Routes to Change

How citizens bring a street-safety concern to government

USG.5.5 "Explain and give examples of important citizen actions that can impact local, state, and federal government as individuals and members of interest groups."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each action a citizen or interest group takes. Circle the government official or agency that could respond, then number the actions 1, 2, or 3 for local, state, or federal government.

A Safer Way to School

1. At the corner of Pine Street and Oak Avenue, students wait beside a busy road with no marked crossing. The street belongs to the city, so the city council can decide whether to fund a crosswalk and ask traffic staff to study the intersection. Maya, a resident, records the times when turning cars block the corner. She emails her council member with her notes and asks for a public discussion. Neighbors form the Safe Routes Coalition, gather signatures, and speak at a council meeting. Their shared request shows how an individual and an interest group can press local officials to consider a change.

2. The route also crosses a state highway, where the state transportation department controls the traffic signal. Maya sends that department a written request for a longer walk signal, along with her observations of how quickly it changes. The coalition surveys families from several towns and brings the results to a state transportation hearing. Its members also ask state lawmakers to fund pedestrian safety projects. Agency staff, not petition signers, decide whether the signal can be changed safely. Lawmakers decide how much state money to budget. These actions put evidence and public priorities before the officials with authority to act.

3. Federal decisions can shape what resources states and cities have, even though Congress does not set the timing of Maya's traffic signal. Maya calls her U.S. representative to urge support for federal programs that help communities improve dangerous streets. The coalition joins a national pedestrian safety group and sends a joint letter asking Congress to maintain that funding. A representative can consider those views when voting on a spending bill, but one call or letter cannot guarantee a result. Federal grants may help eligible communities pay for projects, while state and local agencies still make the specific changes within their authority.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does Maya's email give the city council a reason to consider changing the Pine Street crossing?

2. How does the Safe Routes Coalition act as an interest group at the local level, and what could its action influence?

3. What do Maya and the coalition ask state government to do? Name the state decision-maker for each request.

4. How might the coalition's letter to Congress affect street safety without making Congress responsible for the traffic signal?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A creek in your town is polluted by litter and runoff. Write one paragraph proposing an action you could take alone and an action you could take with an interest group; include local, state, and federal officials and explain what each could do.

ANSWER KEY

Routes to Change

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.5.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each action a citizen or interest group takes. Circle the government official or agency that could respond, then number the actions 1, 2, or 3 for local, state, or federal government. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Maya's email give the city council a reason to consider changing the Pine Street crossing?	**She gives her council member observations about turning cars and asks for a public discussion. The city council can consider funding a crosswalk.**
2	How does the Safe Routes Coalition act as an interest group at the local level, and what could its action influence?	**Neighbors gather signatures and speak together at a council meeting. Their request could influence the council's decision to study or fund a crosswalk.**
3	What do Maya and the coalition ask state government to do? Name the state decision-maker for each request.	**Maya asks the state transportation department for a longer walk signal; agency staff decide whether it can be changed safely. The coalition asks state lawmakers to fund pedestrian safety projects; lawmakers decide the budget.**
4	How might the coalition's letter to Congress affect street safety without making Congress responsible for the traffic signal?	**The letter could influence lawmakers to maintain funding for programs that help communities improve streets. State transportation staff still decide whether to change the signal.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would photograph trash entering our creek after storms and ask the city council to fund covered bins and more frequent street sweeping. With a watershed group, I would send our observations to the state environmental agency and request water testing; the agency could investigate possible pollution and enforce applicable rules. Our group would also ask our U.S. representative to support federal grants for water-quality projects. Congress can fund those programs, but the city or state would still need to plan and carry out any local improvements.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of how citizen actions may influence, but do not guarantee, government decisions. For Your Turn, look for feasible individual and group actions tied to officials with appropriate local, state, and federal roles.