

Tips on Phoning a Member of Congress

When time is of the essence, a phone call can be a practical way to express your concern to an elected representative. To reach your Federal Representatives, call the Capitol Switchboard in Washington DC at (202) 244-3121. The operator will refer you to any U.S. Senator or U.S. Representative (Congressman/woman). To reach your California State Representatives, you can call the Assembly Chief Clerk for assistance in reaching any California Assembly member at (916) 445-3614 or the California Senate Secretary will provide phone numbers for any California State Senator at (916) 445-4251. Upon reaching your legislator on the phone, follow these basic steps:

- Telephone calls are often taken by a staff member and not the actual legislative member. Ask to speak with the aide who handles health issues. If they are not available, you can also leave a message. If you speak with someone other than your legislator, take down their name and title
- Introduce yourself and give your affiliation if you are working on behalf of a particular group, organization or campaign. Be sure to mention if you are a constituent.
- Explain why you are calling: "I am calling to support/oppose Assembly bill A:____/Senate bill S:____." Be polite and concise. Creating 1 or 2 talking points will focus the content of your message. Too much information may confuse your message. Ask your legislator his/her position on this issue. Don't assume that your legislator has prior knowledge of your issue. Be calm, respectful, and be prepared to educate, using local examples to accentuate your point.
- Request a written response to your phone call if you did not speak to your legislative member. If the legislator requires further information, provide it as soon as possible.
- Thank the person who took the phone call for their time and consideration.

Following Up Your Call

A follow-up letter is a perfect opportunity to restate your position and include additional materials, such as a position statement or relevant articles. Remember, don't assume a single communication will do the job of getting the legislator's vote. Maintaining contact with your legislators may make it easier for you to garner support for your issue.

Adapted (in part) from the Center for Reproductive Rights' Advocacy Guide