

HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE LETTER

Letters from constituents are the basic form of voter contact with legislators, and the primary way legislators learn about your views. Elected officials need to hear from you.

Writing an effective letter to your senator, state representative or congressman is not difficult. Here are guidelines that are good to follow.

- Write on your business letterhead, if possible. Use a typewriter or computer. Handwritten letters are fine if you make sure that they are legible. Sign your name over your typed signature at the end of your message.
- Make sure that your address and phone number are on the letter, not just on the envelope. Envelopes are sometimes thrown away or lost before the letters are answered.
- Clearly state your subject. Give the name and bill number of the legislation or describe the issue if it is not yet introduced as legislation.
- State your reason for writing. Your own personal interest and knowledge of the issue is the most effective and best supporting evidence. Legislators want to know how different issues affect those that they represent. You may think that the facts speak for themselves, but the legislator might not be as familiar with the subject as you are.
- Be brief and specific. One page is best; two is the most it should be. Avoid stereotyped sentences or cliché phrases that might look like they are part of an organized pressure campaign that might have less impact.
- Be reasonable. Don't ask for the impossible. Offer an alternative to the bill if you are in opposition to it. On some issues that are under hot debate, a legislator would welcome the opportunity to support or oppose the issue by modifying it to address concerns of interested parties.
- Don't threaten!!!! Saying "I'll never vote for you again if /unless you do such-and--such" won't help your cause; it will most likely harm it.
- Consider the timing factor. Try to write your opinion on a bill while it is still in committee. Your legislator can usually be more responsive to your appeal at that time.
- In addition to your own legislators, you should also write to the chairperson and members of the committee in charge of the issue.
- Write a thank you note, or better yet, call your legislator if they are being responsive to your requests. Remember that courtesy is appropriate at all times. You are trying to inform legislators about the impact of the issue, and influence his or her opinion.