

Connecting with Elected Representatives on behalf of CFUW

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If you want to influence someone, two things are important:

1. The message, the person and the organization must be credible.
2. There is a working relationship with those involved.

Before contacting any official on behalf of CFUW, please review the **CFUW Advocacy Guidelines** first.

Levels of Governments and their Responsibilities

Municipalities

Grassroots, community involvement has been central to CFUW clubs since our founding. Communities are at the root of change. Politicians at all levels know this, which is why they respond best to local pressure, particularly from respected community groups.

The municipality is the level of government closest to the people. It provides most of our

services with increasing responsibilities, yet it has the least amount of control and the fewest taxation tools. For example, municipalities are involved with emergency services, police, fire, transportation, recreation, schools, courts, sewer, water, libraries, hospitals, social services, child care service management, historical societies, community centers, home care social assistance, social housing, zoning and land use, waste management, road management, snow clearance, and more. Many of these responsibilities are shared with the provinces and territories, but the local government is the front line.

Types of Local Governments

- **Towns, cities, villages and townships** – Mayor or Reeve, Councillors or Aldermen
- **Counties** – Warden
- **Regions** – Regional Chair
- **Band Councils** – similar responsibilities to municipalities but are connected to the federal government via the Indian Act, rather than to provincial governments.
- **School Boards** – in Ontario, there are 31 English public secular boards and 4 French boards (ACÉPO), 29 English Catholic boards, 8 French Catholic boards, 1 English Protestant Separate board, and 7 public school authorities that operate in children's treatment centres.
- Association of Municipalities in Ontario <https://www.amo.on.ca/>

Connecting with your Local Governments

- **Writing to Council:** Address your letter to the Mayor (Reeve/Warden/Regional Chair) and Councillors.
- **Attend meetings:** Check the website for meetings, (both Council and Committees), for agendas and minutes, and for any public consultations.
- **Deputations** or oral presentations to Council concerning specific issues on the agenda, request to appear as a delegation, or if you want to send information for the Agenda, contact your City or Town Clerk.
- **Petitions:** Contact your local government and Clerk to find out more.

Legislative Assembly of Ontario (Queen's Park)

- Provincial governments are responsible for areas such as education, health care, social services, municipalities, some natural resources, road regulations, etc.
- Find your electoral district and MPP by postal code
<https://voterinformationservice.elections.on.ca/en/election/search?mode=postalCode>
- Alphabetical list of all MPPs <https://www.ola.org/en/members/current>
- Alphabetical listing of all Ministers, Parliamentary Assistants and Shadow Cabinet members <https://www.ola.org/en/members/current/composite-list>
- **Visiting the Legislature:** Public Galleries at the Legislature are usually open on a first-come-first-serve basis. Check with your MPP's office about times and

Committee meetings that you may be interested in.

- **Consultations:** If you want to present at a consultation on behalf of CFUW, speak to your Regional Director or Ontario Council President concerning this. Notice of hearings with Ontario Legislature Committees <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/committees/notices-hearings>
- **Petitions:** Information concerning can be found at <https://www.ola.org/en/get-involved/petitions>. At this point, the Ontario Legislature does not allow electronic petitions.

Government of Canada

- The federal government is responsible such things as finance, especially items that transfer money to people and/or provinces, justice, especially the Criminal Code, defense, communications, citizenship, aboriginal affairs, including education, among others
- Find your MP by Postal Code, including an alphabetical listing of MPs <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Members/en/search>
- **Visiting:** Similar to Queen's Park, the Public Galleries of the House of Commons and Senate are open usually on a first-come-first-serve basis. Check with your MP's office to make reservations for the Members' Galleries. With Committee meetings that you might be interested in, also check with your legislator's office or the Parliamentary website https://visit.parl.ca/sites/Visit/default/en_CA/DebatesAndCommittees#live-debates
- **Petitions:** Parliament now allows e-petitions <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Home/Index> Your MP may suggest doing this if he/she is supportive of your cause. Do this in conjunction with your Regional Director.

Meeting with your Elected Representatives

Make a connection

Invite your elected officials to one of your club's social events or involve them in a fundraiser. Invite them as a (non-partisan) speaker. Getting to know them socially may help when you need to connect with them officially.

Before the meeting

- Determine the objectives for your visit. Do not go just to introduce yourselves. Use a letter for that.
- Consider asking for a short meeting (7-10 minutes) to bring thoughts and concerns prior to an important vote.
- Longer meetings are useful for bringing up community concerns, but remember that much of the work of a legislator, especially federal and provincial, is last-stage help for very serious issues. Be aware of timing and the needs of other people waiting to see the representative.

Do your research

- Have your facts, and where possible have local stories. If this is a larger province-wide or national concern, either Ontario Council or the National Office will have provided backgrounders to use.

Have an “ask”

- If this is more than a friendly annual meeting, have an ‘ask’.
- Always have a short-term or easily achievable ‘ask’, and a longer term one that will take time to achieve. The latter may be the real reason for your trip.
- The ‘ask’ can include support for action, or lack of support; an invitation, presentation of a petition, or presenting some ideas for Question Period.
- Do try to show how it can benefit your community. For national and provincial ‘asks’, depend on the backgrounders to understand their feasibility, implications and the message. Mixed messages tend to be ignored..

Know about your representative

- Take a bit of time before your meeting to familiarize yourself with their background.
- What committees do they sit on? What role do they play in their party (are they are a Minister? Opposition Critic?)
- Never go alone but limit the delegation to no more than four where possible. The President will normally lead the delegation.
- Be prepared to meet with staff rather than the representative. Just as valuable.

At the meeting

- Thank them for meeting with you. Tell them a little bit about your Club, particularly if the person is not familiar with CFUW and how it serves the community. Keep this brief.
- Don’t just drink tea or talk about grandchildren. Leave that for a social event.
- Present the issue you’re concerned about. Be brief and to the point. If you don’t have some information that they want, tell them you will get it.
- Be prepared to be told it’s not their jurisdiction, that they’ll think about it, etc.
- Ask questions, or offer them assistance – ‘how can we help you”
- Leave information with them to reference after the meeting – a one-page fact sheet is ideal. Exchange business cards and stay in touch.
- Thank them again.
- The staff are the link. Exchange business cards with them, thank them.

Following up

- Call and thank the assistant and/or policy adviser.
- Send a letter to your representative thanking them for their time and reinforcing the key points made at the meeting.
- Report back to your Executive and write a report of your meeting for the club newsletter. Send a note to your Regional Director.

Writing Powerful Letters

A letter remains a forceful form of advocacy. Individual letters written in your own words are the most powerful. Remember, **a good letter or email is succinct, states your position and sticks to the issue.**

- If you are writing on behalf of a CFUW Club, follow the *CFUW Guidelines for Advocacy*.
- Local CFUW Clubs write to your local MPs, MPPs and municipal politicians.
- Individual club members are always encouraged to write to any politician on any issue about which she has a concern. She may use information from CFUW sources, but she may not write “on behalf of CFUW”, nor use CFUW letterhead.

Know your subject

National and provincial issues usually come with backgrounders and template letters which you can adapt for your own use.

Locally if there is no policy to cover your ask, you may develop and adopt a local resolution as long as it does not contravene CFUW Mission.

Know who to write to

Know who is making the decisions? Knowing which of your local representatives (whether federal, provincial, municipal, regional or county level) to contact about an issue is important.

Use proper titles for the person that you are sending the letter to. Those in Cabinet should be addressed using The Honourable, a title that federal cabinet ministers keep, but not provincial cabinet ministers. Clubs are free to write to cabinet ministers who are their own representatives.

At the municipal level, a mayor should be addressed as His/Her Worship (full name), Mayor of..., and the salutation should be Dear Sir/Madam.

Content

The information in your letter should be **current, well researched and accurate.**

Identify yourself as a constituent in your letter, include your contact information, including email address, in the letter.

Make the letter one page if possible. State your concern and what action you want your representative to take. Follow **CFUW Advocacy Guidelines.**

Identify how the issue is linked to, or will impact, your community.

Where possible, know the policies/position of the person to whom you are writing, and if they represent you federally and provincially, investigate the position of the party they belong to. Has your elected representative or his/her party taken a position on this issue before? You may want to commend them for their position, or you may want to urge them to change their position. You may need to edit letters from National or provincial Councils to reflect the position of your representative and his/her party.

Ask a question and ask for a response, particularly if it is not clear what position your representative has taken, or will take, on the issue(s) you have raised.

Always proofread especially emails with predicative text. You could be writing gibberish!