

Contacting Your Elected Officials

When members of Congress, the State Legislature and other elected officials are deliberating about policy issues, correspondence from constituents often plays a significant role. Letters and emails from the public can influence a policymaker's decision, especially if the letters are timely and provide relevant input. Identifying yourself as a community college student can be particularly impactful, given a college's place in the community.

However, also keep in mind that in Congress mailed letters must go through a lengthy security process. Therefore, it is advisable to transmit correspondence via email whenever possible, though this can be followed up by written correspondence. When a vote is imminent on an issue, telephone calls may be the best option, and if you can't get through to a member or his/her staff, an email message can be used.

Tips for Effective Written Correspondence

- **Use the correct title, address, and salutation for your elected official.** Wallace State government relations staff also can help you with this. Sample letters are included below.

To find the contact information, use the Contact Your Member section of [this website](#) to look up your Congressperson or State Legislator's office contact information. Congress can be located easily online on the U.S. www.house.gov or www.senate.gov websites. For Alabama State House and Senate members, www.legislature.state.al.us, or if you aren't sure which district you fall into, visit <http://capwiz.com/state-al/home/>.

The President of the United States can be contacted here: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/> or

For local elected officials in Cullman County, visit www.co.cullman.al.us; for the City of Hanceville, visit www.cityofhanceville.net; for the City of Cullman, visit www.cullmanal.gov/government; for Blount County, visit www.blountcountyal.gov; and Oneonta City, www.cityofoneonta.us. Wallace State's main campus is located in Hanceville, AL in Cullman County; and its first satellite campus is located in Oneonta, in Blount County.

- **Be brief and to the point.** Refer to Wallace State's government affairs [webpage](#) or contact government relations staff for talking points or sample letters on priority issues. Generally, letters should focus on only one or two issues. Personal stories about how the issue affects you as a constituent often resonate the most. Include specific facts and figures if you have them.

- **Summarize the topic in the subject line.** When you transmit your letter via email, this will ensure that the information is identified as relevant and relayed to and read by appropriate staff.

- **Include your contact information in the letter.** Let your legislator know that you are available for follow-up questions or discussions.

Tips for Telephone Calls

- **Prepare talking points.** Check with Wallace State’s government relations staff if you would like additional information prior to calling. Talking points should indicate your position on the topic, how it will impact you and other college students or the college, and the action wanted from the congressional office (i.e., support or oppose).
- **Find the relevant telephone number.** Numbers for members of Congress can be located easily online on the U.S. www.House.gov or www.Senate.gov websites or via the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121. Members of Congress and the Alabama Legislature in the College’s service area can also be found on the Contact Your Member section of [this website](#). For other State House and Senate members, or if you aren’t sure which district you fall into, visit <http://capwiz.com/state-al/home/> or <http://www.legislature.state.al.us>. The President of the United States can be contacted by calling 202-456-1111 or 202-456-1414.

For local elected officials in Cullman County, visit www.co.cullman.al.us or call 256-775-4878; for the City of Hanceville, visit www.cityofhanceville.net or call 256-352-9830; for the City of Cullman, visit www.cullmanal.gov/government or call 256-739-1212; for Blount County, visit www.blountcountyal.gov or call 205-625-4160; and Oneonta City, www.cityofoneonta.us or call 205-274-2150. Wallace State’s main campus is located in Hanceville, AL in Cullman County; and its first satellite campus is located in Oneonta, in Blount County.

- **Identify yourself as a constituent when you call.** Ask to speak with the staff person who handles higher education or workforce issues, or whatever area you are calling about. U.S. Senate staff tend to be more specialized than their House counterparts. State and local officials have fewer staff, and are more likely to take your call directly. Be brief and make sure that you don’t do all the talking. When a vote is imminent, there often will not be time to discuss the issue and the staff will only want to know if you are for or against the bill in question.
- **Always thank the staff for his/her time and consideration of your views.** This is important even if the legislator/official is not receptive to your position on that particular issue. Again, the importance of saying “thank you” cannot be overstated.

Resources for Community College Advocacy

AACC - www.aacc.nche.edu/advocacy
ACCT - www.acct.org/advocacy
ACCS - <https://www.accs.cc/index.cfm/departments-services/external-affairs/>
WSCC - <http://www.wallacestate.edu/marketing/talkingpoints>

See also: “What Calling Congress Achieves,” *The New Yorker*, March 6, 2017
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/06/what-calling-congress-achieves>

Sample letter on an issue (email to staff that handles the issue):

Your Name
Your Street Address
Your City, State Zip

October 1, 2XXX

The Honorable [First name] [last name]
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [last name]:

As a student of Wallace State Community College in [city], Alabama, I am writing to express strong support for the continuation of year-round Pell Grants...

I am [include something about your personal story here and why financial aid is essential to your being able to attend college]

Being able to attend college year-round is important to me because... [my program requires it/I want to save time toward a degree / I plan to transfer to a university.../I support myself and need to begin a career / I have a family and need to finish college and start a career quickly/etc...]. I am pursuing a degree in [your program] and intend to use this degree to pursue a career in...

I urge you to support the continuation of year-round Pell Grants, which benefit me and so many other students. Please call me at _____ or email me at _____ if I can provide further information.

Sincerely,