

Becoming Your Best Advocate: *How to Reach Out to Legislators*

Once we understand the issues that impact Louisiana's retired teachers, we need to reach out to lawmakers who can make a difference in resolving these issues. Why should you reach out to your legislators?

Ultimately, legislators represent YOU and want to hear from YOU. LRTA represents nearly 20,000 members, and we bring those 20,000 voices together to present a strong, unified voice at the legislature. But, legislators also need to hear from their individual constituents about why it is important that they vote "yes" or "no" on a bill. They need to understand the impact their decision will have and hear your experiences as a teacher and retiree so they can make the appropriate decision.

There are a few ways to contact your Representatives and Senators in the Louisiana legislature and U.S. Congress.

Handwritten letters or emails

Emails are a quick and efficient way to reach out to your legislators. Emails are practically instant, so legislators will receive your email the same day (versus waiting possible 1-2 days for the mail). However, do not underestimate the power of a hand-written letter. Letters still have a significant impact. The more pieces of mail they receive, the more important the issue becomes. The letters become a visual representation of who and how many people their decisions affect.

5 Steps

1. To begin your letter or email, properly and respectfully address the legislator. For example: "Dear Representative Smith," or "Greetings Senator Doe."
2. Include a little information about yourself to make a personal connection with the legislator. For example: "I taught in ABC Parish for 32 years," or "I grew up and taught kindergarten in XYZ Parish."
3. Specifically ask them to take action - this should be a direct, brief statement. Make sure to include the bill number and author. For example: "I am writing to ask you to oppose HB 000 by Rep. John Doe."
4. Explain why you want them to take this action. Use research to back up your argument. You can find the latest research and articles at lrta.net/articles.
5. Before you end your letter, make sure to reiterate what action you would like for them to take and thank them for their time and consideration of the matter.

Extra Tips!

- Know your facts. Research and statistics will make your argument stronger and your conversation worthwhile.
- Keep it concise. The conversation can be brief (and may need to be). As you near the end of the conversation, thank the legislator for taking the time to listen and speak with you. Leave contact information for them to follow up with you.
- Know when to fold 'em. If you are having a phone or in-person conversation and can sense the conversation is starting to get hostile, wrap it up, and try to end on a polite note.
- Effective communication is a two-way street. When we want legislators to take action, we need to let them know. When they take the desired action, make sure to take some time to thank them (via email, letter, phone, etc.)!
- When we come together as a unified voice, we make a strong impact. Taking an action like writing a letter or email can make a huge difference. LRTA is here to provide you with the resources to understand the retirement bills your legislators are looking at and the knowledge to reach out to them.

Phone Calls

Sometimes it is easier to pick up the phone and speak to a live person about the issues. While you probably will not get to speak with your legislator directly, you should be able to speak to their legislative assistants or staff. Even if you have to leave a voice message on the machine, hearing your stance on the issues may resonate more with a legislator who is on the fence.

5 Steps

1. When the staffer picks up the phone, politely say hello and introduce yourself as a constituent.
2. Briefly explain that you are calling regarding a specific issue or bill and ask if you can speak to someone about the issue. If the staff member or legislator is unavailable, ask to leave them a message.
3. Clearly state what position you would like for them to take (support, oppose, etc.) and provide background information as to why. The legislators may be unfamiliar with the issue and will need to understand why they should take the position you are asking of them.
4. Be prepared with articles and research if you need to rebut their argument or back up your position. Offer to send them the research you are citing.
5. As the conversation closes, thank the legislator or staff member for their time and consideration. If you had to leave a message, be sure to include a good call back number or how someone can follow up with you.

VoterVoice

In 2021, LRTA implemented VoterVoice, a grassroots advocacy software system, to make responding to calls to action easier for members. The VoterVoice tool automatically matches you with your legislators and allows you to send a message directly to them with a click of a button. VoterVoice is a fast and convenient tool to help you contact multiple legislators at a time (if needed for the call to action). LRTA even includes a prepared message for the action we need legislators to take. Although, we highly encourage members to take a little extra time to personalize the message.

5 Steps

1. LRTA will send direct links to the VoterVoice tool in our Action Alert Email Blasts. You can also access the VoterVoice tool and see our active campaigns on our website, www.lрта.net/advocacycenter.
2. After you click on the link in the Email Blast, you will access the VoterVoice tool. Scroll to the bottom of the page until you see “Enter Profile” or “Review Profile.”
3. If the fields are blank, input your information so the VoterVoice tool can match you to your representative or senator. If the fields are pre-filled, double-check that the information is correct.
4. Once you input or confirm your information, scroll back up to the top of the page to review the “Message Body.” Here you can include a personal message or story.
5. Once you are satisfied with your message, just press the “Send Message” button at the bottom.