



# Things to Think About!

## Check it Out

By Karen Morgan

Need more information? The following links will help you find government representatives for your area:



[www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm](http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm)



[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)



[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

Although SNRP maintains a strict policy of non-involvement with direct/specific lobbying groups, we feel it essential to provide information and training regarding that process. We believe individuals should have every tool available which they may need to acquire services and address issues independently within their own communities. Many special population groups (such as military families) have no other mode of recourse available to them and we would be remiss in not making this information available.

If you have a specific question that we can answer, please feel free to contact us anytime through the following email address...

[snrproject@hotmail.com](mailto:snrproject@hotmail.com)

## Can "I" Really Make a Difference? (part 1 of 2)

By Linda Jorgensen



As a former Boy Scout merit badge counselor I have seen many letters written and sent to government officials and in turn, just as many replies received. These letters, written by teenagers to politicians regarding various activities and concerns are written with, in most cases, thought and true concern. Some have been eloquent in their statements and arguments for their cause. Others have been plain and simple statements of fact with a plain question asked. Not one of those letters has gone unanswered by the official to whom the letter was written. All have been treated with the same respect and courtesy any State or National dignitary would expect and deserve.

Why is it that these young scouts can do what most adults seem to be totally incapable of? What is it they learn that we, as adults have not? How often have we complained about legislation in our states but have done nothing to let our leaders know what we are thinking?

Elected Officials are not mind readers. They rely on input from their constituents, the people who voted them into office. They make their decisions and institute changes in the community by what they hear from us. The people who live in the communities they were elected to govern.

### What Can I do?

As parents of children with special needs it is up to us to educate our elected officials regarding the issues and difficulties we face on a daily basis. We know better than most what hardships must be dealt with in our communities and what needs are going unmet. It is up to us to educate our elected officials regarding our needs and the issues we face.

And how do we educate our elected officials?

### 1. Identify the issues that most concern you in your community.

Is it the lack of funding for certain programs? Lengthy waiting lists for services a problem? Perhaps the lack of ADA compliance by community businesses is hampering your ability to move about in public. Or is the need for special education reforms or increased educational budgets more pressing? Are public transportation issues, medical insurance, accessibility of community services etc. of concern to you? Identify those issues that are most important to you.

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**What Can I Do? continued...****2. How do I find the legislators who represent me? Which voting district do I live in?**

Most state web sites have a page devoted to assisting their residents in finding their state representatives. Go to your state home page and look for a link to your State Legislature or State Assembly roster. Office addresses, e-mail addresses and office telephone numbers are provided by most states. Or call your local county clerk's office.

**3. How do I contact my legislators?**

Do like the Scouts do. Sit down and write a letter. Send it via regular post. Or, if you know your representatives web address send an e-mail. Many legislators will also allow phone calls. If contacting someone by phone be prepared to clearly state why you are calling. Be polite and to the point. Be sure to follow up with a letter thanking them for taking the time to speak with you and reiterate your stand on the issue that was discussed.

**4. How can I effectively communicate with my concerns, ideas?**

Be positive and polite. It is possible to write an angry letter and still be polite and to the point. Tell your legislator exactly what the issue is you would like to see resolved. Use credible information. Use personal experiences or reliable resources. Use research and statistics when appropriate (if available). Suggest possible solutions you would like to see. By giving your legislator the above information you are giving them tools to help resolve the issue. It is up to you to ensure your dialogue is productive.

**5. Why don't I get an answer right away?**

Don't forget that the average state senator represents approximately 70,000 citizens. A representative represents a slightly smaller number. Be patient. Allow a reasonable time for them to see, and respond to, your letter.

**6. If my legislators are so busy why should I even write?**

All legislators have office staffs devoted to processing the mail. EVERY LETTER is read and your legislator is able to view correspondence and direct specific replies. They may take your letter with them into the session to remind of them of goals they need to achieve for their constituents. But again, they are not mind readers! You need to tell them what YOU need.

**7. When should I contact my legislator about something I would like to see changed in law?**

Most state legislatures and Assemblies go back into General Session in January after the Holiday Break. Don't wait! The minute you identify an issue, communicate it! It is not unusual for individuals to start communicating concerns months in advance of a General Session. Don't wait until it's too late! Don't forget. Legislators are not mind readers! Tell them what you need.

**8. How can I encourage others to become more aware of key issues facing my community?**

Discussing issues of importance to you with others is the first step in educating those in your close community group. Encourage neighbors, family and friend to follow the news, read newspapers, write letters of their own, and to think about the issues they see in your community that need to be addressed.



**Remember.** As a concerned citizen you CAN make a difference by helping your legislators understand and focus on issues that matter to you. One legislator's vote can make a difference in whether or not a bill becomes law.

Take a few minutes and write your legislator or Congressman. You'll be glad you did!

*See next month's newsletter for Part 2: Letter writing and the Military Family.*