



# Grassroots Handbook



A publication of the New Hampshire Automobile Dealers Association

## It's Personal.

A survey of Congress found that it took less than 10 constituent contacts on an issue to raise that issue to one of importance for a member of Congress. For the NH State Legislature, one letter or phone call can change the course of legislation. Make no doubt about it: grassroots involvement has power!

Each year over 1,000 bills are introduced in Concord plus thousands more at the federal level. Most legislators are not experts on motor vehicle sales and service so they may be unaware how a proposal impacts your business and employees *unless* they hear from you. What you have to say matters! You are their constituents and you vote.

Your knowledge, expertise and involvement bring a critical element to legislators and their understanding of issues. The hands-on motor vehicle perspective is especially important in analyzing the effect a bill may have on an industry that represents 24% of NH retail sales.

NHADA Grassroots is designed to make your involvement in the legislative process as easy and, hopefully, enjoyable as possible. NHADA will provide the information, the insight, the strategy, and the assistance you need in order to easily but positively impact the legislative process. To join this free program, contact NHADA at 800-852-3372 or log onto [www.nhada.com](http://www.nhada.com).

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## Communicate With Your Elected Officials

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Q: What is the most effective way to communicate with a legislator?

A: Studies show that it is still the age-old face-to-face meeting. A personalized letter, personal phone call, faxed letter and email correspondence follow next. One of the least effective ways of communicating with your legislators is form email letters or faxes.

Communicating with your legislators is very important. They need to know that someone in their district cares enough about an issue to write a letter, pick up the phone or set up a meeting. Use these tips to assist you in being the most effective grassroots communicator.

### Basic Tips (for all communications)

There are three primary ways you can communicate with your elected officials: 1) correspondence (letters, faxes, emails); 2) telephone contacts; or 3) personal visits. While each method is different, certain rules hold true for all of them.

- **Be Brief.** To be effective, you need to be succinct and brief.
- **Be Accurate:** Never give false or misleading information.
- **Personalize Your Message:** Cite examples from your own experience of how the issue will impact your community, business, employees or customers.
- **Be Prepared.** Know the issue. Also, find out where your legislator stands on the issue and if they have how they voted in the past. (NHADA will help you with this).
- **Be Politically Aware.** Every issue has at least two sides. Always remember that by supporting your side of an issue, a legislator may go against another constituent. He or she needs to be convinced that the choice being made is factually correct and politically wise.
- **Be Courteous/Don't Threaten.** Please don't say things like "I'll never vote for you again." Keep in mind that there may be other issues where you or NHADA will work with this legislator – a cordial relationship keeps that door open.
- **Be Patient.** Affecting policy change is a long-term process so don't be discouraged if the results of your activities are not immediately apparent. Remember that in politics, relationships take time to develop and it's the cumulative result that matters.

### Tips on Grassroots Letter and Email Writing

(in addition to the above Basic Tips, Page 3)

- Address your legislator properly.
- Use business, if appropriate, or personal stationery (if writing a letter) and include your **voting and business address**.
- State your relationship to the legislator (i.e.: "as a constituent") and your reason for writing in the first several sentences.
- Keep your letter to one page, if possible.
- Be factual. Always include a bill's number and subject or title if applicable. (NHADA will help you with this.)
- Let them know how long you have been in business and how many people you employ.

- Be direct. Tell your legislator what action you would like him or her to take (i.e.: vote for/against legislation, cosponsor legislation) and the legislations or actions impact on you and your business.
- Be specific. Ask the legislator for a response to a specific question about their stance on an issue and let them know you will be interested in knowing how they vote.
- Indicate your willingness to serve as a resource on this or other motor vehicle issues.

#### **For Members of the State Senate and House**

##### **Senators**

State Senator \_\_\_\_\_  
 New Hampshire State Senate  
 107 North Main Street  
 Concord, NH 03301

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_:

##### **Representatives**

State Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Representative:

#### **For Members of U.S. Senate and Congress**

##### **U.S. Senators**

The Honorable (full name)  
 United States Senate  
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (last name):

##### **U.S. House**

The Honorable (full name)  
 United States House  
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative (last name):

Find mail and email addresses for state legislators NHADA's "Find Your Elected Official" link on [NHADA.com/Advocacy](http://NHADA.com/Advocacy)

#### **Sample Letter/Email:**

Dear Senator Smith:

Opening Paragraph:

- State the subject of your letter
- Use the bill number or name, if available
- Identify yourself and your business, how many employees and how long you've been in business

Body of Letter:

- Explain the issue simply and factually at a level the senator or representative will understand
- Give a local example of the impact of the issue to make the legislator care.
- State your position on the bill or provision, whether you support or oppose it.

Closing:

- Thank the senator or representative for their attention to the issue.
- Let the senator or representative know you are a resource for more information and to contact you with any questions

#### **Following-up Your Correspondence**

Please make sure to send NHADA copies of your correspondence with elected officials, including their response(s)! This is also important in tracking grassroots communications.

## **Calling Your Elected Officials**

A telephone call is one of the fastest ways to make your views known to your Representative and Senator. Most NH Representatives list their home phone numbers because they have no office at the State House. It is perfectly acceptable to call them at home. State Senators do have State House offices with staff and can often be reached there.

To telephone your legislator's office, if applicable, use the "Find Your Elected Official" website link on [NHADA.com/advocacy](http://NHADA.com/advocacy) to find your list of legislators or call us at 603/224-2369, and we'll provide you the information you need.

Before placing a call, review the previous Basic Tips on Page 3 and make sure:

- You have a clear idea of the message you want to communicate. We will provide you these talking points in our NHADA fact sheets!
- Your facts and arguments are organized in a clear, coherent manner – you'll only have a few minutes to make them.
- You can state exactly what action you want taken on the issue (Example: Please vote to pass or kill House Bill 123).

If neither the legislator nor the staff member is available, leave a message. You can either ask to be called back, or you can leave a brief message that states your position and what action you'd like taken (example: please vote to stop House Bill 123). Leave an address or telephone number in case the legislator wants to respond with a letter or call.

## **Arranging One-on-One Meetings**

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The single most effective way to communicate your message to an elected official is through a face-to-face meeting.

A face-to-face meeting can take place at the State House, an official's home town, your business or some other venue. Call your legislator's office and ask to speak to the person in charge of scheduling. (U.S. Reps and Senators have a scheduler; State Senators have an assistant, as most State Reps don't have an office, contact them directly). You may be asked to specify a date, time, meeting topic and who will attend. Be prepared to briefly state the subject(s) you are interested in discussing. Call to confirm your meeting a few days before it is scheduled to occur.

The U.S. Representatives and Senators are often extraordinary busy and have meetings with constituents and lobbyists all day long. As such, a meeting may be with a staff person, not the legislator, which is why it may be helpful to prepare a letter or fact sheet as well to leave with the staffer.

### **Preparing for the Meeting** (in addition to the previous Basic Tips, Page 3)

Be prepared to talk about the issue you wish to discuss. The importance of proper preparation for your meeting cannot be overemphasized. Much of the information you will need to prepare is available through NHADA, such as fact sheets, updates on the bill status, supporters/opposition.

Before you attend your meeting, you should:

- Find out how the issue has played out in the press – articles, op-eds, editorial statements on local television, etc. If the press coverage has been favorable to your point of view, get copies to distribute during your meeting
- Find out if the elected official has voted on it in the past or has stood out on the issue.
- Obtain copies of fact sheets, relevant studies, and position papers that help explain the position succinctly and that can be left with the legislator or their staff at the conclusion of the meeting. NHADA can provide information on these.

## During the Meeting

- Follow the Basic Tips on Page 3.
- Be on time. Make certain you reach your appointment on time or a few minutes early.
- Start off by introducing yourself and explaining the purpose of the meeting.
- State your views clearly. Include personal experiences and illustrations to make key points.
- Listen. Don't do all the talking. Your member might have legitimate concerns about the issue that you should address.
- Leave something in writing. Take a letter that supports the issue, a policy position paper on the issue, a fact sheet, or other relevant materials, such as newspaper articles, so that the legislator or staff can refer to it after you've gone. Make sure your name, address and telephone number is either imprinted or securely attached to it.
- Keep the door open for further discussion. Even if your member seems to be leaning against your position, don't write him or her off. Consider your meeting an investment that may well pay off in the future.

**Plan the meeting carefully.**

**Think about what you want to say and how to frame your message positively.**

**NHADA can help with any aspect of this.**

## Following-up Your Meeting

Send a letter to the legislator and his or her staff person thanking them for their time and reaffirming your views and any agreements made during the meeting.

## Building Relationships with Elected Officials

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There is no limit to the positive role you can have in the legislative process. While knowledge and expertise are powerful, those alone may not win the day. Establishing relationships with legislators and serving as a trusted resource to them can. In other words, expanding your sphere of influence is essential to legislative success. Good politics depends on ongoing ties with both your legislators and their staff. You may not line up on every issue but agreeing to disagree on one issue and work cooperatively on others is a winning approach.

## **Tips on Getting to Know Legislators/Staff**

If you don't know your legislators, introduce yourself and your business. Provide them with any relevant information they may find useful, ask to set up an introduction meeting with the legislator or offer them a tour of your business.

Legislative offices, especially federal, are always looking for activities for the legislator while he/she is in the district – they generally welcome suggestions for events, especially if there is some press potential. If you are opening a new portion of your business or have remodeled, or are celebrating an anniversary, consider inviting your local lawmakers. Contact NHADA at 603-224-2369 to confirm the legislator's interest in the program and how to approach them. Next, contact your legislator, tell them what you are doing, and invite the legislator to be a part of the event.

Remember that correspondence, meetings or events with elected officials work best if they are coordinated with NHADA – coordination helps to ensure that we are meeting with the appropriate legislators at the appropriate time, and our effectiveness is maximized.

## **Events to Interact With Legislators**

There are a wide variety of ways to interact with your legislators:

- Invite lawmakers to visit/tour your business.
- Arrange a breakfast, lunch, or dinner meeting with a particular legislator.
- Attend a fundraiser or house party (especially during election season).
- Introduce yourself to them at community events (Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, etc.)
- Recognize your legislator's activities in your business or employee newsletter or website.
- Award a particularly responsive legislator with a certificate or plaque.
- Identify certain press venues which are appropriate vehicles for interacting with your Legislator (i.e.: an anniversary or grand re-opening).
- Provide relevant and timely resources about your business or issues – this begins to establish you as a trusted resource to your legislators.
- Be involved politically, if appropriate. From campaign literature drops to contributing to a Political Action Committee, there are many ways to become involved with the election/campaign side of politics.
- Follow your legislator through Social Media and encourage them to follow you through yours.

## **Hosting a Visit**

Most legislators are anxious to visit their local business. It is an opportunity for them to learn something new about the motor vehicle industry, an opportunity to see businesses "at work," and an opportunity to meet new constituents. It's also an opportunity for you to "show off" your facility, your services and the high quality work you provide your customers and community.

- Be aware of the legislator's time constraints.
- Know whether or not the press is welcome to attend the event.
- Let the legislator know the format of the visit. Plan an agenda – how much time for a tour, how much time for discussion.

- Prepare a briefing paper for the legislator – something to take back to the office that has the highlights of the points made on the visit.
- Be flexible. Sometimes last minute cancellations happen; sometimes the legislator has another agenda item on his or her mind.
- Provide the legislator with a list of people included in the meeting or key personnel on the tour.
- If allowed, take advantage of a photo opportunity for you and the legislator

Be aware that some times of the year are better than others to schedule visits. NHADA staff can help you plan a successful tour and work with the legislator to set up the visit.

## **Use the Media**

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NHADA members often have a very good relationship with their local media outlets. An effective tool in influencing public opinion and policy, the media plays an equally important role in educating the community on a piece of legislation and the problems it addresses.

Newspaper articles or letters to the editor have an additional impact on, and allow the legislator to see, how important the issue is to his or her constituency. You can write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper to alert the general public about problems that need to be addressed or to applaud a local legislator. You can also comment on on-line media stories in the comments section. This often influences public perception.

It is best for advancement of an issue if NHADA knows what you will be doing with the media. We may be able to provide timely and relevant information of which you may not be aware.

## **Interacting With the Media**

You will be a valuable resource for the media, but it takes some time and effort on your part. You can begin by developing relationships with local reporters, editors and news directors. Get to know them so that they will turn to you for information or insights on motor vehicle issues. Yes, this is a long-term process that needs to be cultivated, but its benefits can be immeasurable.

Follow these general rules when working to cultivate media relations and when interacting with the press.

- Be honest and straightforward. Your credibility is everything.
- Don't think members of the press are your adversaries. Reporters depend on you for information and the facts to be able to do their job. Help them.
- Provide information or brochures on motor vehicle issues.
- Do not get bogged down in minutia – break down complex information into a succinct and understandable form. You are an expert on the subject, they may not be.
- Localize the issue by using real-life examples that impact your city, your business, your communities, your employees.
- Stick with the facts. Do not speculate or overstate your position or arguments. (It's that credibility issue again – you do not want to lose yours!)

Remember that when speaking with a reporter you are “on the record”. Anything you say may end up quoted in the paper. Don't be petrified; simply be aware.



## Writing Letters to the Editor

Follow these general tips when writing letters to the editor (though publication policies vary, the following advice pertains to most newspapers):

- Keep your letter brief. Many newspapers will not consider letters longer than 200-300 words (1 to 1 ½ typed, double-spaced pages). Type your letters if you can; editors often won't read letters that aren't typed.
- Give your full name, address, and telephone number. Anonymous letters generally are not published.
- Keep to the point. If you are writing in response to a news story or editorial, you don't need to give many background details. If you are explaining legislation, try to keep it simple. In either case, state your views quickly and in an organized way. Be sure to use accurate facts.
- Be polite, even when you disagree with the story or editorial you are responding to.
- Don't get discouraged if your letter is not printed. Editors receive countless letters and they simply don't have room to print all of them. Try again with another angle on the problem or look for another story to respond to at a later date.

Ever heard of the saying, “staying on message?”

Well, our “message” will be louder and more effective if we work in concert with one another.

## How A Bill Becomes A Law...And How You Can Be Involved!

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New Hampshire's legislative process can seem difficult to understand, but there are simple ways you can impact it during each step.

Even before a bill is officially introduced, you can begin your grassroots advocacy. From urging your legislator to cosponsor a bill, to testifying at hearings, to writing the Governor, there are practical ways for you to be involved and have your voice heard on issues of importance to you, your business and the communities you serve.

**Serve as a Resource.** NHADA is a constant resource for information to the Legislature. Often times legislators request that NHADA review an idea or bill draft prior to their official introduction of it. In the same way, YOU can serve as a resource for your local lawmakers. Begin by establishing a relationship with your legislators and then offer yourself and your business as a resource on issues.

**Ask a Legislator to Co-sponsor a Bill.** When legislators solicit cosponsors for legislation, often times a simple call or letter from a constituent - you – encouraging them to cosponsor (or “sign onto”) that bill will have the desired effect. The more cosponsors a bill has, the better; constituent input can be extremely important to legislators especially at this preliminary stage of the game.

**Contacting Legislators about a Bill.** There are several other means of contacting your legislator when a bill is in committee. These include writing a letter, telephoning, or meeting with legislators. By writing a letter you can highlight for a legislator (who may or may not be as versed in that

particular subject) what is good or bad in a bill. Legislators often times look to see if they have any letters or other correspondence from constituents before voting. Meeting with them is even more effective.

**Influencing Floor action.** Make a call or write a letter. Suppose a bill is up on the floor (up for a vote before the full House or Senate) and your legislator does not have a strong feeling either way on it but has heard from a constituent – you – in opposition to the bill. Don't underestimate its importance here. That phone call or letter just may be the deciding factor. With 400 House members, NHADA staff cannot individually reach each person. This is where you and your employees are all that much more important.

**Contacting the Governor.** When a bill is before the Governor for final action, it is always a good idea to contact the Governor indicating your support or opposition. A letter or call is a good way to do so.

## Testifying at a Hearing

Did you ever think you would one day find yourself sitting before a legislative committee testifying on a piece of legislation? It's great that you are! It is important that you testify because you are uniquely qualified to provide the motor vehicle perspective on issues of importance. As you prepare, here are a few words of encouragement.

First, remember that your work in the motor vehicle field gives you information and experiences that most legislators will not have. They will look to you to provide that expertise on the subject matter. Second, your background also gives you the “real-life” perspective of how legislation will impact you and your business. Legislators need to hear the personal stories that only you can provide. Finally, if you do not present the motor vehicle side of the issue, who will?

Although natural to feel slightly intimidated by the prospect of testifying, keep the following tips in mind and you'll do just fine.

### Do...

- **Be short and concise.** A general rule of thumb is to prepare to testify for five minutes and then respond to questions. Don't repeat what others have said.
- **Be clear.** If you must use complex terms, explain them. This helps you make sure that legislators understand the points you are trying to make.
- **Know your issue.** Legislators are there to listen and learn, but it is also important to show them you are qualified to speak. Knowing the issue and the legislation are important in this regard, as is the other side's viewpoint.
- **Bring copies of your testimony** to provide committee members. Legislators can include this in their bill files and you can use it to add points that did not fit into your verbal testimony.
- **Know your audience.** Who is the chair of the committee? How has the committee voted on the issue before? Are there certain committee members you're trying to sway? (NHADA will help you!)
- **Be prepared to answer questions.** Legislators may ask you questions, some might even be fairly tough. There's no need to worry, just be prepared.
- **Use real-life examples of how your business, employees, customers and community will be impacted.**
- **Contact NHADA.** We are always willing to assist you in your grassroots advocacy efforts!

### **Don't...**

- **Read your written testimony word for word.**
- **Fudge the facts – ever.** If you don't know the answer, say so and indicate you will follow up with additional information after the hearing.
- **Yell or verbally spar with committee members.** It's not worth it. You might really like to do so but it is best for the issue and for your business that you remain calm and cool during your testimony.
- **Talk down to them.**
- **Let it ruffle your feathers if legislators walk in and out of the hearing.** It is common for legislators to come in and out of a hearing due to other legislative hearings or business.
- **Forget to schedule your day appropriately.** Legislative hearings can take hours, sometimes all day. Be prepared to stay so you can testify.

So you're all set to testify, but now you're wondering how best to get your point across to legislators during your testimony. Your best approach will be to tell legislators your story. While other individuals who testify may be able to provide more facts or statistics, only you can provide legislators with the real-life impact this issue will have on you, your employees or customers. That is a powerful testimony to give. As you prepare your testimony, follow this simple outline. It will provide legislators with the key information they need to hear.

### **Outline for Testimony**

1. Introduction. State who you are, your background, who you represent, how many people you employ and how long you have been in business.
2. State your position on the legislation (for, against, or providing testimony for information only)
3. State your case. Testify on why this issue is important to you, how it will impact your business, employees, customers, and community. Include real-life examples whenever possible.
4. If possible, supply an alternative means to accomplishing the same goal or provide another option for legislators to consider.
5. Close by repeating your position and asking if you can answer any questions.

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