



- Note that since September 11, 2001, the U.S. Postal mail delivered to Capitol Hill has been slow. Therefore, it is best to fax the letter to the Member's office, and then mail the original for the record.
  - If possible, keep your letter to one page. It is important to use only those acronyms that you are certain your legislator will recognize.
  - Cover only one issue per letter. Letters that address multiple issues are much less effective. In the first paragraph, state the action you want your legislator to take. If it applies, identify the bill number and title of the legislation.
  - You may send additional relevant materials, such as, editorials and news stories from local papers in the legislator's state or district to get his or her attention.
  - Ask the legislator to reply, and ask very directly whether he or she will support your position. Legislators are known for writing letters that avoid giving you their positions.
- Remember, your "right to write" is just like your "right to vote" it must be exercised.

#### **D. VISITING YOUR LEGISLATOR**

The first time you visit a legislator, it is natural for you to feel a bit nervous.

It is important to remember however, that legislators are almost always eager to win your support and are sincerely interested in their constituents' views on legislation. Keep in mind that you are the expert on the subject.

TSA recommends the following strategies to "master" the personal visit:

- Make an appointment by calling the legislator's office. In some cases, you will be asked to fax or e-mail your request in writing.
- Do not turn down the opportunity to meet with a staffer. Some staff members wield considerable power.
- During the visit, seek advice on how you can be most helpful in developing support for your issue.

- Listen attentively for clues about how to connect your issues with his or her legislative concerns. Legislators will particularly appreciate any anecdotes, personal stories or illustrations that demonstrate the impact your issue(s) will have on people in their district or state. Your personal stories help the legislators put a face to the cause.
- If you do not have an answer to a legislator's question, tell the legislator that you will provide the information at a later date.
- After the visit, write a letter of thanks to the legislator or staffer, with a copy to TSA's VP of Public Policy to remind him/her of your issues and any agreement.

Remember you are not limited to meeting with your legislators in Washington, D.C. during our Annual Trip to the Hill, or during TS Awareness Month. Most of these meetings can take place in the legislatures State district office at anytime during the year.



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## **Advocacy Brochure 2-2**

### **A GUIDE TO COMMUNICATING WITH FEDERAL LEGISLATORS**



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# DEVELOPING GRASSROOTS

“Grassroots: The ultimate source of power, usually patronized, occasionally feared.” *Safire’s Political Dictionary*

The Tourette Syndrome Association (TSA) government relations efforts are led by an Office in Washington DC, staffed with a Vice President of Public Policy and a committee, chaired by TSA’s national board members.

The TSA takes action on public policies as a member of several larger coalitions comprised of voluntary health, education, disability, and consumer organizations with similar concerns.

## A. GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

An association’s power to influence legislation comes from its grassroots strength, that is the quality and number of letters, other communications, and personal contacts individuals make with their legislators.

Grassroots advocacy involves enlisting the support of TSA members and other groups with similar legislative goals: reaching out to political entities, state legislators, influential business leaders, and stirring up support from local media and the general public.

## B. ALL POLITICS ARE LOCAL

The U.S. Congress is more responsive to grassroots pressure since Members are aware the average time a Legislator stays in office has decreased, and that reelection is not a guarantee.

Members pay close attention to constituent communications and are more responsive when voters make requests. In addition, Members of Congress are less responsive to their party’s direction, and are more likely to make decisions based on their constituents’ views.



To organize TSA’s grassroots body, it is important to select someone who lives in each of the congressional districts within that area to be a “Government Relations Liaison.”

Support group members or individuals not affiliated with any groups, who are interested in meeting with their legislators should work with national TSA’s Government Relations Office to serve as Government Relations Liaisons or Grassroots Advocates.

## C. THE PURPOSE OF GRASSROOTS

The ultimate purpose of grassroots advocacy is to inform the local communities to motivate TSA members to educate their legislators about Tourette Syndrome (TS).

# COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH LEGISLATORS

“I read every letter written to me by a constituent...”

On several occasions I can testify that a single, thoughtful, factual, persuasive letter did change my mind or cause me to initiate a review of a previous judgment.”

*-Congressman Morris Udall (D-Arizona)*

Communication with Members of Congress is the primary weapon in an advocate’s legislative arsenal. Grassroots communication through letters, e-mails, faxes, phone calls and personal visits do produce results in Congress.

Below are a few examples:

- When certain legislators are undecided about how to vote on an issue, these Members can be the target of a grassroots program. Fewer than 100 letters from constituents can actually affect a Member’s vote.
- Some legislators may be so opposed to an issue that a grassroots campaign may not change their views. However, it may cause them to temper their strong opposition. Pressure from a home district may cause a Senator or Representative to abstain during a roll call vote on an issue.

## A. COMMUNICATION WITH CONGRESS

Grassroots mail, spontaneous or organized, is a Member’s political and legislative barometer of his or her constituents’ opinions, and is therefore seldom ignored. Incoming mail

is generally matched with the appropriate issue(s) outgoing form letters signed by an automatic signature machine are fired back. Members do not have the time to give every piece of mail their personal attention, but on some issues, a single, well-written letter or e-mail is more likely to influence a Member’s decision than an avalanche of organized mail.

## B. ESSENTIALS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS

The following are “essentials” to be followed in your communications with legislators:

- Keep it local. Members’ offices pay more attention to personal communications from constituents than from any other source.
- Keep it personal. Personal forms of communication, such as letters, e-mails, faxes, telephone calls and office visits, indicate a greater amount of effort and thus interest.
- Keep it concise. Be short and clear.
- Put it in writing. A written communication provides a readily available record in the legislative office.

## C. WRITING LETTERS AND E-MAILS TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The art of writing effective letters or e-mails to Members of Congress may define the difference between success and failure in your advocacy effort. In an ideal world, letters are personal and should appear spontaneous, not canned. If possible, members of the TSA should write to their legislators in their own words to share a personal story. It is also very important that the facts are accurate. The Government Relations Office is always available to help you draft your letters.

Key ingredients for writing an effective letter or e-mail to a legislator:

- If you know the legislator, make that clear in the first paragraph, particularly if you live in the legislator’s district or state. If you do not have a connection, highlight that you are a member of a group, which includes constituents in his/her district.