

**How to Contact
Provincial and
Federal
Representatives**

A GUIDE

Legislative Oversight Tool Kit

How to Contact Provincial and Federal Representatives

ISBN 8525-14-9

Published By:

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Printed by: Al-Rehman Printers, Islamabad.

Foreword

This guide is part of a toolkit comprising a set of inter-related and complimentary tools. These tools have been developed as part of a USAID funded project, Strengthening National and Provincial Legislative Governance (SNPLG). It is being implemented by the Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Consortium (PLSC) comprising eight national and international NGOs.

At the heart of SNPLG project is the belief that building the capacity of the legislative branch to perform its basic functions namely, citizens' representation, oversight of the executive and law-making, are a must for a viable and strong democracy. Equally important is the need for encouraging and facilitating people and civil society to get involved in the legislative processes and to hold the legislature accountable. A legislature that is well-equipped to carry out its functions coupled with a proactive and informed citizenry provides solid foundations for parliamentary democracy and good governance.

Founded on the above rationale, SNPLG is divided into three programmatic objectives: legislative strengthening, capacity building of civil society, and the improved use of media and research in legislative endeavors. The project component being carried out by CRCP focuses on the empowerment of civil society for legislative oversight and advocacy.

It is hoped that this booklet and others in the series would help enhance the capacity of civil society organisations and activists to understand, track and influence legislature, and eventually contribute to the strengthening of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan.

Introduction

As a citizen you might need to contact a parliamentarian to discuss some social, economic or political matter or to share your ideas about a policy issue or a piece of legislation. Democratic governance and effective legislative processes require that citizens engage proactively with lawmakers to ensure that the rights and interests of citizens are protected. Without such engagement democracy would turn into a periodic ritual of casting a ballot.

To engage with your representatives you must clearly know their roles and responsibilities so that your engagements with them are effective and in line with the requirements of good governance. Briefly, legislators have three basic roles:

- **Representation of Constituents:** As citizens' representatives, members of Federal and Provincial Assemblies as well as Senators are expected to keep informed about problems their constituents face and to voice their concerns and aspirations in assemblies and public fora.
- **Law Making:** The legislative function is the primary responsibility of the Parliament. In the role of legislators, parliamentarians propose new legislations or amendments in the existing ones and vote for or against proposed legislation. Once a Bill has been voted into an Act of Parliament, it becomes a part of the domestic law. The judiciary then interprets and applies the law. For details on how laws are made, see CRCP's publication, *The Process of Law Making-A Guide*.
- **Executive Oversight:** As a system of checks and balances, parliamentary democracy requires the legislature to keep a check on the executive to ensure it functions within the bounds of law and in an efficient and transparent manner. For example, it is within the ambit of legislature's Executive oversight role that it keeps track of the functioning of police (an Executive department) and holds the government accountable if it transgresses the rule of law or fails to deliver the goods. Question Hour during Assembly sessions is a mechanism which allows backbench and opposition members to check the Executive. Similarly, Senate, National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies all have Select Committees on health, education, finance and other departments. The task of a Select Committee is to scrutinize and examine the expenditure, administration and policies of its particular designated government department.

This guide is meant to help you contact and engage with parliamentarians around broad areas of responsibility outlined above.

Get Informed

Before getting in touch with a parliamentarian, it might be useful to check if the issue you intend to bring up with the parliamentarians is something under their purview. In other words, whether the issue you intend to raise relates to the above outlined roles of legislators. For example, a local problem related to civic amenities in your neighborhood could be taken up more effectively at the local level with an elected representative such as Nazim or Naib Nazim. However, if you have exhausted other channels, it would be appropriate to bring your concerns to the notice of a provincial or national assembly member. When trying to take up a parliamentarian on a policy or legislative issue, it would help to see if the issue you wish to discuss is a federal subject (e.g. defense, international trade/ WTO. Foreign policy, WAPDA, PTCL etc.) or a provincial one (e.g. police, universities, irrigation/ canals, forests, agricultural research and development etc.). It always helps if you identify and think clearly through issues before presenting them before a parliamentarian.

Learn how the system works. Find out how a Bill becomes a law. Learn the committee structure. Find out which legislators are dealing with your area of concern. Find out when and how to lobby. Separate handbooks on all these topics are available with CRCP.

Before contacting any legislator, take the time to read all available background material on the Bill or issue, which concerns you.

Get Organized

Forming a group to lobby can be more effective than individual efforts. A group is far more visible, has greater resources, and carries more political weight. Approaching a parliament in a group and with your ideas/proposals endorsed by other constituents (for example, in the form of a collectively signed letter) always increases your bargaining power.

Organize a group of friends, co-workers, or neighbors around a specific issue of concern to all of you. Determine your priority concerns and contact the legislator on those specific issues rather than on every issue. Define your goals and identify tasks that are part of the plan. You could divide the work; for instance, one person could research available material, one could keep track of the Bill¹, another could keep track of the performance of committees

¹A separate handbook on the process of law making is available with CRCP

while several can personally meet with the legislator.

Know When and Where to Contact a Legislator

The best times to find a legislator in your constituency is when the House is not in session and in the respective capitals when the House is in session. The best approach is to call ahead and make an appointment. Let the legislator know what you wish to discuss. One can catch with one's required legislator at parliamentary lodges when the house is in session. Alternatively, you could write to your legislators either to seek an appointment or to raise an issue or make recommendations on piece of legislation or the performance of committees.

Writing Letters

Here are some suggestions on how letters to representatives can be most effective:

- Address it properly. Know your legislator's full name and correct spelling.
- Always include your name and address on the letter itself (printed or typed). A letter cannot be answered if there is no return address or the signature is not legible.
- Time the arrival of your letter. Try to write to your legislator, and the chairperson of the committee dealing with a Bill, while a Bill is Still in committee and there is still time to take effective action. Sometimes a Bill is out of committee, or has been passed, before a helpful, informative letter arrives which *could* have made a difference in the way the Bill was written or in the final decision.
- Know what you are writing about. Identify the Bill or issue of concern to you. If you write about a Bill, describe it by popular title, such as “the Bill on nuclear materials,” or “Bill on *karo kari* or honor killing”.
- Be reasonably brief. Many issues are complex, but a single page, presenting your opinions, facts, arguments, or proposals as clearly as possible, is preferred and welcomed by most legislators.
- Give reasons for your position. Explain how the issue would affect you, your family, business, profession or the country at large. If you have specialized knowledge share it with your legislator. The legislator in determining the final outcome of a bill

can use concrete, expert input on a Bill.

- Write a letter of appreciation when you feel a legislator has done a good job. Legislators are human too and seldom receive “thank you” letters of encouragement. Remember, on any one issue, even a few letters to one legislator can have an important impact. Sometimes just one letter, with a new perspective, or with clear-cut, persuasive arguments can be the decisive factor in a legislator's action.

Useful Addresses and Phone Numbers

Body	Address	Phone Number	Fax	Web Address
Senate	Senate of Pakistan, parliament House, Shahr-e-Jamhuriat, Islamabad	051-9022515	051-9022515	www.senate.gov.pk
National Assembly	National Assembly of Pakistan, parliament House, Shahr-e-Jamhuriat, Islamabad	051-9205895	051-9205895	www.na.gov.pk
Balochistan Assembly	Balochistan Assembly, Zarghoon Road, Quetta	081-9201950	081-9202575	Not available
NWFP Assembly	University Road, Peshawar	091-9210144	091-9210241	www.nwfp.gov.pk
Punjab Assembly	The Punjab Assembly Building, Shahr-e-Quaid-Azam, Lahore	042-9200335-47	042-9200348	www.pap.gov.pk
Sindh Assembly	Sindh Court Raod, Karachi	021-9212033	021-9212033	www.pas.gov.pk

Parliamentary Lodges and MPA Hostels

Body	Address	Phone Number	Fax
Parliamentary Lodges for Senators & MNAs	Shahra-e-Jamhuriat, Parliamentary Lodges, Islamabad	051-9207477	051-2874162
MPA Hostel Balochistan Assembly	MPA Hostel Hali Road, Quetta	081-9203040	081-9202575
MPA Hostel NWFP Assembly	MPA Hostels, university Road, Peshawar	091-9211171	Not available
MPA Hostels Punjab Assembly	(1) MPA Hostel (New) Near The Punjab Assembly, Shahrah-e-Quaid-Azam, (The Mall) Lahore.	091-9211171	Not available
	(2) People's House Address: The People's House, Near Punjab Civil Secretariat Lower Mall Lahore.	042-9212761-70	Not available

Body	Address	Phone Number	Fax
Sindh Assembly, MPAs Hostels	Sir Ghulam Hussain Hadayatullah Road, Karachi	021-9203303	Not available

PILDAT, a Lahore-based NGO has brought out a very useful directory of MNAs with individual contact details. The organisation's address is:

5-A, Zafar Ali Road, Gulberg V, Lahore (Main Office)
&
House No. 7, 9 Avenue, F-8/1, Islamabad.

The directory is also available online at <http://www.pildat.org/mna/>

Reference:

A Citizens' Guide by Michigan State Government: 2003 - 2004