

## Legislator Contact Checklist

### *A Grassroots Guide*

**Purpose: To guide COS volunteers in appropriate, impactful, systematic outreach to their state legislators.**

#### Step 1 - Sign the COSA Petition

This is the most basic form of outreach. It's important, because it helps to build the number of petition signers in the district. This number will frequently be reported to the legislators, so don't skip this step! However, this contact is highly impersonal, so the following contacts are definitely still needed.

#### Step 2 - Contact your state's Legislative Liaison to determine your legislators' positions on COS.

It's helpful to know what your team already knows about your legislators' position on COS. While it is possible that you will be the first constituent to ever make contact and discuss COS, it is also quite possible that they have been hearing from constituents for years, and that we already know where they stand. In this case, your contact is still vital, but you want to go in armed with all the information we have. If the legislator is a sponsor or co-sponsor, for instance, he/she could be insulted if you approached the conversation as if he or she had never heard of COS.

#### Step 3 - Call to schedule an appointment for an in-person or phone conversation.

Face-to-face meetings and phone calls are by far the most effective at establishing a connection with your legislators. Here are some Do's and Don'ts for the meeting:

- **Do** dress appropriately (business casual or professional attire). Remember that you are representing the entire COS organization, and that legislators will naturally consider you more credible if you look professional. This doesn't mean you need a suit or a fancy dress. Just dress your best, and know that whether we like it or not, people get first impressions based on how we appear.
- **Do** remember that your legislators are people. Before you launch into a discussion of COS, ask a question about him/her, or establish some connection. Look around the office, or on the

legislator's bio page online, to find clues about his/her interests. One question that always works well is, "What made you decide to run for office?"

- **Do** transition from pleasantries to the reason for your meeting. A good transition is something like, "I wanted to meet with you to let you know that I am one of many of your constituents who supports Convention of States Action, and I was hoping to tell you about it briefly and ask for your support."
- **Do** prepare yourself to explain what COS is about in your own words, very briefly. You should be able to summarize what it's all about in under 2 minutes. You can find resources for this purpose here: <https://conventionofstates.com/resources>.
- **Do** know the current status of the COS resolution in your state. You can gather this information from your state's Legislative Liaison or State Director, or from your District Captain. Be prepared to give your legislator the resolution number (if it has been introduced), the committee(s) to which it has been assigned, and its current status (no hearing yet, gathering co-sponsors, etc.).
- **Do** ask whether the legislator will support the resolution. If he or she is non-committal, ask what it would take to get a commitment, and ask for permission to call back at a later time for an answer. If they say they will commit to supporting (and this is new), make sure you let your Legislative Liaison know immediately.
- **Do not**, under any circumstances, give a lecture or history lesson to your legislators! No one likes to be "schooled"--especially by someone they are meeting for the first time!
- **Do not** become hostile or unfriendly if the legislator expresses opposition. Simply ask if you might continue the conversation down the road, provide some reading materials, etc. Leave the door open if you can.
- **Do not** wear out your welcome. Your legislators will probably remain friendly and pleasant the entire time you are there (they are politicians!). Don't mistake this friendliness for a desire to extend the meeting. Do your business, and then kindly take your leave. Legislators are busy and they appreciate appropriate brevity.
- **Do** remember to thank your legislators for taking time to meet with you. While we believe they should, they don't have to, and sometimes they won't. Appreciation goes a long way to building a relationship.
- **Do** leave behind some piece of information (one of our online resources, a pocket guide, etc.) that includes the website address, and point that out to the legislator as a source of additional information.

- **Do** be scrupulously kind and polite to all staff members you encounter. Thank them, as well, when you leave. Remember, they are often the gatekeepers to further contact with the legislator.
- **Do** get in touch with your state's Legislative Liaison after the meeting to let him/her know how it went!

#### Step 4 - Send a thank-you note.

This is a great opportunity to make a big impact. Most constituents don't do this, so doing it can set you apart! Take 10 minutes to send a very short note thanking your legislator and his/her staff for the meeting. A sample note is: "Thank you so much for meeting with me yesterday. I am grateful for your service to our district. If you have any additional thoughts or questions about Convention of States, please reach out to: [Your name and phone number or that of one of your state leaders]. I hope we can count on your support." (Remember if they've already agreed to support, thank them for their support.)

#### Step 5 - Follow your legislators on social media.

Make sure any comments or posts you make are positive and polite.

#### Step 6 - Show up at your legislators' events.

By now, you will have been added to your legislators' e-mail and mailing lists. Pay attention to these, and show up at the various public events they attend. Wear your COS buttons, shirts, etc., and take the time to go shake their hands. Remind them of your name and that you are a COS activist. If possible, give an update about what your team has been doing, what is happening with COS nationally, etc. Bring folks with you. There is strength in numbers, especially in politics.