

# MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD



## A TRANSGENDER GUIDE TO EDUCATING CONGRESS

A Resource from the National Center for Transgender Equality  
updated April 2009



*National Center for*  
**TRANSGENDER  
EQUALITY**

1325 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 903-0112 • [ncte@nctequality.org](mailto:ncte@nctequality.org) • [www.nctequality.org](http://www.nctequality.org)

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### Thank you.

NCTE extends its thanks to the following people who wrote and/or edited this document:  
Dana Beyer, Caeden Dempsey, Kami Geoffray, Mara Keisling, Lisa Mottet, and Justin Tanis.  
National Center for Transgender Equality



# MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking with members of Congress to educate them or impact their views on policy decisions that affect the lives of the people they represent is a fundamental feature of our democratic process. Most people fail to realize the importance of speaking out on issues; we all have the power to affect change in our government.

Establishing a relationship with your legislators can be one of the most effective ways to advance the causes of the transgender community. There are a number of ways to do this, including visiting, writing, e-mailing, faxing, or calling your representative. This guide is meant to help you learn ways to reach out to your elected officials and educate them on the issues that transgender people and our loved ones face.

This guide focuses on your national representatives in the United States Congress in Washington, DC; however, the material also applies to contact with your state representatives. Throughout this guide, you will find resources to aid you in preparing to make contact with your Congressperson. The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) is committed to being a resource for those who wish to bring the needs of the transgender community to legislators. Please feel free to contact us, either through our website, <http://www.nctequality.org>, or by phone, at 202.903.0112.

## WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

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Education is an essential tool in the process of getting transgender issues on the national agenda. Education is one of the guiding principles upon which the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) was founded. We believe that greater education of policymakers and the public is the key to gaining our full rights as citizens.

It is our right and obligation to express our concerns to our elected representatives. Your Congressperson may not be aware of the concerns of transgender people or even know that there are transgender individuals in her or his district. Therefore, it is essential that we visit the elected officials who represent us and speak with them personally. Although allies can help greatly in educating congressional representatives about transgender issues, it is also important that we share our own stories.

Speaking personally with your member of Congress can be both an empowering experience for you and an effective educational experience for your legislator.

## FOUR EASY STEPS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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There are four basic steps that you can use to make a positive difference in policies affecting transgender people. They are:

1. Know Your Representatives
2. Know Your Facts
3. Take Action
4. Stay in Touch

In this guide, we'll discuss easy and practical ways that everyone can put these into effect. We will help you learn ways to be an effective force for justice for transgender people.

# KNOW YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

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The important things to know about your representatives are:

**Who** represents you in the United States Senate and House of Representatives, and  
**What** positions they've taken on legislative issues that impact our lives.

## **WHO ARE MY REPRESENTATIVES IN CONGRESS?**

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Every person<sup>1</sup> in the United States has two U.S. Senators and one member of the House of Representatives. Every member of the United States House of Representatives has approximately 600,000 constituents. Every U.S. Senator represents an entire state. Each of the 435 members of the House and 100 Senators has many transgender constituents, but chances are they don't know it because they have not met very many of us or any at all.

You'll need to know your Zip Code + Four in order to find your representative on the House of Representatives website. You can get your Zip + Four from the Post Office website at <http://www.usps.com>. You can also contact NCTE by phone, at 202.903.0112, or look on NCTE's website, you can enter your zip code to find your members of Congress at <http://www.nctequality.org> > Take Action.

## **WHAT POSITIONS HAVE THEY TAKEN?**

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Most of the representatives' web sites include information about them and their positions on various issues. You can visit their websites at

<http://www.senate.gov>  
<http://www.house.gov>

Research the person you are meeting with. Make an effort to know your Senator or Representative's position on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues and other major issues. Congressional voting records are also a good resource, and can be found by visiting the Thomas Legislative Information website, <http://thomas.loc.gov/>. Knowing basic facts about your members of Congress and their positions can help you establish a connection with them and increase your understanding of what might motivate them to support our cause.

### **HELPFUL THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS:**

1. Where they grew up
2. What schools they attended
3. Military Service
4. What career they had prior to political office
5. What their reasons were for running for Congress
6. How long they have been in elected office
7. Their key legislative agenda items for the coming year
8. What committees they serve on
9. Their past voting records in related issues, such as LGBT rights, civil rights, and women's issues
10. What they see as the key issues facing our country and the region they represent

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<sup>1</sup> This does not include residents of Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the US Territories, who do not have Senators and who have a non-voting Delegate to the House of Representatives.



## KNOW YOUR FACTS

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There are several key areas that are important to learn about and will be helpful to you when you contact your legislator.

### **KNOW ABOUT TRANSGENDER CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES**

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Refer to the handout shown on page 19 of this guide. This can make a useful sheet to leave with your legislators.

If you are attending a lobby day organized by NCTE or another organization, you will likely receive a specific up-to-date handout to leave.

### **KNOW ABOUT STATE AND LOCAL LAWS**

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You should determine the scope of your existing local and state protections before your visit. If you do not have local or state protections, you should explain this. If you do have local or state protections, they can be used to make your legislator more comfortable supporting these laws at the federal level. Pointing out how cities in their district passed similar laws, for example, could change the Congressperson's political calculations.

To determine what laws are in effect in your area, visit the Transgender Civil Rights Project of The Task Force online at [http://thetaskforce.org/reports\\_and\\_research/all\\_jurisdictions](http://thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/all_jurisdictions).

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON SPECIFIC FEDERAL LEGISLATION

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Many transgender individuals are concerned with important federal legislation such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) and the Hate Crimes Bill (Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Hate Crimes Prevention Act). You may want to make such legislation an issue you address in your visit or letter. If you want an update on particular federal legislation or policy issues, contact NCTE, either through our website, <http://www.nctequality.org>, or by phone, at 202.903.0112, and we will provide you with any information you need.

## IMPORTANT POINTS TO MAKE

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Most members of Congress need to be convinced of two things for them to support trans-inclusive legislation. First, they must understand what problems exist, such as discrimination, and that these problems are harmful to us. Second, they must be convinced that co-sponsoring and voting for a trans-inclusive bill will not be a political problem for them in their re-election.

The following talking points can aid you in beginning your discussion with your member of Congress. It is most helpful to have a specific issue or bill to address when speaking with a member of Congress. Contact the NCTE office for information about current legislation to address.

### **Transgender people face pervasive discrimination and violence.**

It is important that legislators realize the extensive discrimination and violence that is committed against transgender people. We face discrimination at school, at work, every day on the street, and even from our own families. Legislators need to hear stories of transgender people who have faced real discrimination. Legislators need to understand what happens to us when we are discriminated against. Our stories are painful and they need to know about this pain in order to take action to ban discrimination.

### **Transgender people are not protected from discrimination on the federal level.**

One of the major barriers to getting members of Congress to support anti-discrimination legislation is that they may think that we are already protected by laws currently in place. In reality, none of the existing federal laws prohibit discrimination against transgender people. For example, transgender people have repeatedly tried to use Title VII, which bans sex discrimination, to protect ourselves, but courts have most often ruled that Title VII does not prohibit this type of discrimination. In addition, courts have taken varying positions about state laws so this is not always an avenue of protection. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), likewise, is not helpful, because of an explicit exemption for transgender people.

**A growing number of states and localities prohibit this type of discrimination, yet coverage remains spotty and is often not enforced.** We need legislators to understand that other politicians are regularly voting for transgender rights and that we are, as a community, establishing that these laws can be in place without negative consequences. However, we do not want to paint so rosy a picture that they think we do not need federal protections. We do—state and local protections are not sufficient.

Each year more jurisdictions pass anti-discrimination laws to protect transgender people from discrimination. Remember though, even where these state and local laws exist, discrimination still occurs unchecked because these laws are not as well known as federal laws. Local municipalities and states may not enforce existing laws.

# TAKE ACTION

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There are several ways you can take action:

- Visit your member of Congress
- Write a fax, letter or e-mail your member of Congress
- Call your member of Congress on the phone
- Continue to develop a relationship with members of Congress

This section will give you the tools you need to be successful at each of those.



## VISITING YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Visits to Congress can have multiple important purposes. People often visit Congress to advocate for specific laws being considered, but there are other important reasons for visits which are vital in the fight for our equal rights. By visiting your elected representatives, you will be:

- Establishing relationships and cultivating access in Congress
- Teaching members of Congress that they have transgender constituents
- Educating members of Congress about transgender people and our issues
- Advocating for particular issues or bills

Here are the steps for an effective visit to your Congressional Representative:

- A. Assemble a small team of people to go on the visit
- B. Set up a meeting
- C. Prepare for your meeting
- D. Meet with your member of Congress

## A. BRING A “TEAM” OF CONSTITUENTS, RATHER THAN GO ALONE

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In general, when visiting with an elected official you should not visit alone. Try to bring a small group of two to four people with you on your visit. Having multiple people provides multiple perspectives that may better educate the officeholder about the realities of anti-transgender discrimination and the violence we face. Also, each individual may hear what the officeholder says differently, and thus provide a richer and more accurate picture of how a meeting went and what follow-up may be needed.

When assembling a “team” of constituents, try for diverse representation from the transgender people and allies in your area. Diverse groups bring added perspectives, skills and presence that a homogeneous group cannot and help to break stereotypes. Diversity is an important goal in all transgender organizing and especially important when educating legislators about transgender lives and issues. We want legislators to have an accurate picture of who we are.

While it is important that transgender voices speak for transgender people, allies are often passionate and convincing educators on our behalf. Having allies at the meeting also shows broader political support for your position. Allies may have existing relationships with the member of Congress and therefore are better able to influence a legislator’s opinions.

Some possible team members to include in your visit:

- **Transgender people who have personally experienced discrimination or violence.** This helps communicate to the legislator that discrimination is a problem in her or his district.
- **Transgender people from local support groups,** including transmen’s groups and groups representing people of color. This helps show the diversity of transgender people and adds a broader perspective.
- **Parents, siblings, spouses or children of transgender people.** They may be able to connect with the legislator and explain issues from a non-transgender perspective.
- **Co-workers or supervisors of transgender people.** They can explain what it is like working with a transgender person and how workplace issues have been handled in a positive manner.
- **Human resource or business leaders.** Similar to co-workers, these folks can convincingly make the argument that non-discrimination makes good business sense and that having transgender employees is not a problem.
- **Social workers.** They can communicate effectively the devastating impact of discrimination on communities and individuals within that community. Consider a social worker from an organization that works with LGBT youth, the homeless or a community mental health center.
- **Leaders from your local/state LGBT advocacy organization** (if they are transgender supportive). Their presence will convey the message that the local LGBT voting bloc cares about this issue.
- **Leaders from the local LGBT partisan organization or local party leadership** (if they are transgender-supportive). Consider bringing Republicans to meet with Republicans and Democrats to meet with Democrats etc.
- **Leaders from local congregations.** They can help ease the legislator’s concern that people of faith do not support transgender equality.
- **Leaders of other civil rights organizations.** Leaders of the NAACP, NOW, or the ACLU, etc., may be influential with a legislator who cares about the concerns of these groups. They can help educate the member of Congress that justice issues are interconnected.
- **Other community leaders.** Their presence should help the legislator understand that transgender equality has wider support than the legislator realizes.

- **People who have worked in local politics with the legislator.** Bringing in people who the legislator specifically knows and values can help them realize that their community and their supporters believe in transgender equality.
- **Donors or volunteers from the legislator’s campaign.** The legislator may be very interested and influenced by those she knows are her core supporters.
- **Union representatives.** Depending on the legislator, union leaders may carry a lot of influence.

## **B. SETTING UP A MEETING WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS**

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You and your team do not need to travel to Washington to meet with your members of Congress. Legislators have offices in both Washington and in their home states or districts. Which office a Congressperson is working from generally depends on the time of year, day of the week, and whether Congress is currently in session. For example, Congress is generally not in session during the month of August, so your Congressperson is more likely to be at her or his state or district office at that time. Most maintain a regular schedule of time in local offices, such as Mondays and Fridays or one week a month. You can find current congressional schedules at

<http://www.house.gov>, for the House of Representatives

<http://www.senate.gov>, for the Senate

For individual schedules, contact each office directly.

Meetings usually need to be requested in writing—faxes are preferred as mail has to go through an extensive terrorism screening process, which can take over a month. NCTE has provided a sample meeting request letter on page 17 for you to fax. It is best to request a meeting well in advance, preferably at least one month ahead of time. You may need to be persistent in following-up until an actual meeting is confirmed.

They are usually not trying to avoid you—they are simply overwhelmed with requests for meetings in an already packed schedule, so keep trying. If you speak to a scheduler, be sure to get her or his name in case you need to call back. Be persistent—it will pay off.

## **C. PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING**

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Gather your team in advance, if at all possible, so that you can share information and agree upon strategies for your meeting. Agree on the focus of your meeting with your Congressional representative, how you will introduce yourselves and the basic talking points you intend to cover. Holding a practice session is an excellent idea and will help you feel more confident and prepared for the actual meeting. Because appointments with members of Congress are often brief (usually fifteen to twenty minutes), taking the time to prepare carefully will help you use that time wisely to focus on your most important issues.

You may also want to divide up roles for the meeting. It is helpful to have one person designated as the leader, who can guide the introductions, move things along, and be sure that the right questions get asked at the end of the meeting. It is also very useful to have someone take notes of your meeting so you’ll remember what has been said.

Congress is a formal institution, so plan to dress professionally for your meeting. Members of Congress and their staffs usually will be wearing suits and ties for men, and suits, dress slacks or skirts, with a blouse or dress sweater for women. You are likely to be taken more seriously if you dress in a similar fashion. You should feel free to dress according to your chosen gender presentation.

## D. MEETING WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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When you arrive, each team member should **introduce themselves**. Say your name and that you are a constituent, a veteran, a parent or anything else that might be important to the legislator. Note if you have a connection with your representative.

**Always be brief and stay on point**—your meeting time will be very limited, usually fifteen to twenty minutes. This is when your team’s preparation pays off. Having your general talking points written up will help you present your information clearly and directly.

When speaking with your Congressperson, **the most important thing is talk about personal experiences** of discrimination against yourself or people you know. Refer to local examples of discrimination and violence—personal accounts are the most likely to affect your Congressperson. Painting the realities that the transgender community faces is essential for gaining the support of our representatives. However, it is critical that you keep your remarks brief and to the point.

**Stay focused** so that you will be understood and make your point well since a short, articulate statement will be far more effective than an elaborate story. Congresspeople have limited time and many issues to focus on—help them by being as clear as you can be.

**Avoid theoretical discussions**—they are not a productive way to communicate with your Congressperson and are only likely to cause frustration. For example, engaging in a complicated analysis of gender theory will not be helpful unless he or she specifically asks for this. Instead, focus on telling your personal account and asking your member of Congress to support specific changes in policy.

**Listen carefully** to what your Congressperson has to say and clearly and succinctly answer any questions she or he asks.

Share only appropriate information in the meeting. **Be sensitive** to the fact that some people are uncomfortable hearing about the body and may not want to know specifics. It is better to talk about the impact of violence on an individual without graphic descriptions of the attack and about the need for health care advocacy while leaving out the intimate details of an individual’s medical care. In some segments of our society, it is considered rude and inappropriate to discuss the specifics of any kind of surgery; therefore, it is best to refer to surgery only in the most general terms, if at all. Most members of Congress do not have any medical training and discussing medical conditions with them can be confusing.

Also, remember that many people continue to confuse issues of sexuality with issues of gender. Therefore, it is helpful to stay on topic and focus on gender, and avoid conversations about sexuality or genitals. Some people are uncomfortable with these topics, especially in public and work settings, so it is best to be discreet.

### SAMPLE INTRODUCTIONS:

Good afternoon, Senator O’Brien. My name is Patsy Anderson, and I am a lifelong resident of our state, as you are. I am a cross dresser and was the founder of Feminine Spirits, our local advocacy and support group. I very much appreciate this opportunity to talk with you about some important issues for our community.

Hello, Congresswoman Martinez. My name is Joe Gardner, I’m a new resident of our state, and a member of my local Union. I lost my last job when my employer found out that I am a female to male transsexual. I want to thank you for your consistent support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act that would ban this kind of discrimination.

**Speak slowly and clearly**, without using jargon, slang, acronyms, abbreviations or terms that other people may find offensive. Use “transgender” rather than “TG” and “cross dresser” instead of “CD” or “transvestite.” Do not assume that people will understand terms like MTF, FTM or “transition.” Many people speak too quickly if they are nervous, so pay attention to how you are talking so that you will be sure you are being understood.

**Speak positively** about transgender people and do not disparage other people or their positions, even if you don’t agree with them. Make your own position clear and let it speak for itself.

**If you do not know something, do not make it up.** Explain that you do not know the answer and offer to follow-up with the information. If you do offer this, make sure you really do follow-up.

**An underlying message** to your visit should be that there are a lot more transgender people than members of Congress think, and that we live in their districts or states.

In addition to educating the legislator on transgender issues, **it is important that you leave knowing whether the legislator would be supportive of trans-inclusive legislation.** When you are about 75% through the allotted time and have given your basic presentation, it is time to get a better idea of your Congressperson’s thoughts if she or he has not made them clear to you already. Consider asking the following questions, in your own words, to determine where your legislator stands:

- Is there anything else that you need to know to help you to better understand the issues faced by transgender people?
- Would you co-sponsor legislation that includes protections based on gender identity and expression?
- If you will not co-sponsor trans-inclusive legislation, would you be willing to vote for or support such legislation?

Also, resist the urge to leave a large packet of information—legislators and staff simply will not have time to read it. A **one-page leave behind** that covers the important facts is perfectly adequate. There is one you can use on page 19 of this guide.

**Remember that most appointments are brief**—about fifteen to twenty minutes. Leave gracefully when your time is up and be careful not to overstay your welcome. If you are invited to stay longer, by all means do so if you have the time.

## TELLING YOUR STORY: AN EXAMPLE

My name is Jordan and I’d like to tell you a bit about myself. Ever since I was a little kid, I’ve been uncomfortable having to identify as either male or female. My parents tried to push me into one box or the other at first, but then they realized that this is who I am and supported me. School was okay until high school, when things got pretty rough. I almost dropped out after getting beaten up a couple of times on my way home from school by kids who called me a queer. I had some great teachers, though, who really encouraged me to stay in school. Now I’m attending college in our state at Springfield University and I’ve found that to be a great experience. There is a great Resource Center for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students. Because of my experiences in high school, I’m here to ask you to support safer school legislation which would protect students like me from violence and discrimination.

## MEETING STAFF INSTEAD OF ACTUAL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

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If your member of Congress is not available to meet with you, you may be asked to meet with a staff person instead. This is not a negative thing. Legislators rely a great deal on their staffs and receive detailed reports on every visit they do with constituents. So, while meeting with the actual member of Congress is ideal, meeting with staff people is also extremely helpful. If you found the staff to be helpful, write to your Congressperson to let him or her know that you appreciated the staff's courtesy. Also, keep in mind that occasionally something unforeseen comes up and, even if you were expecting to meet with the actual legislator, you may see a staffer instead.

Often meeting with a staff member first, or even several times, can help you get in to see the actual member of Congress in the future. Remember that staff members can be very important in shaping legislation and policy, so do meet with them.

## AFTER A MEETING WITH YOUR CONGRESSPERSON

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Each visitor should send a thank you note immediately—this is a quick and easy way to further your relationship with your Congressperson. If you also met with someone on the Congressperson's staff, write them a separate thank you note as well. Be sure to follow up as soon as possible with any promised additional information.

NCTE would love to hear how your visit went, so feel free to contact us by phone or email at [ncte@nctequality.org](mailto:ncte@nctequality.org). We have included a short Visit Report Form, on page 18, if you would prefer to use this format.

## GENERAL POINTERS ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL VISITS

### DO

- DO arrive on time, even early.
- DO prepare general talking points. Clear and direct information is most often retained.
- DO politely and calmly present your general talking points.
- DO make sure that all facts you share are accurate.
- DO speak from your personal experience.

### DON'T

- DON'T arrive late for your meeting. Only a short time period is set-aside for you to meet with your member of Congress. If you are late, your appointment may be cancelled.
- DON'T go into too much detail on the issues, unless asked to elaborate. Too much information may be confusing.
- DON'T argue with the member of Congress or be overly aggressive.
- DON'T make generalizations (such as "all transgender people want surgery") or state as a fact something that you are not certain is correct.

# HOW TO WRITE TO YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Writing letters, faxes and/or emails can be a very effective way to deliver a message to your elected officials. While usually not quite as potent as an actual in-person visit, writing is still very useful.

In general, mailed letters have somewhat more impact than faxes and emails since legislators know that mass faxes and emails are easily organized by professional lobbying organizations. When Congresspeople gets an actual letter, typed or handwritten, they know the constituent writing the letter really feels strongly about the issue. However, letters mailed to Congress are required to go through an extensive and time consuming screening process due to concerns about terrorism, so they will take more time to arrive. Faxes and emails are much quicker ways of getting a message to Congress and should be utilized when time matters in expressing your opinion on an issue.

Be concise; aim for one to two page letters or faxes. There is a sample letter on page 21 of this guide.

Consider having a letter writing party at a group meeting or inviting friends over to write letters about an issue that is important to you. You can provide paper, pens, addresses and a sample letter to help people get started.

## ADDRESSING LETTERS

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To a Senator:

The Honorable (First and Last name)  
United State Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (Last name):

To a Representative:

The Honorable (First and Last name)  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr./Ms. (Last name):

Note: When writing to the chair of a committee or the Speaker of the House, it is appropriate to address them as: Dear Mr. Chairman/Speaker or Madame Chairman/Speaker

## TIPS FOR WRITING

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- Be polite, brief and to the point
- Address only one issue in each letter, fax or e-mail
- In the letter:
  - State your purpose for writing in the first paragraph (and in the subject line, if you are writing an e-mail) State your position clearly for or against a particular piece of legislation, using the bill number if you know it, and succinctly describe why you hold that position;
  - Include, briefly, personal information that supports your point of view
  - Conclude by asking for a specific action from the legislator, such as asking them to vote for or against a bill, sponsor legislation or meet with transgender constituents.
  - Thank them for their past support of related issues, if applicable
- Always include your contact information, including your address (this will let them know that you live in their district and state), so they can follow up with you.

If you are writing to a staff member in a congressional office, the accepted forms are:

### **Senate:**

Ms./Mr. (First and Last Name)  
Office of Senator (Senator's Last Name)  
United State Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ms./Mr. (Staff member's last name):

### **House of Representatives:**

Mr./Ms. (First and Last Name)  
Office of Representative (Rep's Last Name)  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr./Ms. (Staff member's last name):

## ADDRESSING EMAIL

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Use the same suggestions as above. In the subject line, identify the topic of your message or a bill number if you know it. Even though you are sending by e-mail, you still need to include your mailing address to confirm that you are, in fact, a constituent from that district. Your email message should have the following format:

Dear (Title) (Last Name),

[Body of your e-mail]

Sincerely,  
Your name  
Address, City, State, Zip Code  
Phone  
E-mail

# HOW TO CALL YOUR CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

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Calling your Congressperson can be an effective way of letting her or him know that constituents are concerned about a particular issue. You may speak with a person or get voice mail. When you call:

- State who you are, including your name, that you are a constituent of that person's district or state, and any other appropriate information (for example, if you are a physician calling about a medical issue or the leader of a transgender organization)
- Name the issue you are calling about (including the bill number or name of the legislation, if applicable), your position on it (are you for or against the proposed legislation), and a sentence or two only about why you have taken that position.
- State clearly what you wish your representative to do (for example, vote for or against a piece of legislation)
- Close by repeating your name and, if they ask for it, giving your address and phone number in case the office wishes to follow up with you
- Remember to be polite, clear and brief. It may help to write out what you plan to say ahead of time

Phone numbers can be found at <http://www.house.gov> and <http://www.senate.gov>.

## SAMPLE PHONE MESSAGE:

Good afternoon, my name is Pat Nyugen and I'm a member of the City Transgender Alliance. I am calling to urge Senator Davis to be a co-sponsor of the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act and ensure that there are protections for transgender people. In our country, everyone should have the right to live without the fear of hate-motivated violence. Even if she is not a sponsor of the bill, I hope that she will vote for it. Again, this is Pat Nyugen. My address is 123 Main Street, Springfield, MO, 45678 and my telephone number is 987-654-3210. Thank you for your time.



# STAY IN TOUCH

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## **After a Meeting with Your Congressperson**

Follow up as soon as possible with a thank you note and with any promised additional information after you've met with your member of Congress.

Completing NCTE's short Visit Report Form, on page 18, is very helpful to us in our work to maintain ongoing contact with members of Congress.

## **After Action Has Been Taken on a Bill**

If you encouraged your Congressperson to take a position on a particular piece of legislation and they did so, send them a letter or make a phone call thanking them. This demonstrates constituent support for their positions and shows that you are paying attention. This is especially important if the legislation was controversial or if it represents a change in their position from previous votes.

## **Invite Your Congressperson to a Community Gathering**

If your community is holding a public event, such as a transgender pride event or candlelight vigil, consider inviting your elected officials. A number of members of Congress have attended Day of Remembrance events. If you are conducting a meeting to discuss a particular piece of legislation, ask your legislator or one of their staff members to come and talk about their position on it.

## **Attend Town Hall Meetings and Events**

Members of Congress often make themselves available to constituents by holding town hall meetings, constituent coffee hours, or other events in their district or state. All people are welcome to attend these and there is no admission charge. They are a good way to build relationships with members of Congress. Also, consider volunteering at a town hall to raise transgender visibility at the event.

## **Develop the Relationship with Your Congressperson**

The best and most enduring way to educate Congress is to interact frequently with the member of Congress, his or her staff, and possibly by getting involved in her or his campaign or political party.

## **Stay in Touch with Your Congressperson**

Make a follow up appointment to visit again and continue to call and write about issues that are important to you. Changes often are not made in a single contact but through developing a positive relationship over time. Maintaining contact is very important to this process.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## **Is there someone who can train us before we do this visit?**

Yes. NCTE can provide training beyond what this document provides. Before any visit, we encourage you to contact us for a briefing on your particular legislators and their stance on transgender and LGBT issues. But we are also very happy to do an actual training session for you and your whole team either over the telephone or in person when possible.

## **Is it better to visit my legislator's district office or the Washington, DC office?**

Either way is great. In general, visiting your legislator back home in the district is less costly and more convenient. Doing so also allows more people to attend. Additionally, when you visit in district, it makes the unmistakable point that local voters care about what the legislator is doing and how she is voting. On the other hand, going to Capitol Hill and doing a visit there demonstrates your commitment to the issue and can add weight to your words. Additionally, your two Senators and one member of the House are closer together in DC so visiting all three is somewhat easier. If you are planning to be in Washington, DC, let NCTE know and we will help you set up appointments and even attend with you if you'd like.

Visiting during NCTE's Lobby Days or similar events can be very powerful in creating conversation about transgender issues among legislators and their staffs. When constituents visit a number of offices at the same time, it raises awareness on Capitol Hill that people care about these issues and are coming in larger groups to bring these to the attention of lawmakers.

## **What if I can only get an appointment with a staff person?**

If your member of Congress is not available to meet with you, you may be asked to meet with a staff person instead. This is not a negative thing. Legislators rely a great deal on their staff and receive detailed reports on every visit held with constituents. So, while meeting with the actual member of Congress is ideal, meeting with staff people is also extremely helpful. If you found the staff to be helpful, write to your Congressperson to let her know that you appreciated the staff's courtesy.

## **What if I didn't vote for the legislator I want to visit?**

That isn't a problem. Your Congresspeople work for you whether you voted for them or not. Besides, they won't know who you voted for and they will be hoping that even if you haven't voted for them in the past, you will begin to do so once they have met with you. They are often seeking your support, just as you are looking for theirs.

## **What if I don't vote at all?**

First of all, if possible, start voting. Everyone who is eligible to vote should vote regardless of who you want to vote for. Second, there will no doubt be members of your team who are voters. The Congressional office prefers to spend time with voters, but you will still be graciously welcome. In general, it is wise not to tell the member of Congress or staff person that you don't vote.

For those who would like to vote but have faced problems or fear facing problems, NCTE has created a document on overcoming voting obstacles for transgender people, which can be found on our website at <http://www.nctequality.org/resources/votingrights.pdf>. It is free to download or you can call us at 202-639-6332 and we will mail you a copy.

## **If my legislator has a negative voting record on transgender issues, is it worth going?**

It is NCTE's position that all transgender people—in fact all people—should visit with and educate their legislators. Keep in mind that part of the reason they may seem to be hostile to transgender rights is that they have not been educated and may not even believe that they represent any of us in Congress.

### **If my legislator has a very good voting record on transgender issues, is it worth going?**

All transgender people should meet with and educate their members of Congress. Someone who has a voting record that supports us may become even more of an advocate as you educate them and develop an increasingly deep relationship with them. You can also help ensure that supportive members of Congress continue to vote for legislation that furthers civil rights for transgender people.

### **Will they be respectful of me when I visit?**

Members of Congress and their staff members meet with the public every day and are polite and friendly; this is a large part of their work. We have not yet had a single report of a member of Congress being rude to a transgender constituent (which is not to say this has never happened). If they agree to meet with you, expect that they will act in a gracious and friendly manner. They want your visit to be a positive experience.

### **In which gender should I present?**

You should always feel comfortable presenting according to your preferred gender expression when meeting with a member of Congress. You should dress professionally when visiting Congress, but in whatever gender presentation is comfortable for you. We are often asked by people who have not yet transitioned, whether they must go as their desired gender to make a point to the Congressperson. That is not necessary. Nor is it important whether or not you “pass.” Just be comfortable being you.

### **What should I wear?**

Congress is a formal institution, so plan to dress accordingly for your meeting. The clothes that would be suitable for a job interview are appropriate for a congressional visit. Your choice of clothing should show respect for the legislator, by being professional and appropriate, and respect for yourself, by expressing your gender in a way that feels right to you.

If your gender presentation is feminine, consider a women’s suit, skirt and blouse, dressy sweater or dress slacks. Those with a masculine gender presentation should consider a suit, dress shirt and tie. Borrowing clothes from a friend is fine.

### **Can I take a photo with the Congressperson?**

Absolutely; this is a common request. The Congressperson may also ask to have his or her picture taken with you. If they take your picture—and they only will if you approve it—the congressional office can send you a copy of the picture. When considering whether to allow for a photo to be taken, remember that everyone on your team may be not comfortable with being photographed, so please be responsible and ask each person. Please consider sending a copy of the photo to NCTE.

### **What if they keep putting me off and just won’t give me an appointment?**

This happens sometimes. Usually, though, they are not being dismissive—only busy. You should be persistent, patient and consistently nice. If you still are not getting an appointment, contact NCTE and we may be able to help you with this.

### **Can’t I just stop by and visit a Congressperson’s office without an appointment?**

Sure, but it is very unlikely that you will get to meet with the legislator or even the correct staff person. A Congressional office is just like any business in the sense that they always are nice to their customers (constituents). But it is also like any other business in that time is limited and heavily scheduled and they may simply not be able to fit you in. The only time we encourage drop-bys is when an appointment could not be set up in advance of a trip to DC (where lots of visiting constituents just drop in, though they usually do not get to see the legislator) or in the district when the office has been repeatedly unresponsive to requests for a meeting.

# RESOURCES

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For more information, please feel free to contact us at the National Center for Transgender Equality. You can find our website at <http://www.nctequality.org/> or call us at 202.903.0112. We can provide training, information and support in contacting your legislators. If you need more information on State Legislation, two great sources are:

- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force at <http://www.thetaskforce.org>
- Equality Federation at <http://www.federationlgbt.org>

And don't forget you can reach your representatives through their websites, which you can find at <http://www.senate.gov> and <http://www.house.gov>.

## YOU can make a difference!

### SAMPLE MEETING REQUEST LETTER

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Date

Attn: (Name of Scheduler, if known)  
The Honorable (Name)  
Member of Congress  
Washington, DC 20515 [May use local address]

Ms./Mr. (Name of scheduler):

I am writing to request an appointment for several constituents and I to speak with Congressman/Congresswoman \_\_\_\_\_ in (Washington DC or the name of town where office is) to discuss federal legislation to protect transgender people from discrimination.

[I understand that the Congress is not in session in mid-August and would appreciate a meeting during that time.] My preference would be for [day of the week], [month, day and year], but we can certainly be flexible for the Congressman's/Congresswoman's schedule.

Those in attendance at the meeting, depending on when it is scheduled for, will be:

- Name, title and address for each attendee
- Name, title and address for each attendee

Please let me know when the Congressman/Congresswoman might be available. I will follow up with you in a few days if I have not heard back.

Thank you,  
(Your name)  
(Your address)  
(Your Telephone Number)  
(e-mail address)

## CONGRESSIONAL VISIT REPORT FORM

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Please complete this visit report form for each congressional visit you complete. Return the forms to NCTE as soon as possible after your visit. This allows us to keep track of which members of Congress have received education and which have not, as well as what members have told you, their constituents. Thank you.

### Basic Information

Name of Representative/Senator: \_\_\_\_\_ State/District \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_ What time did visit start? \_\_\_\_\_ When time did visit end? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did the meeting take place? \_\_\_\_\_

### Information on Legislator/Staff:

Did you meet with the member of Congress or staff?  Member  Staff  Both

What staff members were present?

Name/Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Name/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Name/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

### Information on Your Team:

Name/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Name/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Name/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Was the Senator/Representative supportive of including gender identity or expression in federal legislation?

Did the Senator/Representative express any reservations about adding gender identity and expression to supporting a transgender inclusive federal legislation? If so, what were they?

What questions did the Congressperson ask?

### Looking Ahead:

What would you suggest as next steps with this member of Congress?

Any additional comments (please use an additional sheet if necessary):

## **Transgender Civil Rights Issues**

### **Discrimination**

Transgender people face pervasive discrimination in every area of life. Currently thirteen states and 100+ localities (or 38% of the country by population) have laws that protect transgender people from discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations. As currently worded, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which passed the House of Representatives in 2007, only covered sexual orientation discrimination, which would not include transgender people. The vast majority of LGBT community organizations remained united in asking for transgender-inclusion in ENDA.

### **Hate Crimes**

Transgender people are frequent victims of hate violence. On average, at least one transgender person per month is murdered in the United States. The current federal hate crimes law does not cover anti-transgender hate crimes. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, passed by the House of Representatives in 2007 explicitly included transgender people. Nine states now have hate crime laws that address anti-transgender violence.

### **Identity Documentation**

Without accurate government-issued identity documents that reflect correct name and gender identity, transgender people have difficulty applying for jobs, traveling, immigrating or accessing government or community resources. Transgender people often face institutional obstacles when changing driver licenses, social security accounts, passports, birth certificates, immigration-related documents, veteran's documents and other forms of identification. The Real ID Act threatens to make procuring legitimate ID even harder.

### **Access to Healthcare**

Transgender people frequently face untrained, insensitive or hostile health care providers who either cannot or will not adequately treat us. Additionally, because of pervasive discrimination, transgender people are often refused individual insurance policies, offered only outrageous rates on policies, denied transgender-related care, or even denied non transgender-related care with a claim that it is excluded from insurance policies.

### **Criminal Justice System**

The criminal justice system subjects transgender people to harsh and unequal treatment. Transgender people face selective arrest and prosecution, are assigned to insensitive or hostile attorneys, judges and court personnel, are unprotected from sexual assault while incarcerated, and are frequently denied access to trans-specific healthcare while incarcerated.

### **Access to Sex-specific Facilities**

Transgender people are often refused access to gender-appropriate facilities like bathrooms, locker rooms and housing. Transgender people are subjected to humiliation, outing, arrest, and physical violence when attempting to access gender-appropriate facilities. Transgender people do not pose a threat to others in restrooms; this untrue claim has been used to target transgender people for discrimination.

### **Other Issues**

This document represents a small sampling of the civil rights issues facing transgender people. Other important issues include safe school environments, discriminatory immigration policies, special privacy rights concerns, and access to social services such as homeless shelters.

## SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

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Date

The Honorable (First and Last name)  
United State Senate or House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510  
VIA FAX

Dear Senator/Representative (Last name):

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us on [date] to discuss the rights of transgender people living in our [insert name of district/state here]. We appreciate your time and attention to this issue that is of vital concern to your transgender constituents.

As we discussed in the meeting,

- Transgender people face pervasive discrimination and violence.
- Transgender people are not protected from discrimination on the federal level.
- A growing number of states and localities prohibit this type of discrimination, yet coverage remains spotty and is often not enforced.

We look forward to working with you to address these issues and to create a safer and more just society for all, regardless of their gender identity. We ask that you support legislation to bring this about. [Include name of specific legislation, if applicable]

[If you were asked a question that you could not answer at the time or need to follow up on any information, include it here. If it is longer than one paragraph, include it as a one-page attachment, remembering to be brief and clear in all of your communications.]

Again, thank you for your time. If there is any way that I can be helpful to you, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Organization (if applicable)  
Address  
City, State and Zip

Note: It is best to send your thank you letter by e-mail or fax as it will arrive in a much timelier manner. The process to screen letters for contaminants is lengthy and will delay the arrival of your letter until long after your meeting.

## SAMPLE LETTER ON AN ISSUE

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Date

The Honorable (First and Last name)  
United State Senate or House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator/Representative (Last name):

I am writing to you out of deep concern for the health care needs of transgender people. Because we are not protected by federal legislation and because of widespread discrimination against our community, we often fail to receive adequate health care. Compounding this problem is insurance regulations which deny us needed services and benefits. I believe that all Americans deserve access to compassionate and competent medical care.

While I now have an excellent physician who works with me, I had to search long and hard for decent health care services. Just last year, a doctor refused to see me because I am transgender. I am concerned about what might happen to me should I need emergency health care services. I urge you to consider sponsoring legislation that provides equal access to medical care for transgender people and prohibits discrimination based on gender identity. [If you are writing in response to a particular piece of legislation, include its name and bill number here and state specifically how you would like them to vote on it.]

If you have any questions about this subject, please feel free to contact me at any time. I would be glad to talk with you about it.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Organization (if applicable)  
Address  
City, State and Zip



1325 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 903-0112 ▪ [ncte@nctequality.org](mailto:ncte@nctequality.org) ▪ [www.nctequality.org](http://www.nctequality.org)