



Mass Audubon

Legislative Affairs

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATORS

Q: I don't know who my state representative and state senator are. How do I find out?

A: The best way is to call your city/town hall. In some municipalities, a representative or senator represents an entire town. In others, the district lines divide the town. In the latter case, the best way to determine your district is to contact your city/town hall for the ward or precinct information and who represents your area. You can also locate online the names and contact information of your state representative and state senator by visiting:

- <http://www.wheredoivotema.com/bal/myelectioninfo.php> (Note: look for "Rep. In General Court" and "Senate In General Court")
- <http://www.mass.gov/legis/>

Q: How do I contact my state representative or state senator?

A: Once you have identified your state representative and state senator, look up their contact information at www.mass.gov/legis/. The state legislature's website provides the mailing addresses, phone and fax numbers, and email addresses for your elected legislators. You may also call the general switchboards of the House of Representatives, (617) 722-2000, or the Senate, (617) 722-1455, and ask for your state representative or state senator.

Q: May I call my state representative or state senator at home?

A: Not unless you know him/her well enough to be sure of his/her attitude toward home calls.

Q: Does it really make a difference if I contact my legislator? Do calls, letters & emails influence votes?

A: Absolutely! We have observed numerous occasions where contacts to a legislator resulted in a change of vote or inspired him/her to take action. Even a small number of letters (5-6) indicates that there is a great deal of interest in a particular bill or issue. State legislators need to hear from their constituents in order to best determine how to manage finite public resources.

Q: Which is better: a call, letter, or email?

A: It depends on how much time and concern you have to reach your legislator. A handwritten or typed letter (mailed or faxed) is generally considered the optimal form of communication—as it denotes sincere interest in an issue. If the particular bill you are interested in is up for a vote within 2-3 days, a phone call can be most effective. We recommend that you follow up any phone communication with a letter, thanking the staff and legislator for their time and reiterating your position. Email has become more accepted over time at the State House, which is generally slow to absorb new technology. Standardized postcards or emails (prepared by interest groups or advocacy organizations for your signature) have very little impact in influencing public officials' decisions.

Q: What should I say when I call or write?

A: It is best to be brief (one-page). State your position on the issue. Identify your name and address. Include the bill number if you know it; if you don't know the bill number, be clear in explaining the nature of the issue. Explain why this is important to you personally and why s/he should support your view. Address how a piece of legislation would affect your community. Be sure to ask your legislator a question so you will get a response. For example: Will you vote for this bill? Will you be a sponsor of this legislation? Will you ask the Senate President or House Speaker to bring this bill up for a vote?

Q: Should I expect a response to my call or letter?

A: Yes. If you do not get a response or an answer to your questions you should call or write again. Be polite but explain that you would like your call or letter answered. A handwritten or typed letter will almost always generate a response letter from the legislator.

Q: What if my legislator disagrees with my position on an issue?

A: Be respectful and firm but never angry. Be brief. Ask the basis of his/her opposition. Provide evidence related to the points your legislator raises. If you find information refuting his/her points, follow up your conversation with a letter that includes the information.

Q: How do I go about setting up a meeting with my representative or senator?

A: Call his/her office and request a meeting. It is better if you have an issue to discuss and have a small group of concerned citizens attend a meeting. This shows the community interest and that you are not the only interested constituent.

The address of your representative or senator is:

The Honorable (your legislator's name)
State House
Boston, MA 02133

SAMPLE LETTER

Date

The Honorable (name)
State House
Boston, MA 02133

RE: **S. 2308**, *An Act Relative to Oceans*

Dear Senator (name),

I urge you to contact Senate President Travaglini and Senate Ways & Means Committee Chair Murray and ask them to release **S. 2308**, the *Massachusetts Ocean Act*, for a vote on the Senate floor now. The bill is presently before the Senate Committee on Ways & Means.

I am concerned about recent proposals for liquefied natural gas terminals, sand and gravel mining, desalination plants, gas pipelines, telecommunications cables, and wind energy facilities have raised numerous concerns among local, state, and federal agencies. The current approach to addressing these proposals on a reactive, ad hoc basis is inappropriate for Massachusetts.

The *Massachusetts Oceans Act* calls for the development and implementation of an ocean management plan that would govern development activities and foster environmentally sustainable uses in Massachusetts waters, while protecting valuable marine resources.

Guided by the best available scientific understanding of ocean resources and ecosystems, as provided through research, mapping, monitoring, and other data collection, state decision makers will be able to identify and capitalize on opportunities to encourage desirable development in locations that are well suited for it, while discouraging inappropriate and wasteful development that harms the marine ecosystem.

I urge you to support passage of the *Massachusetts Oceans Act* to strengthen the Commonwealth's authority to manage public trust resources in a proactive manner.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
(your name)

Mass Audubon's Beacon Hill Legislative Affairs Office would be happy to assist you with any questions. Call us at (617) 523-8448 or email at beaconhill@massaudubon.org.