



## Citizens guide on engaging with elected leadership

Connecticut legislators are ordinary men and women elected by communities to represent their interests. They chose to step up and represent the needs of a community as a function of civil society. The hum of an active engaged citizenry is music to the ears of any legislator, because they need feedback from their community to execute their duties appropriately. At this time nationally, cynicism and apathy are insidiously used to suppress citizen engagement, but not so at the state level. Being mindful of these will limit their negative effect, protecting a free and easy discourse between legislators and their communities.

### Information

Obtaining reliable information is necessary for citizen engagement. There are three current news feeds in Connecticut considered least influenced by bias. These are: CT News Junkie, Connecticut Mirror, and NPR's The Wheelhouse. Additionally, signing onto several Connecticut based groups that represent issues of personal interest to receive "alerts" and "actions" will keep a citizen aware of current time sensitive events such as public hearings, town meetings, publications, etc. Examples of groups including 350 CT are the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters, the Sierra Club, Clean Water Action, and Citizens Campaign for the Environment, etc.

### Communication

In all communications be polite. It is the lubricant for two way civil discourse.

1. **Write** - Send a brief handwritten letter. Be mindful a legislator has limited reading time. A hand written letter is more personal and telegraphs sincerity, interest, and effort on the part of the citizen.
2. **Phone** - A personal conversation by phone with a legislator is often welcome.
3. **Email** - Often least effective method of communication, because a citizens message can be missed in the homogeneity of this form of communication.
4. **Social media** - Unless indicated by a legislator as their preferred avenue of communication with citizens, social media communication has low impact.
5. **Meetings** - Legislators serve the needs of their constituents and meetings are part of their job. Citizens can call legislators' offices and make appointments to meet with them. Personal interaction is important.
6. **Public hearings** - As part of the legislative process, time is set aside for live public comment. These "hearings" are a citizen's opportunity to speak. Each speaker is allowed 3 minutes. A prepared testimonial of no more than 300 words will allow for a comfortable delivery. It also condenses thoughts and ideas.
7. **Town hall meetings** - Legislators that schedule town hall meetings are inviting citizen input. This is a traditional New England event and provides an open forum for civil discourse.
8. **Repeat** - Citizens should be comfortable repeating any of the afore mentioned activities. Experience is gained, relationships are built, and agendas that favor the needs of Connecticut communities are moved forward. The halls of the Connecticut legislature are populated by paid lobbyists who are often employed by self serving commercial interests. Their influence can be countered by citizen involvement.

"Stay informed, stay active, and the integrity of good legislation shall be preserved."

- The Steering Committee 350 CT. (January 2018)