



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



National Assembly
of the Republic of Armenia



CONSTITUENCY MANUAL



**Handbook for
assistant of MP**



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of the Republic of Armenia

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**Within the framework of the USAID | Armenia,
Support to the Armenian National Assembly Program**

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PREFACE

The Constituency Manual is a result of a cooperative effort of USAID | Armenia, Support to the Armenian National Assembly Program, RA National Assembly Deputies (MP) and their assistants.

The Manual describes the tools and techniques that can be efficiently used to organize an MP's work and outreach with constituency. It also presents the specificities of the constituency offices, its functions, and the role of the MP staff in the constituency outreach. The Manual is a recommendation source for case-work, which includes templates to be used by MP assistants while performing their daily duties.

The Manual also defines the steps for communications and outreach in communities. It describes how to work with media, outlines various communications tools and specifies how they can be efficiently applied, how an MP and its staff can organize awareness and information campaigns highlighting the opportunities provided by social platforms.

The Manual was finalized after thorough discussions with RA National Assembly MPs, MP assistants and representatives of the NA staff. The Manual was also piloted in a number of constituency offices. The final version includes all recommendations received.

The Constituency Manual aims to be a helpful resource for the MP staff and MP assistants working in constituency offices to efficiently work and serve constituency. It can be a guide in their everyday work.

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NOTES

CONSTITUENCY OFFICE

CONSTITUENCY OFFICE is an important tool for an elected representative to manage constituency affairs. Constituency office promotes ongoing access to the MP's office and can help educate the public about the MP's priorities and programs.



Constituent outreach activities will be more efficient and productive if they are organized and coordinated by **constituency offices**. MPs can spend a lot of time at the National Assembly building in Yerevan, but their constituency offices remain a permanent symbol of their ongoing interest and presence. A well-run MP office can significantly increase visibility and convey a sense of permanence participation in the community.

TOP 8 CORE FUNCTIONS OF CONSTITUENCY OFFICE

1. Provide service and assistance in dealing with government departments
2. Engage the public
3. Maintain a presence in the community
4. Provide informal counseling on personal and professional matters
5. Act as brokers and mediators between interests
6. Collate local opinion, and
7. Advocate to each level of government and their party on matters concerning specific individuals and their community-at-large.
8. Present individual and community matters at the state bodies and political parties to solve them by proposing legislative initiatives.

A constituency office is important for an elected representative to manage constituency affairs, there are pros and cons for establishment of the office.

THE PROS AND CONS OF A CONSTITUENCY OFFICE

- 
- + **Office** can convey a sense of permanence about MP's participation in the community
 - + **Office** always can be used as a physical site for meetings, discussion, etc.
 - + **Office** can serve as identified one central location where constituents can contact and reach their elected representative, instead of reaching their representative at the National Assembly
 - + **Office** can serve as a resource center for the public
 - + **Office** is the place where all information about casework can be centralized and be easily accessible by the legislator and staff.
 - + **Office** symbolizes organizational capabilities and seriousness of an MP. Through the office, management and access to information is institutionalized.

- 
- **Office** may prevent MP's from thinking creatively about various outreach mechanism. A constituency office is only one of several mechanisms for reaching out to the constituents and managing constituency issues
 - **Office** is only as effective as MP and constituents are using it
 - The majority of constituents will never visit the **office** due to lack of knowledge, shortage of time and money for transport.
 - Running an office is costly.

EVEN A HIGHLY EFFICIENT OFFICE CANNOT REPLACE...



- Regular visits to the constituency
- The necessity of constantly exploring innovative and creative outreach mechanisms
- Attention and prioritizing to the planning and management of community development programs
- Authority of the MP to represent constituency in the legislature and involve people into decision-making process.

ESTABLISHING AN OFFICE AND SET UP OFFICE HOURS

Rules of Procedures of the National Assembly (Chapter 1 Article 7.5)

5. The local self-government bodies must upon the demand of factions, deputy groups or Deputies at least one day a month provide the applicant with a furnished room or hall for citizen reception and a meeting with them.

**Constituent Office
can be located....**

**In
municipal
building**

**In regional
branch of a
political party**

**In a
separate
building**



Constituency office should be a place, where the constituents can feel comfortable to discuss and share their concerns on a regular or meaningful basis. Setting up the office requires scheduling the regular office hours to meet with constituents. The hours should be visibly posted and MPs should select specific days to meet with constituents. It is important to spread information about the

office hours throughout the district and do regularly. The announcement about the office hours can be posted in visible public locations, near shopping areas, schools, as well as through social media platforms.



In many countries, MPs schedule office hours on Fridays to meet constituents in the office, while Saturdays are used for traveling around the districts.

Constituents prefer to come to the office only on those days, when MP is available.

OFFICE BROCHURES

It is very helpful to prepare and hand out the basic brochure with information about the MP, office address, and office hours and features MP photograph.

Well-prepared brochure should contain the following information:

- A basic biography and/or introductory statement;
- Contact information (updated)
- Photo of the MP
- Map of the district
- A short thanks message for the voters for their trust and affording the MP the privilege to represent the constituency.
- Short list of services MP and staff provide, and/or areas of assistance.

Make sure that office brochure is short and well written in simple language people speak, don't forget to use a photo. Keep information updated.

It is advisable to mention what motivate the MP to work in the constituency, why it is important to serve constituents. It will be ideal to tell people what issues are primary to the legislative agenda.

SUPPORT TEAM

Constituency office does not run itself, it requires staff and budget. Constituency office staff plays an important role in assisting and supporting the Parliamentarians to serve their constituents in a more effective manner. It is important to hire specialists, who have basic understanding of legislative issues, they can face daily. MP staff should be friendly, motivated, professional and energetic.

Rules of Procedures of the National Assembly (Chapter 1 Article 11)

1. The Deputy may have two assistants, one of which works on a paid basis, and the other – pro bono.

The position of the assistant, working on a paid basis is determined by the staffing list, the assistant is employed on a fixed term contract by the recommendation of the Deputy.

1.1 While exercising their work obligations assistants to Deputies share their offices, technical and communication means.

2. By the assignment of the Deputy, his/her assistant:

- prepares the documents to be submitted to the National Assembly for debate;*
- prepares analytical, information and other materials necessary for the exercise of the powers of the Deputy;*
- organizes the reception of citizens by the Deputy;*
- performs clerical services.*

Hire experience over politics or family. The best constituency assistants love people, problem-solving and know their communities inside and out.

***Assistants provide constituents first impression of you.
And first impressions matter!***

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR THE ASSISTANT OF THE LEGISLATOR

Duties:

- Manage the office
- Support constituents to connect with appropriate government agencies
- Arrange meetings, plan public meetings and other activities for the MP to attend
- Drafting agendas for meetings
- Taking minutes during meetings
- Keep records of meetings and constituent requests
- Organize news conferences and write news release
- Maintaining detailed financial records
- Responding to inquiries and other correspondence
- Identifying civic needs and alerting the appropriate person(s)
- Writing reports to raise awareness of civic needs
- Interacting with high-profile officials
- Assist with telephone calls and other constituent correspondences
- If appropriate, help the legislator report about constituency proceedings
- Research legislative proposals and submit suggestions
- Prepare or support in writing speeches for the MP if necessary
- Prepare briefs for the MP for Question&Answer sessions

Staff work regular hours in a comfortable office environment. While some local travel will be required for attendance at meetings and other events, most of their work is done in the office.

In some countries, legislators recruit volunteers to help them. Usually, volunteers are the people who supported the MP through election campaign. Real volunteers would like to make a difference in their community. Legislators identify and train volunteers with the assistance of local NGOs, help organize public meetings, record constituent requests, and stay in touch with constituents about the status of their requests. Sometimes, parliamentarians announce and create a student “internship” program to equip students with new skills. Smart and

committed university student help with constituency tasks, such as help advertise constituency visits, share information on the legislator's behalf, and write down constituent comments and concerns.

DOCUMENTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The essential part of the constituency work is to keep track on all communications. Legislators and staff can have an integrated correspondence management system designed specifically to track all communications between MPs and constituents, who have contacted the office. Legislators and staff cannot

- Keep track on all communications
- Keep the records in coherent database
- Search in constituents' records fast and easy manner

rely on their memories and remember all requests, inquires and cases. There are a various electronic documents management system consisting of various tools and software, which will track and create reports on turnaround times, dates of conversations, specific actions taken, resolutions, service and opinion summaries as well as review all calls received to note constituent concerns. By using software, constituency staff makes sure that each request is answered satisfactorily and even attaches scanned copies of letters or other images. And all this is done with the click of a mouse.

CASEWORK

CASEWORK means working with government to help resolve citizen problems.



Meeting in Paros NGO

Casework or constituent service is one of the important functions of legislators. It is a part of the Member of Parliament's (MP) responsibility to represent, and it provides the Member with a direct link to the needs and concerns of the citizens s/he represents. For citizens, constituent casework tells citizens that the Member wishes to make government work effectively and responsively for their needs.

“Casework” is the description and/or resolution of a constituent problem. A case includes the description of the problem, notes

of conversations, copies of responses from governmental agencies, and correspondence with constituents.

Generally, an MP allocates casework responsibilities to one or more staff members. They review and respond to needs, complaints, or personal problems posed by constituents.

Casework involves “interpreting, interacting, explaining, distributing, and interceding on behalf of constituents toward relief of some problem between them and the bureaucracy”

ROLE OF THE STAFF PERSON IN CONSTITUENCY WORK

In addition to assisting with legislative matters, a staff person also helps the Member serve his constituents in a more effective manner.

Rules of Procedures of the National Assembly (Chapter 1 Article 11 (2))

2. By the assignment of the Deputy, his/her assistant:

- a) prepares the documents to be submitted to the National Assembly for debate;
- b) prepares analytical, information and other materials necessary for the exercise of the powers of the Deputy;
- c) organizes the reception of citizens by the Deputy;
- d) performs clerical services.

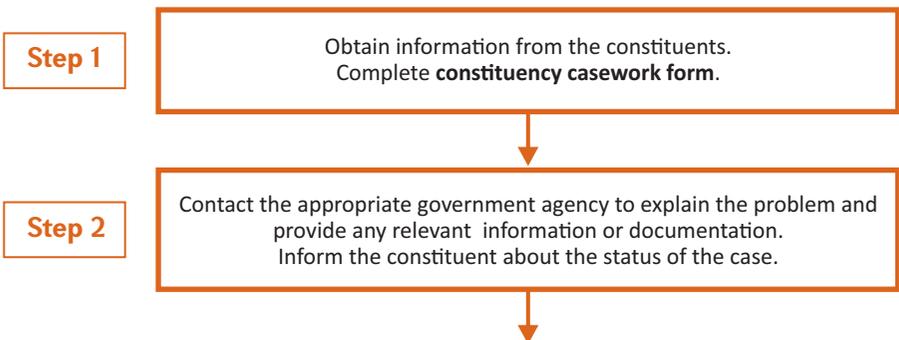


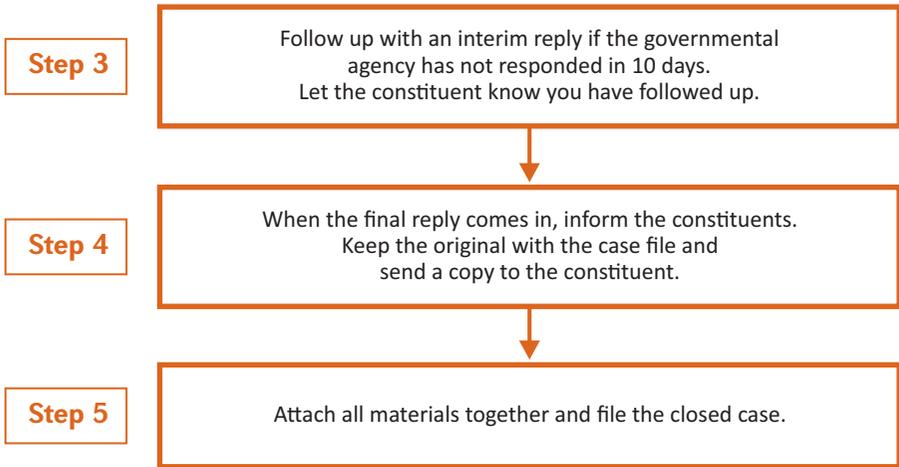
Aghasi Abrahamyan, NA MP Martun Grigoryan's assistant meeting with NGOs



NA MP Karine Poghosyan meeting with constituents

CONSTITUENT CASEWORK IN FIVE STEPS





CONSTITUENT CASEWORK

- In personal or telephone interviews, get name (verify spelling), address and telephone number. Make sure to get all other pertinent information.
- Inquire about action the constituent may have already taken. It's helpful to develop a time line, listing previous actions in chronological order.
- Never guarantee or promise anything. Because you cannot force a governmental agency to render a favorable decision, you should not create any expectation.
- If it becomes obvious during an interview that you cannot support and handle the case, let the constituent know that early.
- Make sure the constituent has made application before you make an inquiry.
- The constituent should be given periodic status reports on the case. Even if you have nothing to report, reassure the constituent that you are dealing with it. All cases need to be contacted every 15 days to at least check-in.
- If you do not know something about a particular request or problem, do not hesitate to let the constituent know that you will need to do some research.
- Make sure the case file contains all information.

- Notify the constituent promptly of responses to your inquiry, whether favorable or unfavorable. If suggestions or alternatives are available, don't hesitate to make them.
- Don't forget to thank agency personnel for exemplary work. A Complimentary letter to the person's supervisor can be helpful in creating goodwill for the future.

Constituent Case Form

Date _____ **Signature** _____

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Issue Description

Backup Documentation? Yes _____ No _____

Key Contacts

Name	Phone	Email
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Actions with Government

Date	Action
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Communications with Constituent

Date	Action
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Issue Closed

Date	Resolution Summary
_____	_____

OPTIONS



OPTION 1: REFER THE CASE TO ANOTHER (USUALLY LOCAL) AUTHORITY

The most common problems arise when constituents are not sure where they can go for advice. In these instances a legislator and staff should try and help people with the right direction. Staff can phone other agencies, set appointments, or draft a brief letter to the local administration encouraging them to assist the constituents. These activities are relatively simple and quickly handled, and they might be enough to help the constituents. In some cases, especially where the local government is unresponsive or otherwise unable to help, legislator's office can engage CSOs to assist the constituents.

OPTION 2: REJECT THE CASE

Saying “no” is never easy for a politician. Sometimes, it may be best to not get involved. In the cases such as family disputes or monetary disagreements, involvement in jurisdiction or in a criminal investigation legislator should be honest with the constituents and reject the case.



OPTION 3: RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF MULTIPLE CONSTITUENTS COLLECTIVELY

In some cases, problems of many constituents can be dealt with on a collective basis far more efficiently and effectively than on an individual one. A creative way of addressing the issue is to organize local meetings or forums, inviting people for discussions. An alternative approach might be to obtain the pro bono legal services of an attorney to provide assistance to the constituents. It will reduce staff time. Another approach is submission of joint applications, such as mailing all the complaints to the respective agency with cover letter stating that the legislator would like to resolve issues of all applicants.

OPTION 4: GET INVOLVED PERSONALLY AND FIND A SOLUTION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

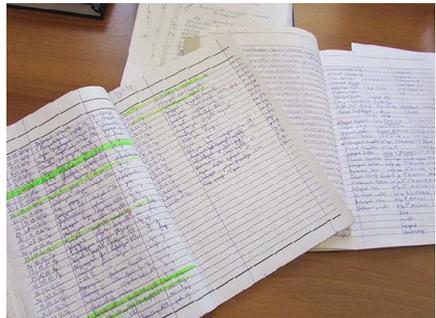
Legislator can play the role of advocate and can contact the appropriate agency or person and be directly involved in resolving the constituents' problem. Legislators and staff should carefully maintain the impression that the office is simply ensuring that a constituent is receiving fair consideration within the administrative process.



HOW TO WRITE LETTERS

- Good news before bad
- Requests before justifications
- Answers before explanations
- Conclusions before discussions
- Summaries before details
- Generalities before specifics

In many situations citizens do not have a basic understanding of where they need to go for help or how they should go about solving their problems. A letter from a legislator may clarify and expedite the process. Once the office has acquired the basic information on a particular case, a standard letter addressed to the appropriate authorities may prove critical to a constituent's success. It also affords the constituent a valuable piece of evidence that someone at the political level is concerned with working out a solution.



SAMPLES OF LETTERS WITH TYPICAL LANGUAGE USED IN CONSTITUENCY WORK

Type of the letter	Language
Letter to Constituent	<p>Thank you for contacting my office about the problems you have encountered with _____.</p> <p>I have contacted <u>(the appropriate officials/agency)</u> on your behalf and explained the matter as you outlined it to me. I asked that your problem be given careful attention and that everything possible be done to help you.</p> <p>I will contact you when I receive a response.</p> <p>Until then, please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything else I can be doing for you.</p>
Letter to Constituent -2	<p>Thank you for contacting my office to request _____.</p> <p>In an effort to be of assistance, I have contacted the <u>(appropriate agency)</u> to secure this (information) (material). I will contact you as soon as I receive it.</p> <p>In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.</p>
Agency Inquiry with Constituent Letter Enclosed	<p>Enclosed is a copy of correspondence I have received from my constituent, _____, concerning _____.</p> <p>I believe you will find the letter self-explanatory.</p> <p>I would appreciate it if you would review the enclosed letter and provide me with any information that may be helpful to my constituent. Please, direct your response to my office at _____.</p> <p>I am grateful for any assistance you may be able to provide in this matter.</p>

Type of the letter	Language
Agency Inquiry – without Constituent Letter Enclosed	<p>My constituent, _____, has contacted me about _____.</p> <p>I would appreciate it if you would provide me with whatever information you feel may help address my constituent's concerns. Please address your response to my office at _____.</p> <p>Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you.</p>
Agency Follow-up – No Response	<p>It has been quite some time since I contacted you about _____.</p> <p>Since I have not yet received a reply, I wanted to take this opportunity to follow-up with you about the status of this matter. I have enclosed a copy of my original inquiry for reference.</p> <p>I would appreciate any information you may be able to offer that will help me respond to my constituent. Please address your reply to my office at _____.</p> <p>I look forward to hearing from you.</p>
Interim Reply to Constituents– Received Letter from Agency	<p>Knowing of my interest and concern, officials with _____ (agency) sent the enclosed correspondence to me to advise me of the most recent developments in _____.</p> <p>I certainly regret that this is to keep you advised of new developments.</p> <p>Please let me hear from you if there is anything else that I should know about your case.</p>

Type of the letter	Language
Interim Reply to Constituents – No Response Yet	<p>Although I have heard nothing further in response to my inquiry on your behalf regarding _____,</p> <p>I want to reassure you that I will continue to pursue this matter until it is resolved.</p> <p>As soon as I have something definite to report, I will be back in touch with you.</p> <p>Meanwhile, please let me know if there is anything else I can do to assist you in this or any other matter involving the federal government.</p>

CASE STUDY: A VILLAGE BUS STOP IS BEING CANCELED

“A bus line through the district has canceled a stop at a large village. People in the village rely upon the bus to get to the town. No serious reason is given for the cancellation. One day, the head of the village calls the MP office and asks for help. What can MP do?”

These are the steps MP office can take to try to help.

Step 1. Verification that the bus stop would indeed be cancelled. There is a need to confirm that the information is true and actual. A few phone calls and meetings can verify the information.

Step 2. Research on the impact of the services stoppage. MP staff should investigate the impact of the services stoppage, how many people would be affected, were there really no other commuting alternatives?

The MP's staff found out that cancelation of the bus stops would impact a few hundred constituents, who would be forced to drive two hours to and from their job in the town. Transportation Company did not consider the number of passengers enough to warrant the service. The staff also found out that the service was not very expensive to maintain and the problem is worth fighting for.

- Step 3. Staff to staff meeting.** MP instructed his staff to meet with the staff of Transportation Company to explain the situation and explore the solutions. Local representative of Transportation Company claimed that the decision was made by the headquarter and issue is beyond their control. MP's staff aimed to find if it is possible to solve the problem with a simple phone call or informal meeting.
- Step 4. Letter to the Head of Transportation Company.** MP sent letter to the Head of the Company to reopen bus stop. Copies of the letters were sent to subordinates of the Head of Transportation Company and to other potentially influential decision-makers, such as parliamentary committee overseeing transportation issues, and or the Ministry of Transportation.
- Step 5. Communication with the public.** To publicize his advocacy efforts, MP's office distributes press release announcing that he had written to the Head of Transportation Company and asked for reopening the bus stop. The press was contacted to show the public that MP was active on this issue. Even if advocacy effort failed, constituents need to know that their MP was active and had concerns about local issues.
- Step 6. Meeting with Head of Village and interested constituents.** The MP scheduled a meeting with local elected officials to discuss the proposed plan. Since MP and Head of Village were members of different political parties, working together on the issue was used to demonstrate bi-partisan cooperation in addressing local problems.
- Step 7. Meeting with Head of Transportation Company.** MP's staff arranged meeting with a high level representative of Transportation Company to discuss potential alternatives and solutions. In preparation for the appointment, MP's staff prepared a short memo that outlined several options for resolving the problem. With these options on the table, the Head of Transportation Company agreed to reopen bus stop, with some cutback in frequency. The Company was pleased to avoid a lengthy fight over a relatively minor issue.
- Step 8. Follow up: MP calls to local officials, press release.** After the meeting, MP's staff initiated follow up. MP personally called the Head of Village to tell the good news. Then staff prepared press release announcing MP's

successful intervention in the problem. Finally, MP sent a letter to the Head of Transportation Company thanking him for cooperation and explicitly confirmed the details of the compromise agreement.

Step 9. Research long-term solutions. The MP recognized that the solution he arranged might be a temporary one and could not be expected to be very secure. Therefore, MP recognized that he had to help find a long term solution and in recent years he has supported efforts to establish local transportation company.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

COMMUNICATION is essential for strengthening public appreciation for the work undertaken by the legislature, which is instrumental in ensuring its legitimacy.



Citizen Reception at MP Hakob Hakobyan's constituency office

constituents, such as writing letters, organizing special events, town hall meetings. All these activities are aimed to reach out to a wide number of people and it is called “outreach”.

To be successful, legislative outreach activities and programs must be carefully tailored to the public they want to reach.

Constituency outreach consists of activities and mechanisms designed to do the following:

- Bring constituents closer to elected Members.
- Help Members address constituents' deeply felt or urgent needs.
- Engage Members with their constituents in mutually beneficial problem identification and problem solving.
- Inform development, introduction and enactment of, or advocacy for, legislation.
- Ensure accountable, equitable, accessible and appropriate services for all, who need them.

The appropriate communication vehicle should be identified for the outreach strategy to become effective.

Effective **communication** is the basis for maintaining successful relations. Building those relationships is what makes it possible for legislature to meet the mission.

Legislators use many methods to **communicate** with constituents. Effective communication with constituents demonstrates a legislator's responsiveness and commitment to a community. This chapter considers a variety of methods that elected representatives can use to communicate with

FOUR TYPES OF LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC OUTREACH

- Institution-wide efforts to educate or inform citizens
- Outreach by committees or by single issue based groups of legislators
- Communication efforts organized by political party caucuses within the parliament
- Individual member efforts to communicate directly with specific groups of citizens

CONSTITUENCY OUTREACH

Gathering information about constituency is essential for identifying and pursuing the issues most relevant to constituents and also helps to identify which local outreach activities are most likely to generate desired results.



MP Martun Grigoryan's visit to Gyumri Mental Healthcare Center

Information gathering efforts should be focused on relevant issues, such as the level of impoverishment in the constituency, adequacy of food and drinking water, opportunities for local employment or the existence of community-driven development projects.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO GUIDE MP TO GATHER INFORMATION

1. ISSUES OF INTEREST

- What are the key issues in the area, for example with respect to health, education, economic development or infrastructure?
- Are there any community hazards (waste dumps, mine or factory emissions, sewage, environmental degradation, etc.)?
- What type of legislative or program initiatives have community residents, leaders and activists called for in the past?

2. DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

- What are the key demographic indicators that could influence needs? Is the constituency heavily populated by the young or the elderly? By women or by men engaged in migratory labor?
- What is the geographic profile of the constituency? Is it urban, rural or mixed?
- What groups predominate in the population?
- What groups have economic power? Political power?

3. INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- What are the key institutions in all service sectors?
- What role do civil society organizations (CSOs) play in providing services to the community?
- Are there places where groups congregate on a regular basis?

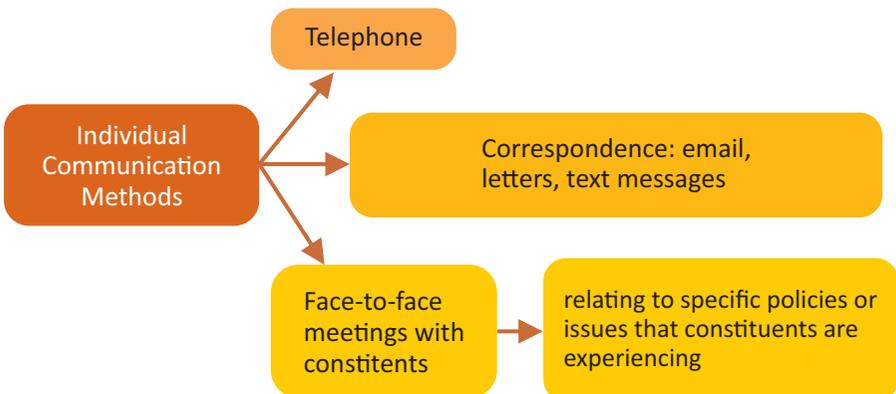
WAYS FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS TO COMMUNICATE WITH CONSTITUENTS

ONE to ONE

ONE to MANY

MANY to MANY

ONE TO ONE COMMUNICATION



Through one to one communication mechanisms MPs show citizens that they are really interested to know constituent concerns and problems. Parliamentarians may initiate one-to-one communications by sending out congratulatory letters to constituents. In addition to creating more informal contacts with the constituency, legislators need to create structured programs to hear about the problems in the constituency and inform the public about MP's work in the legislature.

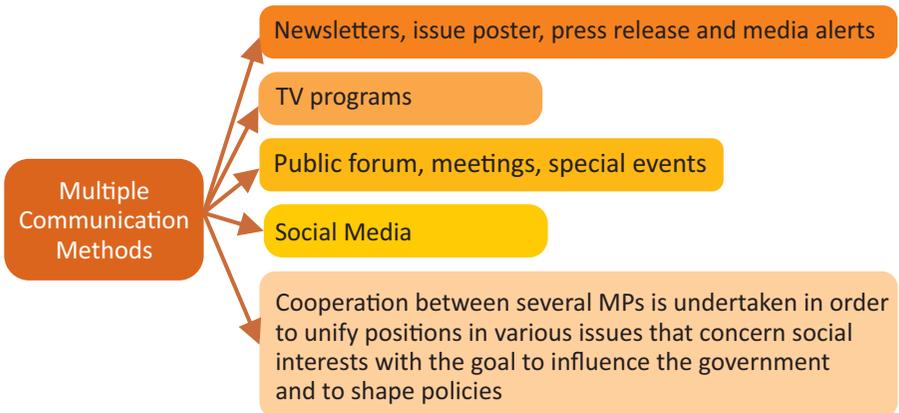
Personal communications may be the most valuable and effective interaction between legislator and constituent, but they do not reach many people in a large legislative district.

«THINGS TO BE CONSIDERED DURING FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS:

- Publicize meetings plans
- Invite mass media
- Make, keep and manage recordings of the meetings
- Take note of every aspiration and concern that is put forward
- Take photos of the meetings and provide to the media
- Study important issues for the district

MULTIPLE COMMUNICATIONS

Parliamentarians usually initiate one-to-many communications, because they are efficient ways to reach large numbers of people.



NEWSLETTERS AND ISSUE BASED POSTERS

- *Through the newsletters MP can inform constituents about activities, projects and priorities.*
- *They often include a questionnaire that constituents can return to express their viewpoints to their representatives.*
- *They may also advertise or promote legislators' willingness to help solve constituents' problems with government agencies.*
- *A good newsletter can demonstrate to constituents that a legislator is accessible and responsive, and can help to heighten the legislator's profile in the community.*
- *MP can produce issue based posters to inform constituency about legislator's work on the specific issues and the status of those issues in the legislature.*
- *Rather than drafting and distributing a newsletter, MP could ask a local newspaper to contribute a column to the weekly newspaper.*

A newsletter does not have to be expensive, nor does it require specific expertise to produce, but it should look professional. Most standard word processing programs can be used. It is much better to produce a simple publication once a year than to publish no activity report at all

NEWS RELEASES / MEDIA ALERTS SHOULD:

- “Say something to the public”. Should be issued when legislator fulfills a major goal, initiate a large project or do something interesting or unusual in the constituency.
- Be short (up to one page) and concrete to the point. Additional information can be provided in a separate document.
- Mention a contact person name with contact info, to allow journalist call and follow-up with questions.
- Have an eye-catching headline, interesting photos and quotes of other legislators or important people, involved in the events.

- Create a distribution list and pick the attention of media to run and follow up with more coverage.

Sample of Media Alert

For Immediate Release

[Insert date, contact person]

MP hosts a meeting to discuss healthcare issues in [Details]

WHAT happened? *[Short description of the event].*

WHO is it about? *[Member of Parliament, Chairman of Committee, Name].*

WHEN it happened? *[Date, e.g. March 28, 2013 at 15:00].*

WHERE it happened? *[Details about location, venue, e.g. School N130].*

WHY and how it happened.

Sometimes there is not enough time to develop the news/press release. Legislators and staff can produce a media alert. Similar in style and virtually identical in intent to a news release, the alert is limited to a bulleted presentation of “**5Ws**” **WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY**.

Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Telephone:

Fax:

Email:

HEADLINE

Headline — should grab attention and summarize the News.

Date line — contains the release date and usually the originating city of the press release.

Introduction — first paragraph that gives basic answers to the questions of who, what, when, where and why.

Body — further explanation of the story.

Biographical Information — a short section explaining who you are and why you are an expert on the topic

Contact information — name, phone number, email address, mailing address, or other contact information for the PR or other media relations contact person.

END - indicate that this is the end of press release

TV PROGRAMS

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

PSA is a non-commercial advertisement on specific issue given on radio or television. The idea is to modify public attitudes by raising awareness about a specific issue impacting the community. PSAs should be very brief. A well-made PSA can increase a legislator's profile and demonstrates commitment on issues.

Interviews

INTERVIEWS are critical important and powerful tool of communication. Media coverage builds legislator's recognition. They allow the representative to tell their story and expound on why they support or oppose an issue in their own words without the filter of the media.

IPS FOR MPS “HOW TO WORK WITH MEDIA”

- Keep yourself accessible. Make sure the media knows how to get in touch with you. Always call a journalist back as soon as possible – it helps maintain a good relationship.
- Be prepared. Do homework. Talk to the journalist beforehand so that you understand what questions will be asked. This creates a relaxing atmosphere.

- Stick to main points and don't go off the topic. Most people make the mistake of talking too much.
- Know the message. Do not just respond to the interviewer's questions.
- Use simple language. Be brief. Avoid jargon. Explain special terms, but remember who the audience is.
- Know who else will be in the program. Try to view the program before it appears on the show.
- Don't overestimate a reporter's knowledge of the subject. When a reporter ask a question, which is not correct, do not hesitate to set the record straight. Offer background information where necessary.

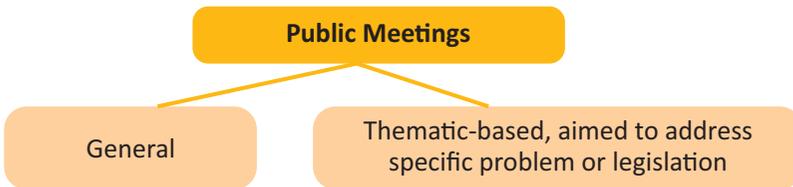


MP Edmon Marukyan's meeting with constituents, Vanadzor

- If a question is unclear, ask for clarifications.
- Avoid saying things "off the record." If you don't want to hear it on the evening news, it is better not to say it.
- Ensure that the host has a MP biography. The audience's initial impression will be largely determined by how impressive bio is.
- Be honest. Don't try to conceal negative information instead, let interviewer know what and how this problem can be solved.
- Be confident. Remember about own expertise, commitment and authority.
- Monitor all print and electronic media, especially when you have been interviewed and after you have conducted an earned media event.
- For television programs, wear solid-color clothing. Stripes and other designs can cause problems with color TV pictures.
- Look in a mirror just before going on camera. The reporter may not tell you that your collar is folded over or your hair is out of place.
- Choose a location where you can screen out background noises. Switch off your cell phone and turn off your computer. Avoid rooms with loud background hums from air conditioning or heating units.

- Find out in advance whether the interview is edited or live. If you agree to a live interview, be sure you are comfortable thinking on your feet.
- In edited interviews, it is normal to stop and start over again if you don't like the way you worded your answer.
- In a TV interview, look at the reporter and not the camera.
- Be still in front of radio or TV microphones and avoid sitting in a chair that rocks or spins.

PUBLIC MEETINGS SHOULD:



- *be properly planned in advance*
- *be announced well in advance through mailings, public notices and advertisements*
- *be two-way dialogue, not just forums for dissemination of information, but also opportunities for the constituents to give feedback and express their views and concerns on different constituency issues.*

STAGES OF ORGANIZING AND HOLDING PUBLIC FORUMS

<p>How many participants and where?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a schedule for regular public meetings. • Identify number of constituents. • Study the map and identify geographic locations that deserve immediate attention. It can be a place the legislator has never been or a location that has lingering problems.
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<p>Specific issue or general topic?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide the main topics of the event. • The public meeting might focus on a single issue (pension questions, improving roads) or be an open forum for a general discussion (report on recent parliamentary session). • Citizens from small constituencies are more welcome to attend open forums, speak about a variety of daily issues that impact their lives.
<p>How to advertise?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise the time and place of the meeting in advance. • Prepare announcement and hang posters in public space, or advertise through local newspapers, TV. Use social media. • Inform the media about public forum and stress the importance, promote event and circulate the details. • Telephone local media and journalist to remind about the upcoming meeting.
<p>How to mobilize the constituents?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask local NGOs, local self-governance bodies to bring citizens to a meeting in a more organized way. • Try to find a sponsor of the event, it will build credibility. • Ask issue-based organization to engage their members. • Acquaint with the potential audience. It can be a potentially disagreed group of people. • Do some research by talking with officials, political parties or media to have better picture on local political scene and local pressing issues. • Appoint someone to be at the meeting place before talking with participants to get a feel for the way the conversation is going. It will help to prepare and consider changing tactics.

<p>How to choose moderator?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A successful public meeting requires focused discussion facilitated by legislator and a moderator. • Do not moderate the forum. Chose a local ally from the party, media figure or local leader. • The moderator should introduce the agenda, set up the rules for questions and answers and inform public about duration of the event. • Moderator should firmly control the audience, if necessary, the moderator can play a “bad guy” role. • MP should not be the person, who cuts a rude person off, or stops someone from asking too many questions. This is a moderator's job. MP should be extremely diplomatic and tactful. • 10 or15 minutes before the wrap up, the moderator should remind that meeting will end. It will protect the MP from breaking and interrupting an ongoing speech.
<p>How to make a presentation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare an opening statement to briefly address the purpose of the meeting. • Presentation should be structured in way it is understandable for the audience. • Be prepared to discuss issues; do not simply recycle old campaign rhetoric.
<p>How and who is caring about logistics?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign staff to registry the attendees. Contacts will be helpful when legislator write “thank you” letters to the attendees. • Prepare comments sheets to be distributed during the forum. Attendees can write their comments and inquires. This information may translate into potential supporters for future projects.

How to handle questions and answers session?

- Public forum is a form of dialogue with constituents, not a debate
- Try and be a good listener
- Assign staff or volunteers to take notes
- Encourage questions to be brief
- Encourage reticent participants to speak
- Avoid campaigning and lecturing
- Accept criticism from the public

QUESTION BOX

MP can set up question box or suggestion box in government buildings, post offices, banks, and other public places. People can ask questions and talk about their concerns. After filtering and sorting out the questions, the staff should brief and present to the legislators the questions or comments.

TELEPHONE HOT LINES

Hotline numbers should be posted in public places. This type of communication is effective only if phone calls are regularly return or respond.



Call Log	
Name/Contact:	
Profession/occupation:	
Village or District:	
Question or Comment:	
MP Response:	

Checklist for Organizing a Public Forum

Before the Meeting

- Venue
 - Locate a suitable room
 - Make a reservation for the room
 - Visit the venue to make necessary arrangements
 - Do a seating arrangement (moderator, legislators, guest speakers, citizens, media).
- Announcements
 - Prepare an announcement, stating the place, time and topic
 - Post the announcement in visible places
 - Spread information using the media and existing constituency institutions
- Research
 - Learn about potential participants and local problems.
 - Call city officials, NGOs, and community leaders to enquire about current local issues
 - Prepare a brief presentation on the activities of parliament and MPs efforts to address constituents needs
- Media
 - Prepare a media advisory, inviting them to the public meeting.
 - Send the media advisory to all media (local, national).
 - Call the media to remind them of the event.
- Moderator
 - Identify a possible moderator who will run the meeting.
 - Explain to the moderator what is expected of him or her:
 - open the floor for questions, comments
 - facilitate the discussion
 - interrupt citizens when their speeches are too long or if their discussion is unrelated to the agenda
 - alert the audience 15 minutes prior to the close of the meeting to avoid last minute questions.

During the Meeting

- Media
 - Develop a sign-in sheet for present reporters
 - Prepare a news release, summarizing the public meeting
 - Distribute the news release to all media representatives
- List of Attendees
 - Develop a sign-in sheet for attendees.
 - Circulate the sheet for attendees to fill out, including their contact information.
- Minutes
 - Have someone to take notes for the future reference.
- Photos
 - Bring a camera to the meeting.
 - Have staff or volunteer to take photos

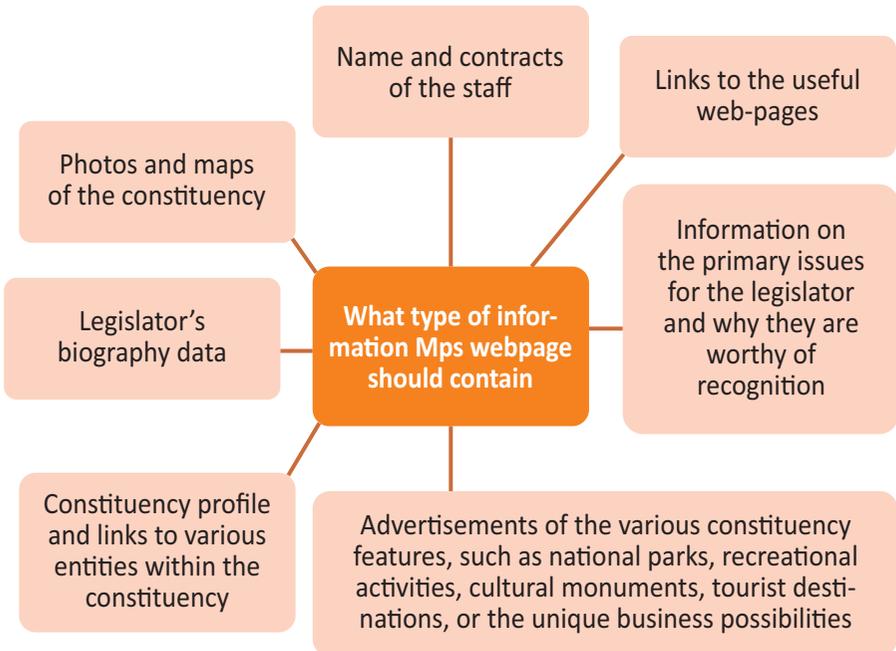
After the Meeting

- Media
 - Call the media who attended to ask if they need additional information.
 - Provide media with photos of the meeting.
- Follow-up
 - Follow up directly with citizens who have requested additional information
 - Upon return to the Parliament, think about the identified needs of constituents and develop a strategy to address them. Engage appropriate parliamentary committees and government ministries to promote the interests of constituents. Discuss constituents' needs with fellow MPs who represent constituencies that may share some of the same concerns.

INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

A wise use of technology can help legislators to maximize the number of constituents they interact with while minimizing the amount of time MPs staff spend on constituent correspondence. MPs can use email, create personal websites and political blogs, use social networking tools and solicit information from constituents.

After creation of the website, it should be promoted and updated regularly. Create a directory of constituency common problems. Directory can contain information and description of the problem, the responsible local government agency, and contact information. This information can also serve to educate constituents about the role and responsibility of their legislator and local authority or governmental agency. Constituents will become aware of whom they can directly contact if similar issues are raised. The website can link to Parliament and active CSOs.



SOCIAL MEDIA is in no longer a novelty-it is necessity. It is developing a two-way dialogue with constituents about most meaningful and important issues. It must be a part of outreach.



- *Your constituents are on social media and expecting you be there, too.*
- *Your constituents want engagement*
- *Remember what you say anywhere on social media may be shared everywhere on social media.*
- *Don't just set up an account, update it regularly with fresh, new content, and respond to constituents*

- *Share your legislative initiatives, your votes, key issue of concern, photos and videos*
- *Ask constituents to share their concerns, idea, opinions, and respond*
- *Conduct polls*
- *Share links with valuable content*
- *Find and follow your constituents and supporters*
- *Remember that your post is about conversations, not only your PR*
- *Link Facebook and Twitter account to YouTube Channel to share content across platforms*
- *Commit the necessary time and resources to a strong social strategy for social media success.*

SOCIAL MEDIA CHECKLIST

Before you start	<i>Objectives</i>	What do you hope to use social media for and what is its value to parliament?
	<i>Integration</i>	How will social media integrate with your other activities and communication?
	<i>Value proposition</i>	What can you offer in terms of resources and incentives to encourage the public to connect and participate?
	<i>Calls to action</i>	What do you want people to do when they connect with you through social media?
	<i>Networks</i>	What are the most relevant and popular platforms?
	<i>Select the tools</i>	Select online and offline tools that will best support your objectives, stakeholders and time frame.
	<i>Budget and resources</i>	Ensure that you have allocated the necessary budget and resources (technical and human).
Become familiar	<i>Set up accounts and pages</i>	Make them look professional and have enough seed content to be able to create some sense of momentum.
	<i>Identify influencers</i>	Who are the popular users on social media in related fields? Can you connect with them so that they promote your new presence?
	<i>Find out how things work</i>	Pay attention to how different networks operate; the protocols and expectations (such as formality, interaction, participation).
Start small and grow carefully	<i>Set up accounts and pages</i>	Make them look professional and have enough seed content to be able to create some sense of momentum.
	<i>Look and feel</i>	What branding, text and images do you want to use? Consider photographs of people, buildings, videos, logos and links to existing digital content.

	<i>Accessibility</i>	Does your content have to be bi- or multilingual and, if so, is it best to duplicate pages or integrate content? Have you checked that what you are doing is inclusive in terms of gender, religion, culture and nationality? Has accessibility for people with disabilities been tested?
	<i>Share content</i>	Make it easy for people to connect with you. Set up integration between social networks, such as between Facebook and Twitter, and look to connect social media to your other digital resources.
	<i>Promote and recruit</i>	Use your existing networks and communication channels to promote a new social media presence. Ask those in your network to promote the new presence too.
Be active	<i>Content is perishable</i>	Have a plan for keeping your content fresh, relevant and up-to-date. Strive for continuous improvement and innovation.
	<i>Plan ahead</i>	Look at opportunities in the parliamentary calendar for which you can plan in advance.
	<i>Listen</i>	Be receptive to feedback and listen to people in your network. Use feedback to help improve and select new features or content based on what your network would like to see.
	<i>Networks are viral</i>	Share other people's content (where appropriate and relevant) and they will share yours.
	<i>Encourage participation</i>	Encourage people to comment by actively managing your presence and responding and acknowledging contributions from those in your network.
	<i>Keep talking</i>	Use the tools within the social network to keep people who have connected with you up-to-date and informed about what you are doing.

	<i>Follow up</i>	Once the engagement or event is complete, provide a response to let those, who took part or are interested know what happened. It's particularly important to show how their contribution helped to shape the outcome.
Constant improve ment	<i>Measure</i>	Use analytical tools to measure activity on your social networks and to help you understand, who your communicators are and whether you are meeting your (and their) objectives.
	<i>Refine</i>	Social networks are fast-paced and change quickly, keep looking around for new ideas and ways to improve. Don't be afraid to try new and innovative ideas if they align well with your objectives.

ADVISORY COUNCIL



- Provide advice, support, and consultation to the legislature on the specific issues
- Conduct specific tasks such as preparing recommendations, research, communicate with constituents, or organizing events
- Help MPs with important functions: strengthening programs, reviewing and evaluating policies and legislations, programs, recruiting volunteers and improving relationships with other organizations

WHAT MAKES AN ADVISORY COUNCIL EFFECTIVE?

An advisory council will be more effective at providing advice and support when:

- Legislator genuinely desires the council's input;
- The council is comprised of knowledgeable, committed individuals, whose interest in volunteering their own time is sustained by appropriate recognition
- The council processes and procedures allow for regular meetings, a sense of engagement and ownership, and sufficient access to information about the issue to offer useful advice
- The expectations about the roles of the council in providing advice and support are clear, consistent, and well communicated.

TIPS FOR MPS “HOW TO DEAL WITH ADVISORY COUNCIL”

- *Determine the Objective of Your Advisory Council*
- *Choose the Right People*
- *Set Expectations*
- *Compensate Your Advisory Council*
- *Ask for Honesty*
- *Consider Alternative Feedback Methods*
- *Respect your Advisory Council's Contributions*
- *Keep Advisory Council Members Informed*
- *Fire Bad Advisory Council Members*



SUMMARY TABLE ON TYPES OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN LEGISLATORS AND CONSTITUENTS

Type of communication	Description	Potential Obstacles	Ways to Promote
One-to-One	Telephone, letters, face-to face communication with individual constituents regarding policy issues or constituent problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor telephone system • Large multimember districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and education • Civic education programs • Offices or conference areas in the capitol or district
Newsletters	Periodic reports to large numbers of constituents on policy issues; often include surveys of constituent opinion and advertise constituent service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large multimember districts • High illiteracy rates • Poor postal communication systems • No postage allowance • Lack of staff or equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and manuals • Computers/photo-copiers • Staff • Technical assistance
Media releases	Press releases on issues or events relating to the legislative district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government owned or controlled media • Lack of staff or equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and manuals • Computers/photo-copiers • Staff • Technical assistance

Type of communication	Description	Potential Obstacles	Ways to Promote
Public Meetings	Meetings with constituents to discuss issues or community problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large multimember districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and education • Civic education programs
Casework	Assistance to constituents in dealing with government agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large multimember districts • Political parties that do not encourage constituent service • Lack of staff • Poor communication systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training, manuals and directories of government and community agencies • Civic education programs • Staff
Community Projects	Assistance in obtaining community development projects for a constituency through government funding or facilitating private investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large multimember districts • Parliamentary system of government • Political culture of patronage or corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training, manuals and directories of government and community agencies

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National Assembly
of the Republic of Armenia

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