V. COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS

No matter how you choose to communicate with your legislator, make sure your message is clearly and concisely presented. Three types of information are most useful to legislators: accurate information about current conditions; purpose of proposed legislation; and the impact of proposed legislation.

Who is your legislator? You can find that out by logging on the NATA website.

Meeting with Your Legislator
NATA has prepared a DVD-format training video entitled “You and Your Representative,” which will prepare you for visits to members of congress or the state legislature. To order, contact the NATA Government Affairs Department.

Preparation
Meetings with legislators are scheduled through their staff. To schedule a meeting, call the representative’s office and ask to arrange a meeting (generally you will be referred to the scheduler or administrative assistant). After reaching the appropriate individual, explain your purpose for calling. Follow up on this conversation with a letter or e-mail to the staff member thanking him/her for the assistance and reiterating your purpose. If a meeting was scheduled during the telephone conversation, confirm the meeting date and time in this letter.

In The Legislator’s Office
Make your presentation interesting. For example, consider beginning “I’d like to talk to you about cost-effective, quality health care...” rather than “I’m here to discuss licensure issues with you.”

Begin promptly. Be prepared for your meeting to be interrupted. Be aware of staff activities (“well, our time’s about up.”) Keep your presentation brief and concise – 10 minutes at the most, and start with the most important information. If it lasts longer, you’ll have a chance to bring up the less important issues.

Do not omit negative but vital information from your presentation. Better to get the good, the bad, and the ugly out immediately. Do not discuss issues not on the ‘agenda,’ or you may find yourself unprepared to answer certain questions. Do not make commitments on behalf of the organization unless you are sure that you have the authority and that the commitment is in concert with association policy.

Ask what you can do or how you can best assist the legislator in complying with your request.

Make sure you’ve done exhaustive research on your subject matter. Prepare 10 tough questions and know the answers. Be prepared to answer the question you least want to be asked. If you’re asked a question to which you do not know the answer, offer to provide it later. Avoid the temptation to speculate or guess at the answer, or if you do tell them you’ll have to check and verify. Research and respond promptly if asked to provide additional information, and send enough copies for distribution to all legislators and staff who were present.
Leave a brief summary of your presentation with your legislator. (Make sure you leave copies for staff, too.) The summary should include what action you’re requesting, how your issue impacts on the legislator’s constituents, and draft language. Leave business cards or contact information.

**Tours**

As an alternative to meeting in the legislator’s office, consider inviting him/her on a tour of your facilities. Extend the invitation in a letter. Include information about any topics you wish to discuss with the legislator during the tour. A tour provides you with an opportunity to extend hospitality and to educate your legislator. Provide a selection of dates and times and also suggest that if none are satisfactory, the legislator select a date and time. Specify how much time should be allotted for the visit. If time allows, schedule an informal working breakfast, coffee break or luncheon during which you can present your issues.

If you schedule a tour, plan carefully. You don’t want to appear disorganized. Or, if legislators visit each state university and college, ask to be a stop on their tour. Most of them want to see the athletic facilities, so it should not be a big issue to be included. If you work at a secondary school, invite them to the Big Game!

**Follow-Up**

After your meeting, keep in touch with the staff, updating them on your progress. Send thank you letters promptly.

**Written Communication**

Despite the advent of the Internet, state legislators still pay the most attention to letters from constituents. Effective communication involves common sense:

- Use letterhead
- Include your return address
- Communicate in your own words, about your particular experience or situation

Form letters are easily spotted and don’t get as much consideration as a personal letter (there are legislative offices that take exception to this). In order for an organized letter writing campaign using a form letter to succeed, there must be a massive number of letters flowing in.

**Tips for Making A Point Most Effectively**

1. Mention the bill number and common name in the first sentence.
2. Mention whether you support or oppose the bill in the second sentence.
3. Keep it short; no longer than one page.
4. Explain how the bill will affect you and the legislator’s constituents.
5. Sum up your arguments.
6. Involve other stakeholders (parents, athletes, doctors or employers). The broader the cross-section of support, the better.
7. Honesty and accuracy are premium; do not exaggerate.
8. Be clear by using layman’s language.
9. Use honey rather than vinegar; no scare tactics or threats.
10. AVOID FORM LETTERS; they receive less attention than personal letters.
11. Include a return address prominently at the top of the letter.
For a sample letter, see the last page of this section.

Addresses for state and federal officials, or to learn the name of your representative, go to the NATA’s Legislative Alert Center [www.nata.org].

**Phoning Your Legislator**
State legislators give serious attention telephone calls from constituents, especially in smaller states. Many include their personal phone number in their material. If you call, first identify yourself and be sure you can express your verbal points concisely. If it makes you more comfortable, write out points you want to make before you call. Keep that list handy while on the telephone. Speak in your own words.

Faxes and e-mails are now acceptable forms of communicating with your legislators. Be prepared, however, for the fax line to be busy during business hours, and the e-mail box to be full. E-communication should be as well written and as neat as a mailed letter.

**Timing Your Contact**
The best time to communicate your view depends on the position(s) held by your representative. If you are writing to a legislator who is on the committee that will hear the bill, send your position before a committee vote is scheduled so that your input will be used in the analysis and will be in the legislator’s file as s/he hears the bill. If your representative will consider the bill for the first time when it comes up for a floor vote, then wait to send your letter until the bill has passed out of its last committee. You may want to write to all members of the committees that hear the bill, although the most effective communication is to your district representative. Don’t forget to write to the governor once the bill is approved by the legislature.

**Communicating with Staff**
It is inevitable that one day you will arrive for an appointment, only to find that your representative has been summoned to the Governor’s Office or to an urgent caucus meeting. Don’t be offended; this is the legislative way of operating.

Now is the time to work with staff, if available. It is written elsewhere in this Toolkit that staff is important, and that is especially true in more populous states. If you find yourself present with no one to meet with, ask to talk with the chief of staff, legislative assistant, or health care advisor. Talk with them just as you would with the legislator, and leave your prepared information behind. It is fairly certain that your message will be passed along, particularly if you are a district resident. As you would with the legislator, follow up with a thank you note.
SAMPLE LETTER TO LEGISLATOR

DATE

The Honorable (Name)
The (State Name) Senate
(Senate Address)
(Senate Address)

or

The Honorable (Name)
The (State Name) (House of Representatives)
(House Address)
(House Address)

Dear Senator * Representative * Assemblyman/Assemblywoman (Name):

First paragraph: 1) reason for writing: 2) your position: 3) the issue and, if appropriate, the bill number and where the bill is in the legislative process. (These three facts should be in one sentence.) I am writing requesting your support for S.B. 123 or H.B. 456, licensure of athletic trainers, currently before the House Professional Licensure Committee.

Second paragraph: Briefly, concisely, explain your position – why this is important to you and how you’re affected by the proposed legislation. Offer your alternatives, if any, to the proposed legislation. Adoption (passage) of such regulation would help protect our (State name) athletes from suffering the consequences – chronic pain, long-term disability or loss of life – of having received health care from unqualified practitioners. State regulation would require, as is now required of other health care professions, demonstration of a minimum competency level in the athletic training profession. State regulation would ensure that (State name) athletes receive specialized emergency care and aggressive rehabilitation. OR Adoption (passage) will inhibit the practice of athletic training. Restricting the athletic trainer's scope of practice denies to athletes access to specialized medical professionals.

Third paragraph: Briefly provide salient facts about athletic training in your state and about yourself. More than (300) athletic trainers live and practice in (State name) and another (100) athletic trainers live in (neighboring State) but practice in (your State). I have been a BOC certified athletic trainer for 12 years. I have been employed as an athletic trainer by the University of (State name), by sports medicine clinics in (town, State), and by (*****).

Fourth paragraph: Thank the legislator for considering your position and offer to provide further information.

Signature block