



THE FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL AMPUTEE ACTIVISM

STEP 1: Understand your issue!

Is there a new bill pending that would hurt people with limb loss/difference? Is a state or federal agency enforcing or failing to enforce a regulation that would help amputees? If you're going to call your representative and/or senators, you should have a specific reason for doing so. Before you can do anything, you have to understand the issue well enough to write a letter or arrange for a telephone or in-person meeting with your congressman.

This doesn't mean that you have to become a policy expert. Instead, stay engaged with your local amputee support group, organizations tracking issues affecting amputees, and your prosthetist. These resources will (1) flag anything requiring your involvement and (2) provide you information and materials necessary for you to fully understand the issue.

- Identify the resources/organizations you will rely on to get information.
- When issues are brought to you, take the time to fully understand them.
- Review any available information and ask questions to learn more.

STEP 2: Where does the information sit?

Is the issue you need to engage with politicians about a federal or state one? Does it involve the House of Representatives, Senate or both?

The last thing you want to do is waste your time and that of elected officials with an issue that they cannot affect or control. So making sure you know where your issue sits is critically important. As an activist, always make sure to ask the following questions to appropriately target where to go with your issue:

1. Federal or state?
2. Senate or House (in states, terminology can vary – for example, in NY, you have (a) the State Senate and (2) the Assembly (instead of a “House of Representatives”).

- Always make sure you know where to go with your “ask”.
- If confused, go to organizations or individuals familiar with the issue.



STEP 3: Finding your Representative or Senators

For federal issues, you will be speaking to your Representative and/or Senators.

To locate your U.S. Representative, click [here](#).

To locate your U.S. Senators, click [here](#).

The structure of state legislatures generally mirrors that of the federal government. Download the **amp'd State Legislator Locator** for all 50 states for information on how to locate your state representatives.

Use the resources above to locate the right elected official to speak with.

STEP 4: Ways to Communicate

There are 3 main ways to connect with your legislator(s): (1) in writing, (2) over the phone, and (3) in person.

Writing is the easiest way to reach an elected official but it is also the method most likely to be “tossed in a pile” and/or dealt with via an automated response. However, if you are unable to connect with your legislator in person, sending a letter or email is undoubtedly better than doing nothing. Often, the organizations mentioned in Step 2, above, will have model letters addressing key issues that you can easily personalize.

Direct conversations with elected officials – either over the phone or in person – are generally more effective than an email. However, they can be harder to arrange. Federal lawmakers have staff located in offices both in Washington DC and back in their home state/district. The local offices in your home state are often easier to deal with because they tend to be less busy and the staff, like you, are local. Building relationships at the local level is always advisable.

In-person meetings need to be scheduled ahead of time. Also, more often than not, these meetings will be with staffers, not the actual lawmaker him or herself. But you should never view a meeting with a staffer as a “step down” or a waste of time. These individuals often have better specific subject matter knowledge than their boss and can be enormously influential and helpful.

Use email/snail mail when an issue is time sensitive and phone/in-person meetings aren't possible under the circumstances.

Use phone if mobility issues prevent you from an in-person visit.

Use in-person if time and your mobility permit it.

For phone and in-person, never hesitate to ask for the healthcare staffer if you are told that the congressman/woman isn't available.



STEP 5: How to Prepare for a Phone/In-Person Meeting

We subscribe to the “keep it simple, stupid” method of preparation. When politicians or their staffers meet with voters, they are not expecting a presentation from a policy wonk – they want to hear from you: a normal person. So prepare, but don’t get so worked up that you paralyze yourself.

The most important thing you can do to have a successful phone/in-person meeting is to use the BLUF method of communication: **B**ottom **L**ine **U**p **F**ront. What this means is you start by *immediately* explaining the issue and what you’re asking for. Here’s an example based on a real issue:

Thanks so much for taking the time to meet with me. My name is David McGill. I am an above-knee amputee. I lost my leg while acting as a Good Samaritan 20 years ago. I’m here to ask the Senator to sign onto a letter to the Director of the NY insurance exchange and to support a bill addressing the same issue. Some insurance companies are illegally denying New York amputees access to medically necessary prosthetic care. Specifically, federal law prohibits insurers on the exchanges from asserting annual or lifetime caps on certain benefits, including prosthetics. But all exchange plans are denying prosthetic claims based on a ‘one prosthesis per limb per lifetime’ limit. I’m therefore hopeful that the Senator will consider signing onto a letter to the Director of the NY insurance exchange authored by Senator Brown and supporting bill number 12345 that would permanently solve this problem.”

Activism feels mechanical and awkward if you don’t do it a lot. It is ok to use notes and other information to ensure that you don’t forget anything during your conversation. We strongly recommend that you practice saying what you plan on saying beforehand – OUT LOUD. That’s right – sit by yourself in a room and pretend a stranger is sitting across from you and you have only a few minutes to tell them what you’re asking for. Do this at least 3 times – hearing yourself and identifying the areas where you stumble will help you overcome any difficulty during the actual conversation.

Additional Phone-Specific Tips: (1) start by giving your name/city/zip code; (2) if you do not want a specific response but just want to register opposition or support for something, say, “I don’t need a response.”

- Use BLUF – get right to the point. The legislator or staffer will love you for it.
- Practice. Out loud. Several times.
- On the phone, start with name/city/zip – it helps the staffer.



BONUS TIP

ALWAYS follow up a phone/in-person meeting with a thank you!

Any time you have an actual conversation with legislators or their staffers, *send a reply email thanking them for their time and, if appropriate, provide them supplemental information!*

These are human beings. They spend all day dealing with constituents, the vast majority of whom are *not* contacting them to tell them how happy they are. Their desire to help you and advance your requests can only be enhanced by a thoughtful thank you note after the meeting.

Also, in many meetings, they may ask you for information that you don't know, don't have on you, or that you cannot provide because in the stress of the moment, you get rattled. *That is ok!* Telling them that you will get back to them with additional information just creates another interaction between you and them, and repeated interactions lead to real relationships.

Oh – and in the “it’s so obvious we shouldn’t have to say it but we will” category – make sure at the end of every conversation with a staffer or legislator that you have not spoken to before that you get their email address. You know – so you can *send* your thank you note.

- Always send a thank you after a phone or in-person meeting.
- Forward any supplemental information that’s appropriate afterwards.
- Get the person’s email before the meeting ends!