

SENDING AN EMAIL

Email is a quick, inexpensive way of communicating with legislators that is a good communication tool if you do not have time to send a personal letter.

CALLING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Calling your legislators is very effective, particularly in the days just before they are scheduled to take action or vote on your issue. To prepare for the conversation, jot down a few notes containing the key points you want to make, and refer to the notes during your call.

Unless you know the elected official, you will almost always speak with a staff person, and not the member directly. The staff member is trained to take a detailed message regarding your position.

FIVE KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- **Identify the issue.**
- **Cite a personal connection or describe its local impact.**
- **Use key facts to support your case.**
- **Make a specific ask.**
- **Say thank you and request follow-up.**