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Dear Legislative Volunteer-

A chicken coop. It’s probably not the first thing that comes to mind when you hear “AARP,” but that humble location is where we began. Back in the 1940s our founder, retired educator Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, found a former teacher living in a chicken coop because she could not afford anything else. Ethel couldn’t ignore the need for health and financial security in America and set the wheels in motion for what would become AARP. As a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization we work to help people 50+ achieve their priorities and dreams and get the most out of life.

Talking to our elected officials about issues of importance to Americans and North Dakotans 50+ is a big part of how we create positive change. Remember, especially in North Dakota, that all politics is local. Anything you do in your local community or with a friend or former colleague in the legislature goes a long way in helping AARP advance the goal of living with dignity and purpose throughout our lives.

Serving as a legislative volunteer is a great opportunity to stay in tune with the issues of the day. It also is a great way to make a difference for your state, community and in the lives of your family, friends, and neighbors. Dr. Andrus said, “Each of us has powers of which we are unaware; each of us has a circle of influence. Our limitations are the product of our own thinking and self-evaluation. If only we think we can!”

In this handbook, you will find tips and tools to help you be a successful advocate. Included are resources to find out who your legislators are, how to contact a legislator, and tips for how to make your advocacy effective. I hope you find them useful. If you have questions, I encourage you to reach out to our Associate State Director of Advocacy Josh Askvig (or any AARP staff member). I know you will find Josh helpful and willing to ensure you can be an effective advocate. He can be reached at jaskvig@aarp.org or by phone at 701-355-3642.

Volunteers, like you, are what make AARP great. Thanks for your service and please let us know what we can do to support you as an advocate for 50+ Americans.

Sincerely,

Janis S. Cheney
State Director
What is Lobbying?

Personal Visits

Personal Letters, Text Messages, Email or Faxes

Newspaper Letters to the Editor

Information/Fact Sheets

Phone Calls

Presenting Testimony

Attending Public Forums

AARP/Coalition Activities
Golden Rules

(For Those Who Work With Public Officials)

There are some universal principles that apply across the board for every person who works with congressional officials, legislators, commissioners, city council members, and all other public officials.

BE FAIR - With very rare exceptions, public officials are honest, intelligent, and will want to do the right thing. Your job is to inform them of what you think is right.

BE OBJECTIVE - All humans have faults. However, a disdainful attitude is an expensive luxury. Whatever affects your business (aging and retirement issues) is your business!

BE UNDERSTANDING - Put yourself in the public official’s place. Try to understand his/her outlook, problems, and aims. You are more likely to then persuade him/her to do the same in understanding you.

BE FRIENDLY - Don’t contact public officials ONLY when you want their help. Invite them to be guests at meetings. Take pains to keep in touch with them throughout the year…every year.

BE REASONABLE - Recognize there are legitimate differences of opinion. Never indulge in threats or recriminations. (They are confessions of weakness).

BE THOUGHTFUL - Commend the right things done by public officials. Any public official will tell you they get dozens of contacts asking them to do something but very few thanking them for what they have done.

BE CHARITABLE - Remember when evaluating public officials for “failing” to do what you wanted, the failure may be yours. You may not have done a good job in presenting, preparing or following through on your case.

BE CONSTRUCTIVE - You don’t like to be scolded, pestered, or preached to; neither do public officials.

BE COOPERATIVE - If a public official makes a reasonable request, try to comply with it. Don’t back away for fear it is a “deal” or you’re “getting into politics.”

BE REALISTIC - Remember that controversial legislation and regulations usually result in compromise. It has always been so, and it will likely occur in the future.

BE PRACTICAL - Recognize that each legislator has commitments and a certain amount of vote trading goes on in a legislature. Therefore, don’t chastise a
legislator who normally supports you if he/she happens to vote against one of your bills. This doesn't mean he/she has deserted your whole program. Give him/her the benefit of the doubt; he/she will appreciate it and remember that you did. And, remember that while some votes may be firmly committed, there will be many others that can be swayed on the basis of properly presented sound arguments.

BE A GOOD OPPONENT- Fight issues NOT people. Be ready with alternatives or solutions as well as criticisms. This is constructive opposition.

BE INFORMED- Never meet with public officials to advocate a position without first studying the facts and the arguments - pro and con. The mere fact that you want a public official to adopt one position will not be enough to convince him/her. Do your homework.

BE TRUSTWORTHY- Keep your promises. This is the cardinal rule of politics. If you tell a public official you’ll do something in exchange for certain action by him/her, stick to the bargain.

BE FAITHFUL- Don't change horses in the middle of the stream. Never leave an official stranded out on a limb by changing your policy or position after he/she has publicly stated a position you have urged him/her to take.

BE DISCREET- Participations in discussions about legislators being “bought” or “paid off” is useless. First, remember AARP is a nonpartisan organization and we do not endorse political candidates nor coordinate with any candidate or political party. Furthermore, you have absolutely nothing to gain and everything to lose by doing so.

PICK YOUR BATTLES- Sometimes bills are introduced “by request” and are never intended to pass. Before you call out the heavy artillery or criticize the legislator, make sure the bill is serious.
1. Know your legislator’s full name. Spell it correctly.

2. Inform yourself about the measure of concern to you; know what you are talking about.

3. Use plain stationary or personal stationary.

4. Use first-class mail or “read receipt” on email.

5. Let the legislator know how a particular measure will affect your locality – his/her own home district.


7. Be complete enough to give pertinent reasons and facts.

8. Be sincere.


10. Clearly identify the bill, using the title and number, if possible.

11. Follow through. Let your legislator know you are watching his record with deep interest.

12. Write a letter of appreciation whenever your legislator does something that meets your approval.
Checklist for Personal Visits

- Make an appointment (if you can)
- Be on time (15 minutes early is merely on time)
- Thank your legislator for meeting with you
- State reason for wanting to meet (identify your issue)
- Personalize the issue (tell your story)
- Dress for success (dress for the setting of the meeting - when in doubt overdress)
- Be prepared for questions (If you don't know the answer - say so – and then promise to find out and get back to them with the answer)
- Thank your legislator for meeting with you (once is never enough)
- Write a thank you note after the meeting
Points to Consider in Writing to Your Legislator

1) Write your legislator at the State Capitol, NOT the legislator’s home, during the session (may be different in interim).

2) Address letters to: Senator/Representative _(insert first and last name)_, North Dakota House of Representatives/Senate, State Capitol, 600 E Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck, North Dakota, 58505.

3) Salutation should be Dear Senator/Representative _(insert last name)_.

4) If messages are not typed, handwriting should be neat and legible.

5) Identify yourself as a constituent by including your home address in the message or on the envelope.

6) If you are not a constituent, identify your specific concern and why you are contacting that legislator *(For example, that legislator might be the chairperson of a committee hearing a bill in which you are interested).*

7) Limit your message to one topic and keep the length to one page if possible.

8) If you are writing about a specific bill, identify the bill by number and subject matter. If you have had a personal experience with the subject matter of the bill, briefly relate that experience.

9) Bullet your points.

10) Briefly describe how the proposed legislation might affect your life, your community, your family, or your profession.

11) Be fair and factual about the subject matter. Don’t overstate the issue.

12) Don’t insult, berate, or threaten the legislator, or suggest the legislator’s motives are improper.

13) Don’t put down the motives of the persons on the other side of the issue.

14) Compliment the legislator if you approve of a vote he/she has recently cast or a statement recently made in support of your position.

15) Don’t write too often. Space your communication for maximum impact.

16) Don’t ask your legislator to do the impossible (they only have 1 vote).
17) Try to know your legislators views on the issue that concerns you. If the legislator’s view is different, acknowledge his/her view, but express your own position and the reasons for your position in a firm, polite way.

18) Proofread for grammar and spelling.
SAMPLE LETTER

DATE

Senator/Representative (Insert First and Last Name)_
North Dakota Senate/House of Representatives
State Capitol
600 E Boulevard Ave
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Senator/Representative (insert Last Name) :

INTRODUCTION

• Identify yourself
• Briefly reference your occupation or organization
• Identify your purpose for writing

PURPOSE OF THE LETTER/EMAIL

• Why you are writing
• Reference bill by number and/or name
• Give facts, figures, personal experiences, and anecdotes that support your position

CLOSING

• Request a reply indicating his/her position regarding your request
• Thank the legislator for his/her consideration of your position.

Sincerely,

(Your Signature)

Your Name
Address
City, State Zip
Phone Number
Email
Email Hints

- Refer to Letter Writing section (page 8-9).
- Personalize your message.
- Use regular print. Do not use all capital letters, bold face, etc.
- Include your full name, address and email address
- Print and proofread before sending
- Check spelling
- Check grammar
1. Have the legislative phone number handy (1-888-635-3447).

2. Use provided talking points if you connect with a legislator- if you don’t have talking points ask AARP for them.

3. Lines are open until 5 PM Monday-Friday during the legislative session.

4. Usually messages will be taken and delivered to the legislator you are calling.

5. When calling…
   - Identify the Senator/Representative to receive your message.
   - Identify yourself, telephone number where you can be reached, any specific time you are available for a return call.
   - State your message:
     - I am calling regarding _(bill number)_ . Please ask Senator/Representative _(name)_ to return my call. I can be reached at _(phone number)_ between _(time)_ and _(time)_ . Thank You.

6. If lines are busy, wait a minute and try again. Incoming calls are usually brief and lines open quickly.

7. Give your legislator about 24 hours to return your call. If you don’t receive a response by then, call again.
Guidelines for Writing Letters to the Editor

1. Know the rules. Each newspaper has its own rules for letters intended for publication. Newspapers post the rules on their websites. As a rule of thumb, keep it under 250 words.

2. Stick to one point. Trying to cover an array of issues usually doesn’t do justice to any of them.

3. Simple declarative sentences can be very effective. (Example: “Legislators should champion retirement security.”)

4. Brevity is the soul of clarity. It is often the heart of readability. Some of the best letters to the editor are only one paragraph in length.

5. Try to discuss an issue in terms of how it affects North Dakotans 50+ (i.e. Providing seniors with options to stay at home is often more affordable than a long-term care facility).

6. Don’t be a reluctant dragon. Express your convictions.

7. The experts say a letter to the editor often wins the hearts of readers if the letter includes humor, solid logic, a picturesque outlook or a unique manner of approaching an issue.

8. Try to connect with the readers. That is, write your letter as if you are saying, “I want what you want.” A letter that appears self-serving usually suffers loss of credibility.

9. You may want to include a “call to action statement” in your letter. Such as: “Please ask your legislator to vote for HB1234.”

10. An upbeat letter may be more persuasive than one that scolds, blames, or complains.

11. Remember, it is fair for the editor to cut a part of your letter for readability.

12. Check spelling and grammar before you submit your letter. Ask someone else to proofread your letter.

13. Expect the newspaper to call and confirm that you submitted the letter. When they do, ask when it will be printed.

14. Read your letter in the newspaper and courteously but firmly demand the editor correct any errors made as a result of editing.
Letters to Editor Addresses/Online Forms for 10 Dailies

Updated July 2014

The Bismarck Tribune letters@bismarcktribune.com
Or the online form: http://bismarcktribune.com/app/letters/

Louise Oleson - Managing Editor, The Devils Lake Journal, news@devilslakejournal.com

Dustin Monke, The Dickinson Press, DMonke@thedickinsonpress.com or newsroom@thedickinsonpress.com

Jack Zaleski, The Forum, Fargo, letters@forumcomm.com

Tom Dennis, Grand Forks Herald, tdennis@gfherald.com

Kathy Steiner, Jamestown Sun, kathys@jamestownsun.com

Bryan Obenchain, Minot Daily News, online form: http://vnr.oweb.net/vnr/add_submission.asp?categoryID=970&publicationID=58702 Or bobenchain@minotdailynews.com

Paul Riemerman, News Editor, Valley City Times-Record, online form: http://www.times-online.com/content/send-letter-editor
Or treditor@times-online.com

Kathleen Leinen, Wahpeton Daily News, editor@wahpetondailynews.com;

David Rupkalvis, Williston Daily Herald, editor@willistonherald.com
Information Fact Sheets

✧ Limit your topic

✧ Be brief

✧ Include facts and information to support your position

✧ Use visual aids to graphically show numbers (i.e. bar graphs or charts)

✧ Use logical sequence

✧ Request action

✧ Print and proofread before sending

✧ Check spelling

✧ Check grammar
Presenting Testimony

Writing Testimony
- Write it out. Proofread for correct grammar and spelling. Double space.
- Print enough copies for every member of the Committee, the Committee Clerk, and a few extra copies for other people or groups who are also supporting your position.
- Three-hole punch your copies.

What to Include
- Introduce yourself and who you represent (If testifying on behalf of AARP your testimony MUST be reviewed by AARP staff).
- State your purpose. Identify the bill by number (HB ____).
- Outline your major points.
- Give examples of how the bill negatively or positively affects you, your family or your community.
- Conclude by telling the Committee what action you would like on the bill (I urge your support/opposition of HB______).

Delivering Testimony
- Practice your testimony ahead of time.
- Arrive early to get a seat and so you can hear all other testimony.
- Sign in at the podium (either when it is your turn or when the clipboard gets passed around).
- Give copies for the committee to the Chair and Committee Clerk.
- Speak clearly and strongly.
- Begin by addressing the Chair (i.e. Senator _(last name of chair)_ and Members of the Committee).
- Follow your script, but don’t read it word for word. Use good eye contact.
- Take questions. Before you respond, address the Chair and Committee member (i.e. Chair _____ and Senator ____).
- If you don’t know the answer to a question- say so. Offer to provide a response and/or information later. Then follow up!
- Thank the Committee for their consideration and return to your chair.
- Unless you must leave right away, it is good to remain until all action/discussion on your bill is completed, since you may be asked for additional responses.
Resources

AARP ND Homepage- aarp.org/nd
- General AARP ND information
- AARP events
- Weekly Legislative Updates (in session)

Legislative Volunteers Resource Center- states.aarp.org/ndlegislativevolunteers/
- Weekly Legislative Updates (in session)
- Issue Fact Sheets
- Talking points
- 2015 Legislative Agenda

North Dakota Legislative Home Page- legis.nd.gov
- Names of Senators and Representatives and Committee members
- Locate the legislators who represent your home district
- Lists of bills by number and topic
- House and Senate Journals- where you can find out how your legislator voted
- Copies of bills and amendments
- Status of all bills and amendments
- Committee hearing schedules
- Daily House and Senate calendars
- Fiscal data
HOW TO STAY IN CONTACT WITH AARP NORTH DAKOTA

- To receive AARP North Dakota updates and event notifications by telephone (we call you with a recorded message): [www.aarp.org/ndsignup](http://www.aarp.org/ndsignup)

- To receive the AARP North Dakota quarterly state newsletter and other event notifications by e-mail: [www.aarp.org/stateemail](http://www.aarp.org/stateemail)

- To receive legislative updates, including information on Social Security and the state legislature by e-mail: [www.aarp.org/getinvolved](http://www.aarp.org/getinvolved)

- For the most recent news, visit the AARP North Dakota webpage and blog: [www.aarp.org/nd](http://www.aarp.org/nd)

- Friend us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/aarpnd](http://www.facebook.com/aarpnd) Follow us on Twitter: @aarp_ND or #aarpinND

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“If we are not content with things as they are, we must concern ourselves with things as they might become.” – Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, Founder of AARP