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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRIES

General Guidelines

Members and staff of the United States House of Representatives often act as facilitators between constituents and administrative agencies of the federal government. The Ethics Rules of the United States House of Representatives allow Members and staff to communicate with agencies on behalf of constituents to:

- Request information, initiate a legitimate inquiry or determine the status of a pertinent matter (inquiries may not be initiated if based on speculation, suspicion or if they lack foundation)
- Request reconsideration of an administrative decision if permitted under law, rule or regulation

Members and Staff may not:

- Exert undue, gratuitous or improper influence on agency officials
- Circumvent agency rules or regulations or alter agency determinations
- Make off-the-record comments to government officials concerning matters subject to formal agency proceedings (i.e., "ex parte" communications with decision makers that are made without prior notice to all parties)
- Receive money or things of value (other than Congressional salary) in return for, or as a result of, official assistance.

It is also important to note the following:

- Although constituents may provide appropriate documentation for their inquiries, providing such documentation in and of itself does not assure favorable decisions by agencies.
- Members and staff may not help constituents with matters which are either criminal or judicial in nature nor concerns which in any way involve past or pending litigation.
- Members and staff refer constituents with matters pertaining to state and local governments to the appropriate state or local agency.
- Members and staff may not initiate inquiries on behalf of third parties; the constituent desiring assistance must request it in writing.
- Members and staff may not initiate inquiries with private entities.
- As a matter of congressional courtesy Members and staff must refer inquiries from individuals outside their district to the Member of Congress who represents them.
- Members and staff must allow Federal agencies enough time to provide a thorough response to inquiries.

These guidelines are general in nature. Given the varying complexity and unique aspects of certain inquiries, more specific guidelines may apply.