**Tips for Contacting Elected Leaders**

**1. Connect through a phone call:** Phone calls are the most effective way to connect with a decision maker and let them know how you’d like them to act on an issue. Hand-written letters are the second most effective followed by emails and auto-actions, so take a few minutes to pick up the phone and call them!

* It’s ok to feel nervous or intimidated, but please don’t let nerves keep you from picking up that phone! Your call is one of the most important ways you can connect with your Representative. Elected officials receive dozens of calls every day from people in their state/district. You don’t have to know the issue perfectly to have a valid opinion on how your Rep. should act on it.
* Telephone calls are usually answered by a staff person. Ask to speak with the legislative aide who handles the energy/environmental issues. If no one is available, ask if you can leave a message.
* Before you pick up the phone, spend a minute or two thinking about what you want to say to increase your confidence and help you be succinct.
* Identify yourself as a constituent and state the reasons that you support or oppose an issue or specific piece of legislation (Use bill numbers and popular bill names if calling about legislation).
* Ask your representative to take a specific action by telling him/her what you want. Example: “I would like Senator Graham to support America’s Climate Security Act, S.2191, because it is a first-step toward reducing carbon emissions and establishing a clean energy future for South Carolinians and all Americans.”
* Explain how the issue you are calling about affects you and why you support or oppose the elected official’s position or action on the issue.
* Ask for the Senator’s/Representative’s position on the issue. If the official’s position is the same as yours, express agreement and thank them for their leadership.
* If your position differs from the legislator’s, politely express disappointment and offer some factual information supporting your view.
* Discuss only one issue per telephone call.
* Thank the legislative assistant for his/her time and for considering your views.
* Encourage others to make a call as well. It only takes a couple of minutes to express your opinion and participate in the legislative process.

**2. Personalize Your Letters:** Taking the time to write or type a letter shows representatives that you are serious—otherwise you wouldn’t have taken time out of your busy schedule to write a letter. Use these tips for effective letters!

* Keep it simple. Only address one issue in your letter and try to keep it to one page if possible.
* State your reason for writing in the first paragraph. If you’re writing about a particular piece of legislation, include the bill’s name or number.
* Be constructive. Don’t just criticize. Offer what you consider to be the best course of action if you disagree with your legislator’s approach to an issue. Showing your passion is

appropriate, but don’t be apprehensive or rude. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

* Share your story, not just facts and figures. Including a short anecdote from your personal life can help legislators to understand what is going on back home.
* Provide reliable information. Sharing your opinion with legislators is important, but when they are debating issues with their colleagues, legislators need to have reliable information to share. Make sure you share necessary facts, news articles, new reports or other information with them to help make your case.
* Give praise. Legislators are used to feeling the heat when constituents think they’ve done something wrong. A few words of encouragement and appreciation can remind a legislator that you support other actions they’ve taken.
  + On this point, remember to call your Representative when they’ve made the right decision on something important! It’s essential that we recognize and thank them when appropriate.
* Representatives receive high volumes of emails. Although email is a quick way to share your thoughts with your legislators, it could be overlooked.

**3. Sign an online petition, action alert or send an email**

* While less effective than making a phone call or writing a letter, electronic communications are another good way to connect with elected officials.
* The same rules apply here as for calls and letters: Be clear, concise, informative and polite in all your communications with Representatives!