

# GUIDE TO CONTACTING THE U.S. CONGRESS

## NRMLA CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY

One of the greatest aspects of the U.S. political system is the accessibility to lawmakers. Unfortunately, it's not as easy as calling up your Representative's office, or your two Senators' offices and telling them your concerns.

If you really want to be effective you must be pro-active in cultivating relationships with each of your elected officials.

To get lawmakers to pay attention to our issues, they must hear from the folks back at home, from you, their constituents. This is a step-by-step guide designed to help you be effective in communicating properly with your members of Congress.

# [ YOUR VOICE IS IMPORTANT ]

As the official voice of the reverse mortgage industry in Washington, NRMLA does its share of work, too. The association has forged strong ties with members of Congress to shape federal policies that benefit both lenders and seniors alike.

While NRMLA represents the views of the reverse mortgage industry before Congress and the federal government, lawmakers are usually most impressed by contact and arguments from their constituents – you. They also respond better on an issue if they can associate it with a name and face from “back home.” This is why it’s critical for you to get involved and educate your elected representatives about reverse mortgages so that they can be convinced to take action to help our cause.

As you reach out to your Representative, it is important that you work closely with NRMLA. As an industry, we must speak as a unified force.

# WHO REPRESENTS ME IN CONGRESS?

Each of you, as you know, has one Representative that represents the Congressional district where you live and two Senators representing your state.

- U.S. House of Representatives
  - [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)
  - If you don't know who your Representative is, there is a box up on top where you can put in your zip code and it will tell you. In most cases, you will need to use the "zip + 4" code, which can be found here: <http://zip4.usps.com/zip4/welcome.jsp>
- U.S. Senate
  - [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)
- Independent site that also features information
  - [www.Congress.org](http://www.Congress.org)

So now you've found your elected officials and have learned where their state or district offices are located. You should also read their biographical material and learn which committees they serve on.

# CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES

It is important to know whether or not your Representative serves on one of the committees that matter most to us. You should also become familiar with your Representative's Committees, even if it's not the major ones of concern to us.

Members are generally listed according to rank on each committee & subcommittee website

## ■ *HOUSE*

- House Financial Services Committee
  - Subcommittee on Housing & Community Opportunity
- House Appropriations Committee
  - Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies.

## ■ *SENATE*

- Senate Banking, Housing & Urban Affairs Committee
- Senate Appropriations Committee
- Senate Special Committee on Aging

# CONTACTING CONGRESS

There are a variety of ways to contact your representative(s):

- Meet with your Lawmakers
  - Visit Capitol Hill
  - Visit Local Office
- Attend a Legislator Event or Town Hall Meeting
- Call your Legislators
- Write an E-mail or Letter

*Make sure to coordinate your efforts with NRMLA as you reach out to your representative(s).*

# [ A LOCAL OFFICE VISIT ]

- **Call the local office** and ask to speak to the Congressman's "district manager" (may have different title).
- Explain who you are, what you do and that you'd like to set up an appointment to come in to get acquainted.
- Try to meet directly with the district manager – or the elected official, if possible.
- It is important to understand that you must never mention financial contributions when meeting with the elected official or their staff in their offices. This is done separately, outside, generally with a separate campaign staff.

# [ AT THE LOCAL MEETING ]

- Explain who you are and what your company does.
- Explain reverse mortgages very simply and briefly. Gauge how much they really know by the questions they ask you.
- Be brief and to the point.
- Ask them to contact the Chairman or Chairwoman of the appropriate committee(s) to voice their interest in this matter. If they are a member of the minority party, ask them to contact the ranking minority on the committee(s).
- Leave them a one-pager on what you discussed. You can also leave the NRMLA legislative briefing paper, a 6-page background paper on HECMs.
- Find out the name of the person on their legislative staff in Washington who deals with housing matters.

# [ AFTER THE MEETING ]

- After your meeting, send a follow-up letter thanking them for their time and re-summarizing our issue(s).
- Once you've initiated the relationship, stay in touch. You must keep the relationship current.
- Try to attend campaign fundraising events. Write the checks. Make sure you talk to the candidate while there. Also, make sure you get to meet any staffers who are present.

# [ A VISIT TO CAPITOL HILL ]

Meeting with a member of Congress or congressional staff is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific legislative issue.

- **Plan Your Visit Carefully:**

- Be clear about what it is you want to achieve
- Determine in advance the member or committee staffer you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.

- **Make an Appointment:**

- Contact the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler.
- Explain your purpose and who you represent. It is easier for congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the member.
- Review the same information that you discussed with folks back in the District office.

# MEETING ON CAPITOL HILL

## ■ **Be Prompt and Patient:**

- Be punctual, flexible and patient. The Member's schedule is often crowded, so it is common for them to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a member's staff.
- Keep the meeting short and concise, about 20 minutes.

## ■ **Be Prepared:**

- Bring information and materials supporting your position, but not too much - they get inundated with paper. Prepare an agenda highlighting the issues you're presenting and the arguments for or against it; distribute to the staffer your points of view on paper.
- Members are required to take positions on many different issues. A member may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is helpful to share information and examples that demonstrate the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.

## **Be Political:**

- Members of Congress want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the member's constituency.
- If possible, describe for the member how you or your group can be of assistance to him/her.
- Ask the legislator or staff questions on the issue and how he/she will vote on the legislation.

## ■ **Be Responsive:**

- Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information.
- Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials requested.

# ATTENDING A LEGISLATOR EVENT OR TOWN HALL

These events are beneficial for both legislators and constituents.

- Legislators can address a large number of people at one time, explain his or her preferred policies, why he or she voted the way they did, and meet with constituents to hear concerns and answer questions in person.
- Town hall meetings are a great way to assemble a group or your friends or colleagues to show support or opposition for specific piece of legislation, ask questions, and meet the legislator and some of his or her staff.
- It could be a town meeting, a speech the rep is giving or a fundraising event. While there:
  - Make sure you get a chance to introduce yourself.
  - Give him or her a card.
  - Tell them you'd like to come into the office to meet with the Congressperson or a key staffer.
  - Find out who to call to arrange an appointment.
  - Call the next day to follow-up and setup that appointment.

# A CALL TO CONGRESS

- A telephone call is an effective way to get your message across to the legislator, especially if there is an impending vote on one of NRMLA's issues.
- To find your senators' and representative's phone numbers, you may use our searchable [online congressional directory](#) or call the Switchboard
  - U.S. Senate Switchboard: (202)224-3121
  - U.S. House of Representatives Switchboard: (202)225-3121
- Remember that telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member, not the member of Congress. Ask to speak with the congressional staffer who handles the issue about which you wish to comment.
- After identifying yourself, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message,
  - Example: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S.\_\_\_/H.R.\_\_\_)."
- You will also want to state reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your senators' or representative's position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call.
- Keep the message concise.

# A LETTER TO CONGRESS

- Identify yourself as a constituent
  - Start communication with name & address at the very top.
- Use Proper Salutation (see next slide)
- State purpose for writing in first paragraph.
  - If you are writing about specific legislation, be sure to identify it (e.g. House: H.R.\_\_; Senate: S.\_\_)
- Keep comments brief, pertinent and factual.
- Be courteous and constructive, not negative.
- Use examples; explain how the issue would affect you and/or your organization.
- Address only **one issue per letter**.

# SALUTATIONS - SENATE

Whether sending an e-mail or letter, it is important to use proper salutation.

## ■ U.S. Senate

### ○ *Envelope:*

The Honorable (full name)  
\_\_(Rm#)\_\_(name of) Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

### ○ *Correspondence:*

Dear Senator (followed by last name)

### ○ *When writing to the Chair of a Committee, it is proper to address them as:*

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman

# [ SALUTATIONS - HOUSE ]

- U.S. House of Representatives

- *Envelope:*

- The Honorable (full name)

- \_\_(Rm#)\_\_(name of) House Office Building

- United States House of Representatives

- Washington, DC 20515

- *Correspondence:*

- Dear Congressman/Congresswoman (followed by last name) **OR**

- Dear Representative

- *When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as:*

- Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman

- Dear Madam Speaker or Mr. Speaker

# [ E-MAILING ]

- Generally, the same guidelines apply as with writing letters to Congress. You may find and e-mail your senators and representative directly from the congressional websites.
  - [www.House.gov](http://www.House.gov)
  - [www.Senate.gov](http://www.Senate.gov)