



Legislative Advocacy 101



Advocacy Handbook

For Ohio's \$53 Billion Travel Economy

Contents

Ohiotravel.org Advocacy Resources	2
Why Get Involved?.....	3
Are Constituents Really That Important?	3
Demystifying Elected Officials.....	4
Who Does What?	5
How Laws are Made.....	8
From an Idea to a Law.....	8
Reading a Bill.....	11
Tips for Contacting Elected Officials	13
Most Effective Ways to Communicate	13
Phone Calls.....	14
In-Person Meetings.....	15
Social Media.....	17
Letters	19
Testimonies.....	22
Maintaining your relationship with your elected official	24
Back-of-House Visits	25

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world,”

Mahatma Gandhi

You can create change.

Your opinions matter.

Your voice is needed.

Throughout history, individuals have changed the course of the future. Without individuals working through their local representatives, Mothers Against Drunk Driving wouldn't have convinced dozens of states to toughen up drunk driving laws, women wouldn't have the ability to vote, and child support laws would be inadequate.

We have great access to government through technology and social media. At the same time, influence of special interest groups continues. Add this to the complexity and frequency of issues that are firing up the American public, and you can see how we need to break through the clutter to be heard and understood.

Once voice can make a difference, but that voice is magnified when joined by similar voices, such as those provided by the Ohio Travel Association (OTA) and its partner organizations. Organizations such as OTA, however, can't do it alone. We need grassroots action and involvement. It takes both – individual action and collective strategy.

We've developed this updated guidebook to ensure your opinions are heard by lawmakers. Additional resources are available at ohiotravel.org.

Ohiotravel.org Advocacy Resources

After logging in with your member ID and password, visit Advocacy on the top navigation bar. The following resources are available:

Creating Change in Ohio – An overview of recent successes, as well as a link to the Ohio Tourism Works information showing the economic value of travel to the state and local communities

Current Issues – Summaries of recent issues, including research, action taken and links for additional information

Tips and Tools – A series of articles for communicating with your legislator, as well as links for finding elected officials in your district

Legislative Day – Information and registration links (if applicable) for unified advocacy events at the Ohio Statehouse.

Why Get Involved?

Budget proposals, bills, taxes and other decisions can seriously harm Ohio's travel economy. Lawmakers have many decisions to make, and they are influenced by a number of special interest groups. You need to make sure travel-related impacts of policy decisions are known before votes are taken.

Recent issues where this industry has had a say include the following:

- TourismOhio funding levels and development of a new funding model
- School start dates in Ohio
- Funding program for securing sporting events
- Cuts to the J-1 Summer Work Travel Program
- Introduction of a township admissions tax
- Development of a statewide trails plan

Despite what you may believe, lawmakers are eager to get to know you, as you are a constituent (aka voter) in his or her district. If you work at an attraction, retail shop, DMO, hotel, restaurant, rental car company, airport, etc. you are a travel economy expert in your community – that means you have information lawmakers need to make informed decisions. You know what's happening in the trenches. You know whether business profit margins are expanding or decreasing. You know the employment issues.

Your goal is to become a resource for elected officials – someone they can call or email when they need accurate information, feedback from the business community, or information on potential consequences of pending legislation. This means you need to develop relationships with these officials way before you contact them with a specific “ask” in mind.

Are Constituents Really That Important?

As someone who votes in your elected officials' districts, you carry a lot of weight. The following stats show just how impactful your involvement can be in creating law:

- **94% of elected officials say if they haven't arrived at a firm decision yet regarding an issue, they are most influenced when constituents visit** (Source: Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement, 2017, Congressional Management Foundation)
- **78% said social media posts directed to their office from constituents can influence decisions if undecided** (Source: #SocialCongress, 2015, Congressional Management Foundation)
- **95% say meetings with constituents are important for developing new ideas for legislation** (Source: Communicating with Congress, 2013, Congressional Management Foundation)

Demystifying Elected Officials

Legislators are folks like you and me. Some own businesses in your community. Others served as township trustees or county commissioners before winning a state or federal seat. They are mothers, fathers, grandparents, neighbors, cousins or siblings.

They were; however, inspired to serve your community. And, even more importantly, they were able to share their visions and promises with local constituents effectively enough to be elected to serve. So, as you communicate with local trustees, commissioners and business folks, remember that they too could one day represent your region in Columbus or Washington. Start educating them now about the importance of tourism in your community and to the State of Ohio.

Who Does What?

Various entities impact travel and tourism in Ohio. Some of these are government agencies, while others are industry-driven and represent those of us who operate businesses and organizations who rely on travel and hospitality in the state. All have roles to play and must communicate and collaborate.

Federal and state governments function similarly, but for simplicity, we are focused here on state functions.

Citizens of Ohio

First, recognize that we, the people, elect officials to represent us. **Our elected officials and public figures are working for us, not the other way around.**

You. As a business owner, manager or employee in the travel industry, you must keep legislators informed of business trends, as well as impacts of taxes and policies on your business and tourism in your community. You may learn of issues needing addressed through newsletters, telephone calls, regional meetings or workshops. Your role will be to carry this information to your legislators with a 'local' edge. Research shows that legislators place the most significance on comments brought to them by constituents.

Ohio Travel Association is a trade association representing all sectors of the industry – hotels, attractions, museums, ferryboats, visitors bureaus, retailers, etc. It is a nonprofit organization and does not receive public funding. Because it does not receive public funding, this organization is free to advocate for industry interests. Leadership is structured through a 25-member board that is elected by the membership. The organization tackles statewide issues of concern to all. Working through its members and partners (see below), the Ohio Travel Association is prepared to provide thought leadership, communications and messaging, industry strategy, case studies, policy recommendations and testimony related to priorities of our partner organizations when a voice about a policy's impact on travel is needed. OTA also produces the state tourism conference, as well as educational workshops and trainings, facilitates community and regional planning for tourism; and produces the Heartland Travel Showcase group travel marketplace.

Ohio Sector Specific Trade Associations, such as the Ohio Hotel and Lodging Association, Ohio Association for Convention and Visitors Bureaus, Ohio Craft Brewers Association, Ohio Wine Producers, Ohio Campground Owners Association, Ohio Museums Association, etc. are important partners as they represent the interests of specific sectors of the industry.

Ohio Tourism Roundtable is a collaboration of the Ohio Travel Association, Ohio Hotel & lodging Association and the Ohio Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus. It was established to facilitate the communication and cooperation among tourism and hospitality organizations in Ohio.

Ohio Travel Coalition represents the sector-specific trade associations mentioned above to encourage unity and collaboration. The Ohio Travel Association launched these quarterly gatherings in 2023.

Three Branches of Government

Our founding fathers set up three branches of government to make sure there were checks and balances so one branch didn't gain autonomy and more power than the others.

Legislative Branch

These are our elected officials in the Ohio House and Senate. There are 33 Ohio Senators, each representing the concerns of approximately 349,000 constituents. There are 99 Ohio House Representatives, each representing approximately 110,000 constituents. Collectively, the House and the Senate are known as the Ohio General Assembly.

Judicial Branch

The primary function of the judicial branch is to fairly and impartially settle disputes according to the law. To do this, a number of courts have been established in the state by the Constitution and by acts of the General Assembly.

Executive Branch

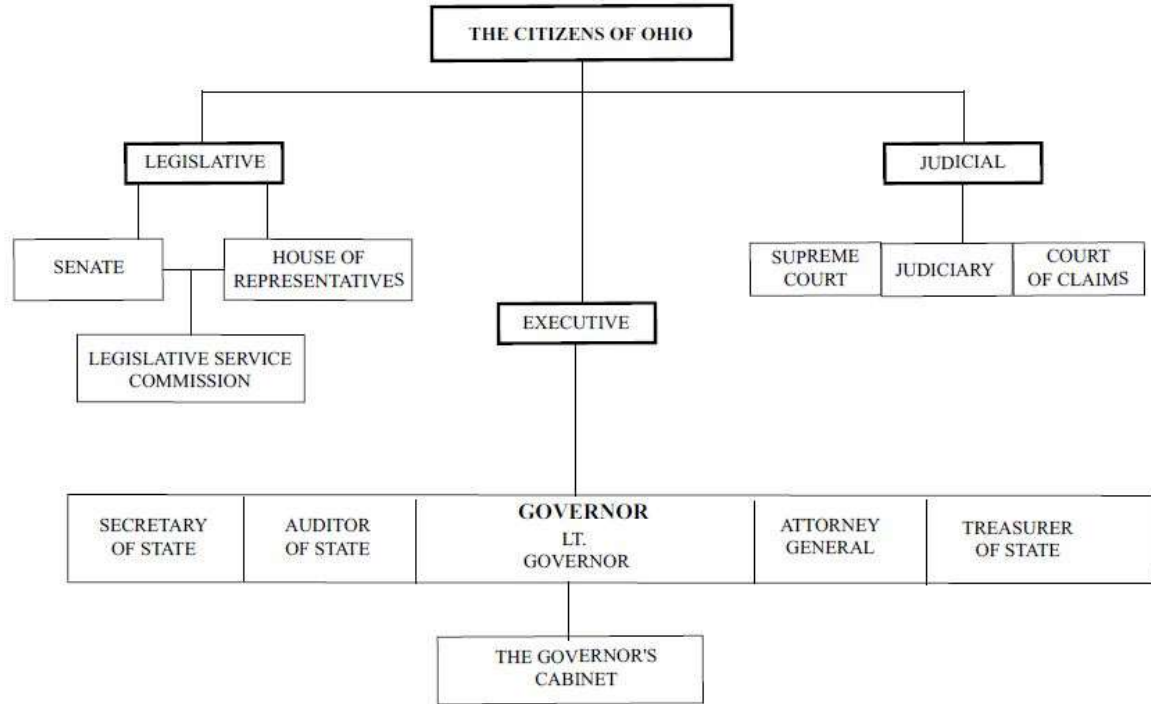
This branch of government is in place to make sure the laws established by the Ohio General Assembly and others are being followed or implemented. This where the governor and his or her cabinet resides. Cabinet members are heads of various agencies such as Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Development Services Agency, EPA, Department of Health, Transportation, Agriculture, etc.

There are legal limitations on interactions state agencies have with the legislative branch.

Ohio Department of Development is a cabinet-level department. Its mission is to create jobs and build strong communities, while ensuring accountability and transparency of taxpayer money and exceptional customer service. Some of its programs include the Ohio Film Office, Workforce, Minority Business Programs, Governor's Office of Appalachia, Affordable Housing and more.

TourismOhio is an office within the Ohio Department of Development. It reports to the Assistant Director of the Ohio Department of Development and ultimately to the governor. TourismOhio is the state's destination marketing organization focused on marketing travel to and through Ohio. It also coordinates economic impact research and conducts visitor research providing much-needed market intelligence for Ohio's businesses.

STATE OF OHIO ORGANIZATION CHART



How Laws are Made

The legislative process in the State of Ohio provides many different opportunities for making contact with your local representative and senator. The Ohio Travel Association can, and does, provide information about the status of certain issues and bills and which committee members should be contacted.

From an Idea to a Law

The following is a simple description of how an idea becomes a law.

An Idea is Formed. A Bill is Drafted

Ideas for new legislation or changes to an existing one can come from a legislator, a concerned citizen, a business trade association, a state agency, the governor, or elsewhere. Sometimes the proposed legislation is the result of a court decision, or it may be in reaction to a new requirement of the federal government.

A lawmaker sends the idea to the staff of the Ohio Legislative Service Commission (LSC). These folks write all legislation. They'll check to see if the proposed idea conflicts with law or the constitution. Then they'll start writing. For some ideas, the entire bill may fit on one piece of paper, such as naming a highway. For others, it can be a lot more work. Last year, the Ohio budget bill was longer than 3,500 pages.

Bill is Introduced on the Floor

Depending on whether the sponsor of the bill is in the House or the Senate, the bill is introduced on the floor. This means it is announced before his or her colleagues. From here, the bill is assigned to a committee.

Bill Discussed and Debated in Committee

As debating a bill's merit on the full floor would be somewhat unwieldy, the bill is assigned to a standing committee. Examples include Education and Career Readiness; Economic Development, Commerce and Labor; Higher Education and Workforce Development, etc.

While in committee, opportunities for testimony are provided for both opponents and proponents of the bill. Changes may be made to the bill in the form of amendments. If the committee majority votes favorably for the bill, it goes to the full floor for discussion and a vote. The bill can be changed with amendments, combined with other bills, or dropped in committee.

Bill Goes for Floor Vote

A bill sent to the House or Senate can be debated by all and changed with amendments before it is voted upon. To pass, the bill must receive a majority vote.

Bill Process Continues in Second Chamber

Sometimes this process can happen simultaneously. Other times, a sponsor in the second chamber announces the bill and the process starts over in the House if first passed in the Senate, in the Senate if first introduced in the House. If the bill passes the second house without changes, it sent to the governor. If there are amendments made to the bill in the second chamber, the bill is sent back to the chamber of origin for approval of those amendments. If agreement can't be reached, a conference committee is appointed. After both chambers have approved the bill, it is then known as an "act."

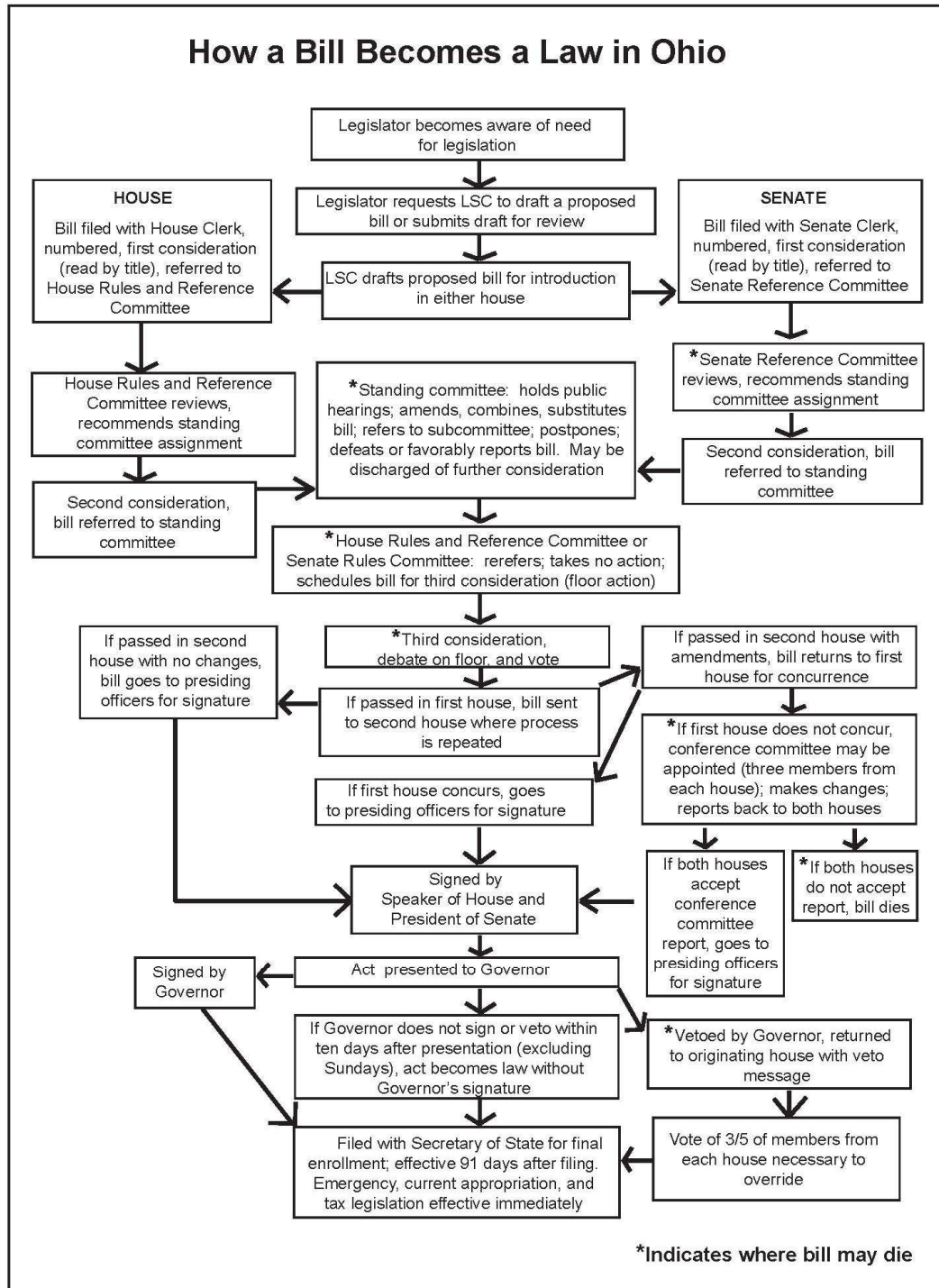
Governor Signs or Vetoes

After the bill passes both chambers in identical form, it is sent to the governor for his signature or veto. If the governor takes no action on the act within 10 days, the act becomes law. If the governor vetoes the legislation, a three-fifths majority is needed in both chambers to override the veto.

Bill Becomes Law

An act becomes law on the 91st day after it is filed with the secretary of state unless it was passed as an emergency.

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Ohio



SOURCE: Legislative Services Commission

Reading a Bill

Figure 1: Sponsor is identified at the top, along with cosponsors. This particular bill is Am. S.B. (Amended Senate Bill) 2.

As Passed by the House	
132nd General Assembly	
Regular Session	Am. S. B. No. 2
2017-2018	
Senator Hite	
Cosponsors: Senators Gardner, Manning, Yuko, Williams, Brown, Sykes, LaRose, Bacon, Balderson, Beagle, Burke, Dolan, Eklund, Hackett, Hoagland, Hottinger, Huffman, Kunze, Lehner, Obhof, O'Brien, Oelslager, Peterson, Schiavoni, Tavares, Thomas, Uecker Representatives Landis, Leland, Schaffer, Anielski, Antonio, Arndt, Ashford, Boyd, Clyde, Craig, Duffey, Edwards, Fedor, Galonski, Gavarone, Green, Hambley, Holmes, Hughes, Kent, Lepore-Hagan, Manning, Miller, O'Brien, Patterson, Patton, Reineke, Rogers, Seitz, Smith, K., Strahorn, Sweeney, West	
<hr/>	
A BILL	
To amend sections 1506.21, 1506.23, 3714.01,	1
3714.02, 3714.051, 3714.06, 3714.062, 3714.082,	2
3734.061, 3734.19, 3734.20, 3734.21, 3734.22,	3
3734.23, 3734.30, 5301.80, 6109.02, 6109.08,	4
6109.24, 6111.03, 6111.04, 6111.07, and 6111.30	5
and to enact sections 3714.022, 6109.25,	6
6111.052, 6111.33, and 6111.34 of the Revised	7
Code to revise specified laws relating to	8
environmental protection.	9
 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF OHIO:	
 Section 1. That sections 1506.21, 1506.23, 3714.01,	10
3714.02, 3714.051, 3714.06, 3714.062, 3714.082, 3734.061,	11
3734.19, 3734.20, 3734.21, 3734.22, 3734.23, 3734.30, 5301.80,	12
6109.02, 6109.08, 6109.24, 6111.03, 6111.04, 6111.07, and	13
6111.30 be amended and sections 3714.022, 6109.25, 6111.052,	14

Figure 2 Additions to any existing bill are underlined, while deletions are shown with a strike through.

Sec. 1506.21. (A) <u>(1)</u> There is hereby created the Ohio Lake	17
Erie commission, consisting of the directors of environmental	18
protection, natural resources, health, agriculture,	19
transportation, and development services, or their designees,	20
<u>the two board members of the great lakes protection fund board</u>	21
<u>appointed by the governor under section 1506.22 of the Revised</u>	22
<u>Code who shall serve as ex officio nonvoting members,</u> and five	23
additional members appointed by the governor who with the advice	24
and consent of the senate. The governor shall serve at the	25
pleasure of the governor <u>appoint the five additional members not</u>	26
<u>later than forty-five days after the effective date of this</u>	27
<u>amendment. Of the initial five additional members appointed by</u>	28
<u>the governor after the effective date of this amendment, two</u>	29
<u>shall serve for a term ending on September 1, 2017, two shall</u>	30
<u>serve for a term ending on September 1, 2018, and one shall</u>	31
<u>serve for a term ending on September 1, 2019. Thereafter, all</u>	32
<u>five additional members appointed by the governor shall serve</u>	33
<u>three-year terms.</u>	34

Tips for Contacting Elected Officials

Most Effective Ways to Communicate

Choose a method of communicating based on urgency, your elected officials' preferences and intent. The Congressional Management Foundation conducts surveys on the most effective ways to contact a federal legislator.

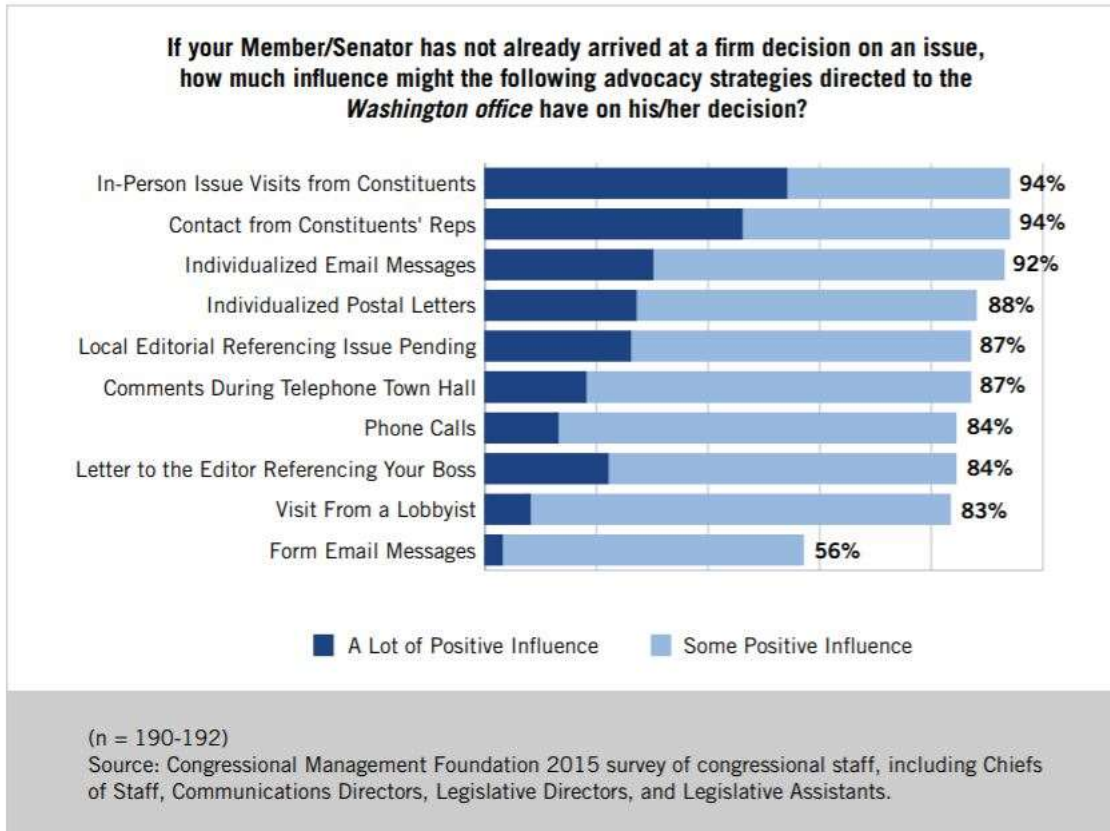


Figure 3 Source: Congressional Management Foundation

Phone Calls

Make a phone call if time is short before he or she must act on a bill. If you need to call, be sure to consider the following:

- Keep the conversation short, sweet and to the point. You'll have limited time. Make the most of it.
- Make yourself notes before dialing. This way, you won't forget what you need to say or stray from the point you were making.
- As always, identify yourself as a constituent.
- In most cases, you will be speaking with an aide. These aides keep track of conversations and share them with their bosses. Leave your name, organization, telephone number and a short message with an appropriate staff member.
 - *"My name is _____ and I am a constituent who works at _____. Please tell Senator/Representative _____ that I support/oppose (S. ____/HR ____). I'm opposed/supportive because _____."*

In-Person Meetings

You have every right to meet with your elected official, and you should make good use of it. Face-to-face meetings are the most influential thing you can do to educate elected officials. According to Congressional Management Foundation research, 94 percent of congressional representatives said that an in-person conversation will have at least some influence on their decisions.

Unlike letter writing and social media advocacy, meetings have the intention to persuade. You are given a set amount of time to sit down and talk with your elected officials. In that time frame, you want them to understand your issue and why they should support your point of view. Develop a plan before you go so you have the most persuasive appeal possible.

Here are a few tips that will give you the most influence and keep your appeal persuasive.

Plan Ahead

- Make sure your elected official knows you are a constituent. Like with all advocacy efforts, elected officials want to hear from their constituents most of all.
- Schedule your meeting two to four weeks in advance. Under two weeks, and your elected official is probably already booked.
- Be willing and flexible if rescheduling is necessary. Committee hearing and legislative schedules change often with very little notice.
- Keep calling! It may take more than one phone call to set up an appointment.
- Be early, but not too early. Five minutes early is ideal, but 15 minutes is annoying.

Be Prepared

- Before calling, have your talking points handy. It's not unusual for a staff person to ask you a few questions so it's nice to have the information by your side.
- Remember to tell the scheduler your name, whom you want to meet with, when you want to meet and why you want to meet.
- Bring notes to your meeting. These will keep you on track with what you really want to say and allow you to better hit all of your key points.
- Do your research. Have facts and data ready and available. Supporting research can greatly enhance your credibility and the persuasiveness of your meeting.

Be Flexible

- Elected officials are often very busy. You may end up meeting with a staff person. These people have a large amount of influence with your elected official, and they may be the key to getting a future meeting scheduled. Treat them with respect! Present as if you were presenting to the elected official.
- If you are meeting with a staff person, and your elected official arrives after the meeting has started, keep going. Do not restart. Just be prepared to answer questions throughout.

- If your elected official is running late, you may be asked to wait. Smile, and be patient.

Be Brief

- Keep your pitch short. Five to 10 minutes is the recommended length for your pitch.
- Stay on topic. It's tempting to talk about all the issues you may care about, but don't. Stay focused on one issue at a time.
- Keep politics out of it. Stick to the issue at hand. Be professional and respectful of your elected official, even if you don't always agree with them. Present the facts as you know them, without providing commentary on their political career.
- If you are with other people, keep the group small. Don't overwhelm with a large group of people. Have only one main spokesperson.

Be Thorough

- Leave a one- to two-page synopsis of your argument. Include facts and research information.
- Follow up with the staff person. Get his or her business card, and keep in touch. Send a thank you email and include copies of your handout.
- Keep in touch. Send correspondence. Make sure that your elected official remembers who you are and what you had to say
- And, as always, send a thank you note!

Figure 4: Sample Script for Meeting with a Legislator

Outline/Script for Legislative Visit

- Introductions (“I live in your district”)
- Personal connection: (“Thank you for supporting tourism in the past, etc...”)
- Review one or two points from the talking points
- Provide a short story to illustrate the need
- The problem
- Reiterate your position (“I am opposed/support SB ___ or HB ___”)
- Discussion - remember to listen!
- Follow-up

Social Media

Social media is now a relevant tool to keep in touch with your elected officials. Lawmakers are using social media to learn about issues and to keep in contact with constituents. Here are a few steps to contacting your legislators, getting your voice heard and keeping your representatives informed with the issues you find important.

New research released by the [Congressional Management Foundation](#) offers us a look at how congressional staff and lawmakers use social media. Although this research is focused on DC, we think the research gives us a perspective of social media potential at all levels of government.

Lawmakers are on Social Media. Find Them.

- Approximately 84 percent (and growing) of congressional lawmakers use social media.
- Around 75 percent of lawmakers feel social media has enabled them to more closely interact with their constituents.

What this means is that it is getting easier and easier to interact with elected officials.

Keep it Professional

Contacting legislators through social media is perfectly acceptable, but be sure to speak to legislators with the same amount of respect and etiquette that would be expected from an email or in-person conversation. We have all seen less than professional posts, and we can guarantee those will be filtered out and ignored. Respect and attention to detail will get lawmakers to listen.

Continue to Build Relationships

If you've met with an elected official, here are some tips for getting your issue and your legislator additional visibility.

- Post a photograph of you and your elected official. Be sure to get permission for taking the photograph and posting it.
- Tag and/or share the photo on your elected officials' social media sites.
- In the post, mention something memorable discussed at the meeting. Remember, social media is conversational, so keep it interesting.
- Thank him or her for meeting with you.

Get Your Voice Heard.

- One of the best things you can do is to identify yourself as a constituent in the post. Show that you are from his or her state, district or county. Most elected officials will pay more attention when they are contacted by known constituents.
- If you are a part of a group, get multiple people to submit similar posts, or even the leader of your group. Seventy-eight percent of elected officials will pay attention if multiple members of the same group create posts, and 75 percent will listen when it is the leader of the group.

In essence, identifying yourself on social media and developing similar messages across repeated posts enable legislators to focus on your issue.

Be Responsive.

- You are most likely to get noticed if you post within the first six hours of an announcement, event or reaction. Around 54 percent of elected officials will pay attention for up to six hours; 23 percent will pay attention for up to a week, but after that attention will drop greatly. So react fast.

Be Brief.

- Keep it short so followers will be able to add comments when they Retweet you.

Be Consistent.

- Don't change your profile photo too often. Think of it as your brand. If you switch it too often, you'll be harder to find.

Be a Follower.

- Make sure you follow your legislator, leaders from both parties, and the advocacy organization that represents your issue, such as the Ohio Travel Association and your sector specific trade associations.

In the past, you may have felt government officials were difficult to reach and hard to contact. You would have to submit a letter or go through other channels. All of this has changed, however, with the advent of social media. From Facebook to Twitter, most of us now have a direct connection with a large majority of lawmakers and officials, who may be paying a lot more attention to their social media than you would think.

In short, be quick. Be numerous. Let them know that you are definitively a constituent and remember that elected officials are paying attention to what you have to say on social media.

Letters

You have the right to write! Most of the time, the purpose of writing a letter to an elected official is to request action on a specific issue or policy. Letters sent by constituents carry powerful messages, but you need to make your letter stand out from the crowd. You can do this by keeping it professional, short, and focused.

When you think about the purpose being to take a specific action, it makes the task a little easier. You aren't necessarily writing to persuade them to adopt your way of thinking. If you want to deepen an elected official's support and understanding of the travel economy, the best way is through face-to-face conversations and providing research to back up your discussion. Then, when an issue needs action, a letter lets your elected official know which decision you support.

Form letters are not as effective. As Bradford Fitch of the Congressional Management Foundation puts it, "Do you really think an [elected official] is going to read a hundred of these missives and say, 'Oh, NOW, I'm convinced,'" then suddenly run in the member's office like a converted zealot?" Of course, the answer is no. He emphasizes that the point of letters is to request things of your elected official, not to try and persuade them to your point of view.

Indeed, 96 percent of offices surveyed by the Congressional Management Foundation say that individualized letters from constituents can have at least some influence on members of Congress. Their research shows that receiving a personal letter from you ranks third in effective ways to get an elected official's attention. The first is when you make a personal visit; the second is when a person representing collective interests makes a visit (such as when the Ohio Travel Association meets with policymakers).

With that in mind, here are a few things you can do to be successful in your letter writing.

Ask for Specific or Measurable Things

- If your letter is a non-measurable request to "put the pressure on" or to "fight hard," it will probably be ignored.
- Be specific right out of the gate! "Please support," "Please oppose" or "Please sign on as a co-sponsor" are all reasonable requests.
- Elected officials keep a tally of how constituents feel about an issue, such as "Fifty letters received in support of the issue; 1,000 against." So never feel it's not worth your time to voice your opinion.

Be Brief

- New advice from staffers indicates that your letter or email should not exceed seven to 10 sentences or around one page. Yikes! But this makes sense. People are busy, and this includes your elected officials. Keeping your correspondence brief will allow them to read your request without overloading them.

Stay Focused

- Limit yourself to one issue per letter. Covering multiple issues with one letter will not only lengthen it, but this will distract the reader from the issues that you may find more important.

Include Essential Materials

- When you begin writing your letter, you should include two things as soon as you can:
 1. The bill number, title or reason for writing, and
 2. your position and request on the matter. Quickly identifying these key elements will increase the likelihood that they will be read and understood.
- Refer to them by their title. “Dear Senator _____,” “Dear Congressman _____.” Make sure to show them respect.
- While a handwritten note can be very effective as a thank you note, most officials prefer a typed note, as they are easier to read. If you do feel that the letter needs to be handwritten, use professional stationery.
- Address your letter properly. On the envelope, refer to your elected official as The Honorable, then include where they are in the government. It should look something like this:

The Honorable (First Name, Last Name)
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43266-0603
And make sure you include your return address.

Own Your Letter

- We’ve all come across them – form letters to elected officials where you just add your name and drop them in the mail. Sure, that’s quick and easy. But you get results based on how much time is invested.
- Research from the Congressional Management Foundation states that form faxes, emails and letters are the least effective way to get your opinion heard.
- Send your own thoughts in a letter you've written yourself, and you'll stand out. Your letter will be remembered. Your elected official will be getting hundreds of the same letter (or emails) with small changes. Creating your own differentiates you and makes you stand out. It will also bolster what you need to say, as it shows that you care enough about the issue to take the time to craft the letter yourself.

Make it Personal

- Mention any particular expertise and why you are qualified above others to be heard. As an example, say, "As someone who supports their family because of a tourism job ..." or "As a business owner in the tourism industry for 15 years," ...
- Avoid using industry jargon, such as NTA, OTA, OACVB, USTA, VCB, etc.

Make Your Voice Larger

- While making it personal is important, do not make the letter just about you. Make it about your employees, your partners and the residents of your community.
- Talk about the group you are representing. Don't say "I," say "we."
- Avoid saying, "My hope is that you'll do X," instead say that "The 2,000 individuals living in Happyville, Ohio will benefit when you do X," or "The Widget-Making Museum and its 50 employees request you to do X." Demonstrate that your request impacts a larger audience.

Show Them You Care

- Send thank you notes. Seriously. They build relationships and can really help your case when you send a request to your elected official. Advocacy is all about building relationships, remember. So thank your elected official. Thank them if the job they're doing is helping you. Thank them if they listened to what you had to say. Send a follow-up thank you note if you recently sent a request letter. Just make sure you thank them.

Testimonies

While a bill is being considered, there are times that the public will have the opportunity to give thoughts on the issue. If you ever wind up giving a testimony at a public hearing, remember the following tips:

Prepare

- Do your homework on the issue. Read the proposed bill. Talk to industry association leaders and others in the industry. Do some online searches of communities who have experienced a similar situation.
- Know who is on the legislative committee. What districts do they represent? What is their history regarding the issue or similar issues?
- Try to get a feel for what the legislative “lead” on the committee is thinking about the issue. In other words, are you likely to be met with leadership supporting your statements, or will you be in defense mode – providing evidence and rationale for changing leadership’s mind?
- Anticipate the questions you may be asked, and prepare your responses.

Personalize

- Relate the bill to your personal experience or life. If they wanted only facts, they’d read a report.
- Relate the bill to how it will affect you, your family, your community, etc.
- Be unique. Tell a story. The goal is to make sure your message is remembered.

Punctuate

- Don’t make them guess what you’re trying to say. Be specific, and answer why the bill is important and how it will improve the state, community, etc.
- Have one primary message, and then back it up by two or three major points.
- Support these points by evidence, examples, facts brought to life, etc.

Put Pen to Paper

- Although you are providing oral testimony, you will be asked for a printed copy of your statement or will be asked to submit your paper online prior to the committee.
- At the top of the paper, identify your name, your organization, the bill name and number, the committee and your position.
- Address your paper and comments to the Committee Chair first, then to members of the committee.
- State your opinion in a summary paragraph at the very beginning of the testimony. Don’t make them guess what your position is.

For example:

Ohio Widget Museum
1234 Main St., Widgetville, OH 55555
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

Testimony by Joe Travel, Ohio Widget Museum Executive Director, IN SUPPORT OF (insert bill number), before the House
Economic Development & Workforce Committee
Jan 20, 2016

Present

- Be respectful of the time schedule, the committee and your opponents who may also be testifying.
- Introduce yourself, and establish your relationship to the subject, such as your job and history in the subject.
- Always recognize the chair, vice chair and ranking member before testifying. In other words, say “Chair Brown, Vice Chair Jones and Ranking Member Smith, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.”
- State your position as “for” or “against” clearly, and identify the bill by name and number.
- Don’t take comments personally. Keep your cool.
- Dress in business attire.
- Show up well in advance, bring enough written copies of your testimony for the entire committee and be sure to thank the committee for their time following your remarks.
- Don’t read testimony word-for-word if you can’t help it. A conversational style is more effective.
- Bring supporters. A group of people backing your testimony tells an important story.
- Wait briefly following your testimony for questions from committee members.
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, tell them you do not know, volunteer to find the answer and get back to the committee with the answer.
- Don’t repeat what others before you have said. This may take some ‘thinking on your feet’ to provide a different message.
- Don’t fret if committee members come and go; sometimes they have multiple meetings scheduled at the same time.
- You will speak from a podium facing the committee members. Your back will be turned away from the galley audience. Do not twist and turn. Just address your comments to the committee.
- It is an official hearing. Open your remarks with “Mr./Mrs. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of...” Opening your remarks professionally and officially will help to solidify what you need to say in the eyes of your audience.
- If your elected official is there, make sure to identify yourself as a constituent.
- Create your statement beforehand, but don’t read it. Use it as a reference if you get lost, but focus more on maintaining eye contact with your audience.
- Try to add a real-life story to your statement. It will make your argument and desires more relatable and concrete.
- If asked a question, before answering, address the chair and the person asking the question. In other words, say “Chair Brown, Representative Smith, my answer to this question is ...”

Maintaining your relationship with your elected official

One of the best things you can do is to keep in touch with your elected official. It's about developing a relationship of trust and respect. Elected officials are often only contacted when a constituent wants something. If your elected official feels that you genuinely like them and are willing to work with them, they may be more open to what you have to say. Here's how to keep in touch (while helping your cause):

- Schedule a breakfast with them in your district. Most weeks, state elected officials are in their district offices Monday and Friday. Some prefer meeting with constituents at home.
- Add your elected official to your mailing list, but don't send them everything. Sending them your annual reports and other major updates, like industry fact sheets and research updates, will keep them in the know and informed as to how they are impacting your industry.
- Attend fundraisers or send a contribution if you can't make it.
- Visit your legislator's office, and invite them to do the same to yours. Show them around and explain your business, such as employment, payroll and taxes. If you can schedule a meeting on a busy day, it will look good and show that your business has an important impact on the economy.
- Offer your elected official the opportunity to write or contribute to an article for your organization. It will help them feel included in what you do, plus it'll give you a really good idea of what they are thinking about matters important to you..
- Help your elected official with publicity. Getting their names and faces out in the community are important for elected officials at all levels. Consider allowing yard signs at your home. Take pictures of them actively participating within the industry and post them online (with their permission!).

Back-of-House Visits

There's perhaps no better way to understand the vitality of Ohio's \$43 billion travel economy than to witness it firsthand. Hosting a site tour at your attraction, museum, hotel, restaurant, ferryboat, etc. for your local, state and federal lawmakers is the best way to build relationships with these policymakers, and these visits provide excellent opportunities for them to meet and hear from constituents.

Step #1: Extend the Invitation

Decide Whom to Invite

Although it takes more time, it is always best to host private tours for lawmakers versus doing one tour for multiple ones. This allows plenty of time for individualized attention to his or her questions. If it's a major event, such as a grand opening, then it makes sense to invite more than one; however, always make sure each lawmaker knows who else is attending. Our advice is to stick with one elected official at a time for best results.

Research your elected officials to know what policies are important to them. On what committees do they serve? Which bills have they supported or not supported, particularly on those related to travel?

Work with Lawmaker's Staff to Set a Date

Begin by calling the lawmaker's staff to ask for the name of his or her district scheduler. Contact the scheduler and let them know you'll be sending details and a formal invitation, but that you wanted to touch base with him or her first. Ask for several possible dates when the elected official is available to visit. It makes sense to do this at least a few months before lawmakers are back in their district after recess is called in Columbus or Washington DC.

Before you place the call, make sure you have the following information handy:

- Let the scheduler know your business is in the district
- Identify the number of Ohioans you employ
- Let the scheduler know why you believe the visit will be beneficial to the elected official (to see economics of travel in his or her district, to see fruits of workforce development initiatives you've implemented, to meet other constituents to better understand the challenges facing small/large businesses, etc)
- Let them know whether media will be present, or better yet, ask them if there is anyone from media they would like invited
- Have a general idea of the activities for the visit

Be flexible with the event date. They will likely want you to follow-up the request in writing; be prepared to do so right away.

Send Formal Invitation

The letter should include the following:

- Proposed date and time
- Name and location of the business
- Some details about the business that may interest your policy maker (based on the research you did earlier in Step 1)
- Highlight the importance of the travel economy in your community
- Provide a brief overview of what he or she will experience on the tour
- Copy the scheduler or staff person you've been working with on the tour

Followup with Lawmaker's Scheduler

Within a week, call the scheduler to check the status of your pending invitation. Do not get discouraged if setting up this meeting takes awhile. Be patient, yet persistent.

Notify the Ohio Travel Association

If we have enough notice, we'd love to join you on the tour. If we're not able, we'll be sure to send you talking points of some of the industry's top policy priorities. When we are aware of this visit, we can also be sure to follow-up as well. Contact Melinda Huntley at mhuntley@ohiotravel.org.

Step #2: Prep for the Tour

Keep the Tour Concise and Targeted.

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement and to want to show the lawmaker everything about your business that deserves attention; however, his or her time and attention is limited. Identify three or four primary points you want to make and design the experience around that.

Most Important Rule – Remember Why You are Hosting

Remember why you are hosting them – to show them the economics behind what we do. So please don't give them the same type of tour you would give a travel writer or group tour operator on a FAM.

One of the most successful tours the Ohio Travel Association ever gave was when we took a federal official to the basement of a well-known indoor waterpark and hotel, introducing him to executive and line staff, showing him operations and back-of-house before ever stepping foot in the waterpark. These officials aren't visiting to play or have a great time (even though we know they will); they are there to learn about the importance of what you do to the community and the state, so show them as only you can do. Don't gloss over the business details because you think you need to streamline a guest experience for them. This is about the business of travel.

Create an agenda

Make sure it gives the elected official time to speak, a tour, photo opportunities and encounters with employees and guests.

Make sure your staff is well briefed on the agenda well.

You may want to let key employees help lead the tour.

Invite guests and media

Work with the elected official's staff to identify and coordinate these invitations.

Clear Food and Arrangements with Scheduler

It's always best to work hand-in-hand with the scheduler to make sure food and/or tour arrangements are within legal limitations and comply with any special meal needs.

Step #3: Conduct the Tour

Verify the Timeline

Schedules change quickly, so it's best to verify how much time is allotted to your place of business before getting started. That way if something unexpected has popped up on the official's calendar, you can re-visit your tour plans to make sure priority information is covered.

Make the Ask

Briefly identify a couple legislative issues that are important to your business and why they are important. Also identify what outcomes you'd like to see. Contact the Ohio Travel Association if you need help with crafting these messages.

Take Lots of Photos

Take both group shots and candid.

Take Lots of Notes

Assign someone to be the note taker to document needed follow-up to information requests or questions

It's Not about Tchotchkes

In fact, most elected officials aren't able or don't want to accept gifts. Keep your handouts business related and informative.

Make It Experiential

Think about the photo opportunity and offer your visitor a chance to be an active participant if appropriate.

Step #4: Following Up After the Visit

Send a Thank You Note

Send a formal thank you to the legislator and any staff members who attended or assisted with the visit.

Follow Up Beyond Expectations

In addition to following up on specific requests, send along images taken during the event. Legislators are always looking for photos for their newsletters and websites.

Offer to Remain Available as a Resource

The opportunity to build relationships with your elected officials doesn't happen every day. Let them know that you are available if ever they should have questions or need resources from the travel industry in your area.

Follow-up with Your Employees

Thank them for their efforts during the tour. More important, encourage their active participation in public policy process as activists and as registered, educated and active voters.