
Writing Effective Letters to Elected Officials

Writing a letter to your elected officials is one of the easiest ways of conveying your thoughts and concerns on an issue. Taking five minutes to write a letter **does** make a difference.

Letters to your own legislator are especially important. When an elected official receives numerous letters on a specific issue, it does influence his or her vote. Some tips for writing a letter to an elected official follow:

- **Use your own stationery.** A neatly typed or legibly handwritten letter on your own stationery is best.
- **Write your own thoughts and words.** Form letters or preprinted postcards are not as impressive as an original letter. Write about your personal experience and how the issue affects you. Be brief and not overly dramatic.
- **Be clear on your position.** Clearly state your position on the issue. Show your knowledge in a concise format. Be direct and firm, but not hostile.
- **Identify yourself.** If you have met the legislator before, personalize the letter by noting briefly when and where that occurred so he or she can place a face with your name.
- **Address elected officials properly.** A member of the House of Representatives is, "The Honorable Jane Doe," a senator is, "The Honorable John Smith."
- **Be concise.** Write about only one issue in your letter. A one page letter is more likely to be read than a longer one.
- **Mention legislation.** If appropriate, cite a specific bill number and name or its principle sponsors. If the bill is not well known, a short summary of the bill may be necessary.
- **Request a specific action.** State exactly what you want the elected official to do. If appropriate, ask the legislator to vote for a particular bill or amendment, request a hearing or co-sponsor a bill.
- **Ask for a reply.** If you ask a question or request something, ask the legislator for a reply explaining his or her position on the issue.
- **Include a return address in your letter.**
- **Mail the letter.** Particularly for local elected officials, mail the letter directly to where the legislative session is held. If the legislature is not in session, send the letter to the legislator's home office address.
- **Write a follow-up letter.** If you asked for a reply and did not receive one, write another letter asking for a response. If the legislator complied with your request (e.g., voted favorably for a