



Speak Up!

Legislative Affairs

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Identify a Legislative Contact in Your Office

Either you or one of your senior staff should be the identified legislative contact in your office. That means you follow national legislation and respond as needed. Legislative advocacy often requires fast response. The contact person must be able to drop what he/she is doing and respond to the legislative concern immediately.

Establish a Phone Tree

In order to respond to fast-breaking developments, it is necessary to establish a phone tree in your state. Your office can take the lead and identify contacts in other organizations who can call members of Congress. Have them identify contacts in still other organizations who can make the call.

Review Federal and State Lobbying Rules

Federal lobbying rules are explained elsewhere in this notebook. It is important that you review them and understand when you can and cannot lobby.

State lobbying rules may be more restrictive than the federal ones. Check with the Attorney General, the Governor's chief of staff, or the legislative liaison in your agency to find out more about state rules. Remember, if you are unsure, ASK!

Stay Abreast of Developments

Keep apprised of current legislation by reading what the Washington office sends you, compare your information with that of other affected agencies or organizations in your state, and follow the status of legislation on the Internet. Useful internet sites include:

- GHSA www.ghsa.org
- House of Representatives www.house.gov
- Senate www.senate.gov
- Library of Congress www.loc.gov (click on "Thomas")
- Government Printing Office www.access.gpo.gov
(click on "access to Government information products")
- Federal Highway Administration www.fhwa.dot.gov
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration www.nhtsa.dot.gov
- CSpan www.cspan.org

GHSA's web site includes descriptions of federal grant programs, summary tables of state laws, funding charts, press releases, reports, etc.

The Library of Congress web site provides a status of bills in the current and previous sessions of Congress, bill texts, and bill summaries. The data bases are searchable by bill number, bill sponsor or key words. The GPO web site provides access to the U.S. Code, Federal Register, the Code of Federal Regulations and other government publications.



The House and Senate sites also provide summaries of House and Senate floor actions as well as access to the daily Congressional Record and the Daily Digest of legislative action. Each Congressional committee has its own web site that can be accessed through the House and Senate sites.

FHWA's site includes extensive information about surface transportation reauthorization for all of U.S. Department of Transportation. CSpan provides live coverage of House and Senate floor action and selected committee proceedings.

Or, you can contact Congress directly and find out what's happening in committees or on the floor. A list of important telephone numbers is elsewhere in this kit.

Understand Federal Legislative Processes

Unlike most states, Congress authorizes new programs and then appropriates funds for those programs under two separate and distinct legislative processes. It's important to understand the difference between the authorization and appropriations processes when discussing legislation with members of Congress or their staff.

It's also important to know who's on the authorizing committees that have jurisdiction over highway safety issues and who is on the appropriations committees. It would be a major faux pas to raise a concern about an appropriations issue with an authorizer or vice versa. Your first target of opportunity should be the member of Congress from your state who serves on one of the key committees.

A description of the basic steps Congress takes to enact legislation elsewhere in this handbook. Detailed descriptions of Congressional legislative processes can be found online at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov. Current committee lists are also shown elsewhere in this notebook.

Stick to the Five Commandments of Lobbying*

Once you have familiarized yourself with lobbying rules, legislative processes, and committee memberships, you are ready to be an advocate. All advocacy with Congress, no matter what the subject, should be governed by five simple and common sense rules:

1. Tell the truth.
2. Never promise more than you can deliver.
3. Know how to listen so that you can accurately understand what you are hearing.
4. Work with Congressional staff, don't circumvent.
5. Spring no surprises.

* From [Lobbying Congress: How the System Works](#), Bruce Wolpe and Bertram Levine, 1996.

Another great resource is The [Citizen's Guide to Lobbying Congress](#), Donald E. deKieffer, 1997. It describes, in greater detail, the best way to influence Congress.



Phoning can be an effective way to reach legislators, particularly when a bill is quickly moving through the legislative process and you need to let him/her know where you stand on issues.

Be Prepared

Don't call a legislator without doing your homework, organizing your thoughts and materials for the call and honing your message. Marshall a few key facts and figures that will help you state your case and be prepared to present them. Anticipate the arguments and be prepared to address them.

Call the Congressional Office

Your phone calls should be targeted to members of the key committees (listed elsewhere in this handbook.) If you don't have a member on one of the committees, start with members of your state's Congressional delegation. A legislator is more likely to listen to a constituent than to someone else.

If you don't know the phone number for your Senator, contact the Senate switchboard (202/224-3121). For the House switchboard, call 202/225-3121. The operators will connect you directly to the member's office.

Ask to speak to the Representative or Senator. If he or she is unavailable, ask to speak to chief of staff, legislative director or the staff who handles transportation matters. Identify yourself, explain your position in the state and your affiliation with GHSA. Briefly explain what GHSA is.

If the member or staff is unavailable, leave a brief message such as "Please tell Senator/ Representative (name) to support/oppose _____ (e.g. primary belt laws, graduated licensing laws, funds for data improvements)."

Be Specific

Identify the issue (e.g., reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU) that you want to discuss. State what you want the Senator or Representative to do (e.g. support the increased funding for the data improvement program, simplification of grant administration, more funding for research, etc.). Keep your request simple and don't ask the legislator to do too many things.

Make Your Case

Succinctly explain your position (that is, why should the legislator do what you want him/her to do). Support your position with facts and information about how the issue affects your state.

Respect Differences of Opinion

Ask for your Senator's or Representative's position on an issue or bill. If appropriate, request a written response to the telephone call. If his/her position is different than yours, recognize that there are legitimate differences of opinion and don't take a negative position personally. Never indulge in threats or recrimination.

Close the Call

Thank the legislator or staff for his/her time. Offer to serve as a resource for the staff on highway safety issues. Following the call and if time permits, send an email or letter thanking the legislator.



If you are unable to have a face-to-face meeting with a member of Congress, then writing a letter may be the next best thing. It can be an effective way to get your message across.

Be Brief and Succinct

Keep your letter to a page and a half. When writing your letter, use the “inverted pyramid” approach favored by journalists. Put the most important point – the action that you want the legislator to take – in the very first paragraph. Then explain and justify your request in the body of the letter, starting with most important argument or concern to your least important at the end of the letter. If the letter refers to a specific piece of legislation, reference the bill number or name.

Remember, the members and staff who read the letters have many competing demands on their time and can’t afford to wade through voluminous communications from your office. A logical, well-written letter with a clear message will have an impact.

Make Your Case

Clearly articulate your issue and what you are requesting (e.g., support for an amendment, opposition to a proposed idea or proposal, etc.) Don’t ask for too many things in one letter. Use a few important facts or examples to support your position but don’t attempt to write a research report or a scholarly journal article on an issue. Show how the provision will affect the issue, program or the people in the district.

Personalize Your Letter

Personalize your letter by interjecting state-specific examples or concerns. Personal letters will receive far more attention than form letters, faxes, standardized emails or postcards. They show the member of Congress that you are knowledgeable about the issue as well as about the political process.

Address Letters Properly

Be sure and spell the legislator’s name correctly! Address correspondence as follows:

To a Senator

The Honorable (full name)
Room number, xxx Senate
Office Bldg .
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator:

To a Representative

The Honorable (full name)
Room number, xxxx House
Office Bldg .
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representative:

When writing to the Chair of a Committee or Subcommittee, it is proper to address him/her as Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman.

Include Contact Information

Don’t forget to include your return address and the name, office and home phone numbers, fax and email information of a contact person in your office where the member or staff can get detailed information.



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Organize Coalition Letters

Contact like-minded organizations and convince them to send a joint letter on an issue or concern. Coalition letters have a bigger impact than letters from an individual or single organization. If an organization has a policy against co-signing a joint letter, then encourage that organization to send its own letter on the issue. Many individual letters can sometimes be just as effective as a joint letter as long as the individual letters have been personalized and are not simply form letters.

Follow Up

Send a thank-you letter if the legislator takes the action you recommend. This will help you gain favor and develop a personal relationship with the legislator.

Send Emails

Sending an email can be an effective way to communicate with members of Congress quickly. Since 9/11, letters to Congress have to go through a security screening which can add days or weeks to delivery. If a timely response is needed, an email is a good way to proceed. The same guidelines apply to email communications as with writing letters. Succinctness is even more important in an email. Use the subject line to reference the bill number and make sure that the email has your contact information in it.

To send an email to a Senator, go to www.senate.gov, click on "Senators", scroll down the list until you find yours and click on his/her name. To email to a Representative, go to www.house.gov, look on the list of representatives and click on the member's web site to find his/her email address. Alternatively, use the "write a letter" feature that will allow you to compose a letter and email your member directly from the House web site.

The most effective way to influence legislation is through face-to-face visits with members of Congress. Such meetings require organization and preparation. In addition to affecting a particular piece of legislation, the goal of a visit to Congress is to develop a positive relationship with the legislator.

Target Your Congressional Visits

Visit those members of Congress who are on key committees and whose vote will make a difference. Committee lists are shown elsewhere in this handbook. If you are concerned about a funding issue, target the appropriations committees. If you are concerned about authorizing legislation, then target members of the three authorizing committees that have jurisdiction over highway safety issues. If you don't have a member on either an authorizing or appropriations committee, then target members of your state delegation, particularly those who are interested in transportation or have contacted your office.

Request an Appointment

Call ahead and request an appointment with the member of Congress. Phone numbers of every member of Congress are listed in this kit. Or you can call the Senate switchboard at 202-224-3121 or the House switchboard at 202-225-3121 and ask to be connected to the member's office. Give at least two weeks lead time for a meeting with a member. Call and confirm the appointment a week before and again on the day of the appointment.

Members of Congress are typically in Washington DC Tuesday –Thursday or Friday morning. Appointments can also be arranged at the member's district office. There are periodic week long district work periods, usually scheduled around holidays.

If you are setting up a meeting with a member, assume that your appointment will be very brief (15-20 minutes). Explain (in a very succinct manner) your purpose and who you represent. It is easier for the appointment staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the member.

Staff Level Meetings

If he or she is not available, ask to meet with the chief of staff, legislative director or the staff who handles transportation matters for the Representative or Senator. Members of Congress rely very heavily on their staff. Staff decides what information is given to the member. The staff makes a recommendation to the member about what position to take on each issue. Unless it is a very controversial issue which requires "member to member" decisions, the member usually will support the staff recommendations.

Oftentimes, the staff is more informed about a highway safety issue than a member is and can be very influential on a key vote. Meetings with staff can be more substantive than meetings with a member, so staff-level meetings should not be discounted.

Congressional staff is typically young, relatively inexperienced, overworked and underpaid. They have to juggle multiple responsibilities. They rely heavily on organizations and individuals who explain issues clearly and provide factual information that can help them and their principals make informed decisions. In effect, they depend upon interest groups to inform them about how things work in the real world.

Be Prepared

Don't visit a legislator without doing your homework and carefully planning the visit. Research the factual and philosophical justifications for your position. Organize your



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thoughts and materials for the meeting ahead of time and be clear about what you hope to achieve. Develop talking points, including one or two specific requests (the “asks”), and then practice delivering them.

Most members lack details about particular positions or issues. It can be helpful to share information and examples that clearly demonstrate the impact of a pending decision or current law or the benefits/shortcomings of a particular position or piece of legislation.

Find out as much as possible about your opponents. Anticipate possible arguments against your position and be prepared to address them. Know who will be positively impacted by your position, enlist their support and present it at the meeting.

Assemble Materials

Assemble written materials about your position to leave behind. Keep them brief (ideally, a page or two) and to the point. Put the most important one (e.g., one page position summary, fact sheets, etc.) on top and supplementary materials underneath. The least important written materials should go on the bottom. Don't give the member or staff pages of press clips, research reports, state plans, etc. They will not have time to review quantities of materials.

Know Your Audience

Be sure you know how long the member has been in office, what district he/she represents and on what committees he/she serves. Put yourself in the public official's place. Try to understand his/her outlook, problems and politics. Check the member's website for biographical information that can help you make a personal connection with the member. Personal information can help make a meeting a more memorable one and can be a building block for developing a personal relationship with the member.

Be Prompt, Patient and Polite

When it is time to meet with the legislator, be punctual and patient. It is not uncommon for a member to be late or to have meetings interrupted by votes or important phone calls. If interruptions do occur, be courteous and flexible and most importantly, don't show anger or irritation. When the opportunity presents itself, continue the meeting with the member or his/her staff.

Identify Yourself

Start the meeting by thanking the member or staff for meeting with you. Identify yourself, explain your relationship with the governor, and where your office sits in the state bureaucracy. Indicate that you are a member of GHSA and briefly describe what GHSA is. Use your personal connection if there is one but don't let small talk overwhelm the meeting.

Make the Case

Be brief and to the point. Explain the issue or bill you want to discuss and clearly state what you want the member to do. Discuss how the issue or bill will affect the people and programs in the state or the member's district. Use state-specific examples wherever possible. Demonstrate the connection between your position and the interests of the member's constituency. Marshal the facts to support your case. As noted previously, public officials face strict time constraints and will appreciate concise, well-organized presentations.



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Ask the member what his/her position is on the issue or, if the situation warrants, ask for a commitment from the member. For example, a member might support or oppose a bill or specific legislative provision, sponsor legislation, or organize other members to support your position. Don't ask for too many things or give too many messages at once.

Give the legislator or staff a chance to respond to the information you have presented. Ask what is needed to get the member to support your position. If the member or staff is non-committal, set a time for a follow up meeting or a time when you can make a follow up phone call.

Above all, stay on message and avoid getting sidetracked. Your time is very limited, so you have to make the most of it.

Don't Make Promises You Can't Keep

Don't commit to a member that you'll do anything unless you are positive you can deliver. (For example, don't promise that your state will enact a particular piece of safety legislation unless you are completely certain that action will occur.) Your credibility is your primary "commodity." If you lose it by being unprepared or by breaking your word, you can rarely regain it.

Be Responsive

Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information in the event the member expresses interest or ask questions. Don't be afraid to say you don't know if a question is asked on which you have no information. If possible, describe how you and your office can be of assistance to the member.

Respect Differences of Opinion

Keep the communication positive. Recognize that there are legitimate differences of opinion and don't take a negative position personally. Never indulge in threats or recrimination. Always respond with politeness even if the member or staff is rude or uncooperative. Offer to work with the member on other issues in which there is mutual agreement.

Close the Meeting

Thank the legislator or staff for holding the meeting. Let him/her know where you can be reached for further information and be sure and get business cards of any staff present. Offer to help with future highway safety issues that may arise. If you have prepared brief materials, don't forget to leave them behind.

Follow Up

Send a note following the meeting outlining the different points that were covered. Send along written responses to questions and additional materials or information if requested. If deadlines were set during the meeting, make sure you meet those deadlines. Most importantly, send a thank you if the legislator takes the action that you recommend.

Don't forget to fill out the GHSA Congressional contact form and send it to the Washington office.



Don't contact a public official only when you want his/her help and you are the most vulnerable. Educate the member about your programs and concerns throughout the year. Remember, if a state highway safety issue is important enough to warrant a state or local press announcement, then it is important enough for a briefing for or notice to Congressional members and staff in Washington DC.

A number of things can be undertaken throughout the year to develop a strong working relationship with members of Congress and their staff:

- Develop a brief fact sheet about the state's highway safety program and send it to your Congressional delegation.
- Hold a briefing for members of Congress and their staff and review the state's Highway Safety Plan, goals, progress, and barriers to achieving the goals.
- Include members of Congress on your newsletter mailing list
- Invite a member of Congress to be a participant at the annual state highway safety conference, regional meetings, press conferences, commission meetings, or other events
- Arrange for a drive-along of a federally-funded law enforcement activity or tour of a federally-funded community project with a member of Congress or his/her staff.
- Send the member press releases (particularly when grant awards are made), Annual Evaluation Reports, summaries of research funded by the state and other relevant information
- Develop a list of projects, disaggregated by Congressional district, and then send the member information about the projects in his/her district.
- Convene a policy briefing or workshop on a highway safety topic and then invite the public official to attend and/or make a presentation.
- Make a courtesy call to a member when you are in Washington on other business.
- Make a point of meeting with the district staff to let them know who you are and what your office does.
- When a new member of Congress is elected, send him/her a letter of congratulations in which you introduce yourself and explain what your office does.
- Develop a year-long highway safety calendar and send it with a personal note to a member and his/her staff.
- Develop a relationship with the Washington office of your governor and familiarize the office director or transportation staff with your issues and programs. Have the governor's Washington office represent your interests with Congress. A list of Washington representatives is shown elsewhere in this kit.

Personal relationships are invaluable when you want an audience with a member in order to gain his/her support for an issue of importance to your office. Communicating with federal (and state) legislators should be a **standard function of the State Highway Safety Office**.

Understanding Congressional processes and staying abreast of developments is another key ingredient to developing an effective relationship with a member of Congress. GHSA's Washington office, its website and the websites listed elsewhere in this handbook can help keep you informed. If you need an immediate answer, don't hesitate to call the Washington office at 202-789-0942.

CONGRESSIONAL CONTACT FORM



please type or print

1. Date of visit or written communication

2. Name of member or staff contacted

3. Issues discussed

4. Outcome of contact

5. Needed follow up

6. Other comments

Mail, fax or email to:

444 N. Capitol St. NW
Suite 722
Washington DC 20001

fax 202/789-0946

headquarters@ghsa.org

Name

State

SAMPLE LETTER #1



Honorable _____
_____ House/Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20515/20510

Dear _____:

The (state highway safety office) urges the House/Senate (authorizing committee) to support a \$25-35 million a year speed management incentive grant fund as part of the next reauthorization of federal highway safety grant programs.

Speeding is a factor in an estimated one-third of all crashes – a figure that has remained unchanged over the last decade. Speeding costs society an estimated \$40 billion annually. Speeding is a problem on all road types and for all types of vehicles. The lack of progress on speeding-related fatalities has offset the gains that have been made on impaired driving and occupant protection. Currently, there are no federal grant funds focused specifically on helping states reduce speeding.

Small reductions in speed can have a large impact on crashes, injuries and fatalities. According to a 1996 study published by the Transportation Research Board, a 1% decrease in travel speed reduces injury crashes by about 2%, serious injury crashes by about 3%, and fatal crashes by about 4%.

Reducing speeds can also save energy. According to the Department of Energy, aggressive driving (speeding, rapid acceleration and braking) can lower gas mileage by 33% at highway speeds and 5% around town. The agency estimates that, as a rule of thumb, drivers can assume that each 5 mph they drive above 60 mph is like paying an additional \$0.20 per gallon for gas

We urge the Committee to give states the resources they need to address a critical factor that contributes to motor vehicle crashes. It's time to stop ignoring this problem and take a proactive stand to reduce speeding in this country.

Sincerely,

SAMPLE LETTER #2



Honorable _____
_____ House/Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20515/20510

Dear _____:

The (state highway safety office) urges the House/Senate to enact a multi-year reauthorization bill as quickly as possible. Without a bill, highway safety activities in (state) will virtually come to a standstill.

(State) has had to rely on carryover federal funding to keep highway safety activities going at the state and community level. Like most states, we are making adjustments in order to cope with the lack of new funding. (Give examples.)

If Congress does not quickly reauthorize federal behavioral safety grant programs, the (state highway safety office) will only have enough funding to keep safety programs going for (weeks, months). We would not be able to fund enforcement of state safety laws, training, equipment purchases for law enforcement, or new paid media or public information campaigns on safety issues. (State) would lose expertise at the state and community level which has taken years to develop. We would not be able to reach the impaired driving, occupant protection and child restraint goals set by this Administration. (Give other state-specific examples here.) (state) would experience a significant reversal in the effort to reduce impaired driving and to increase the use of safety belts and child restraints.

We urge Congress to enact a multi-year reauthorization bill as quickly as possible. Without one, our state highway safety program would receive a devastating blow from which it would take years to recover.

Sincerely,

SAMPLE LETTER #3



Honorable _____
_____ House/Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20515/20510

Dear _____:

The (state highway safety office) urges the House/Senate urges you to oppose XXXX sanction/ transfer penalties when the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) is reauthorized.

Currently, there are eighteen sanctions, seven of which are highway safety-related. New sanctions would add to the perception that the federal government is coercing the state to act and would increase state resentment. When states are compelled to enact specific legislation, they typically enact the weakest version of the mandatory legislation at the last minute and then fund little or no enforcement of the new legislation.

Further (state) believes that sanctions are too broad and not targeted, do not link the safety problem to an appropriate safety-related policy solution, and can be counterproductive. If there is not strong public support for the sanction, then it may be largely ineffective, as was the case with the sanctions relating to the National Maximum Speed Limit and the mandatory motorcycle helmet legislation. Both requirements were later repealed by Congress.

(State highway safety office) strongly believes that incentives are the best way to influence state and local behavior. Experience with the Section 410 impaired driving incentive grant program indicates that incentives have been successful. If the Congress wants to positively influence state and local behavior, then it should create incentive programs and fund them at a significant level (e.g. a level equal to or greater than the amount of funding that would have been sanctioned).

(state) urges Congress to encourage states through incentives that bring federal, state and local governments together toward a common safety goal.

Sincerely,



OREGON V. NATION 2006-2007

	OREGON			NATION		
	2006	2007	% Change	2006	2007	% Change
Fatalities	478	456	-4.6%	42,708	41,059	-3.90%
VMT (billions)	35.5	34.8	-2.1%	3,014	2,996	-0.59%
Fatality Rate (100m VMT*)	1.35	1.31	-2.6%	1.42	1.37	-3.52%
<i>* VMT means Vehicle Miles Traveled</i>						
Occupants Killed	413	384	-7.0%	32,119	30,401	-5.34%
Non-occupants* Killed	62	65	4.8%	5,752	5,504	-4.31%
<i>*Non-occupants are bicyclists, pedestrians and unknowns</i>						
Alcohol-Related Fatalities	179	179	0.0%	13,470	12,998	-3.50%
Alc.-Related (% of Total)	37.4%	39.3%	5.1%	31.50%	31.66%	0.51%
Alc. Fatality Rate (100m VMT)	0.50	0.52	4.0%	0.45%	0.44%	-2.22%
Fatalities from Crashes Involving Large Trucks	63	52	-17.5%	4,732	4,808	1.60%
Pedestrian Fatalities	48	50	4.2%	4,795	4,654	-2.94%
MC Fatalities Under Age 40	14	20	42.9%	2,529	2,612	3.28%
MC Fatalities Age 40 and Older	30	31	3.3%	2,281	2,542	11.44%
Total Motorcycle Fatalities	44	51	15.9%	4,810	5,154	7.15%

Sources: Oregon Department of Transportation, FARS

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER



4

Date _____

The Honorable _____
(Room number) _____ House (Senate) Office Building
Washington DC 20515 (20510)

Dear Representative/Senator _____:

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you (your staff member _____) on _____ regarding (the reauthorization of federal highway safety grant programs, opposition to a program, support for a program).

As I indicated in our meeting, (reiterate position here and give brief explanation).

With respect to _____ questions raised during our meeting, the following information has been provided. (Submit written responses to questions you couldn't answer during the meeting.)

As we discussed, you (your staff) agreed to (indicate position or commitments made.)

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to have discussed these issues with you (your staff). Should your staff need further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to have him/her contact me at _____. Thank you.

Sincerely,