



LETTERS TO YOUR LEGISLATORS

For a legislator, letters are the barometers that measure the constituent's concerns. The impact of writing a thoughtful letter to your congressmen should never be underestimated. For every written letter received, a legislator tends to assume that other constituents may feel the same but haven't taken the time to write. You do not have to be an expert to write a letter; however, some hints might make your correspondence project easier.

Download our editable letter template.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Keep the letter to one page. A single page letter indicates your recognition that you are writing to a busy person. A single page also compels you to keep to the issue at hand.
- Write legibly.
- Avoid form letters where you must sign your name. Rewrite the form letter, making it personal and different.
- It is worth knowing your legislator's membership on committees and associates. This is public information and may be obtained by telephoning the legislator's state office. A legislator's affiliations greatly determine his or her ability to act. For example, a Senator on the Health and Human Services Committee has direct influence on health legislation. A Representative on the Budget or Appropriations Committee can help ensure funding.

HOW TO ADDRESS YOUR LETTER

- Your elected legislators are addressed as "The Honorable (Name)" in the address and "Dear Senator/Representative (Name)" in the salutation.
- For our federal congressmen, letters can be addressed to the Senators at the U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510. To the Representatives, letters are addressed to the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. Room numbers and building names are helpful but not necessary.

FIRST PARAGRAPH

- Identify yourself as a constituent. This personalizes the letter. It helps if you can identify yourself both as an individual citizen and as a member of a larger group or organization.
- Cover only one topic. This helps keep the letter short but it also ensures that your letter goes to one staffer who is responsible for responding.
- Ask for specific action. Be reasonable in your request.

SECOND/THIRD PARAGRAPHS

- Show your interest or knowledge in the legislator's past record. Draw the parallel between your current concerns with the legislator's past actions. Acknowledge the legislator's past action that you thought was positive, if it's related to your current concern. If you can flatter, do so but be short about it.
- Be specific. Refer to a piece of legislation by title or name, by bill number, or by the legislator who introduced it.
- Give reasons for your position. Focus on two or three main reasons why you consider the legislation good or bad. Acknowledge the opposition without being insulting.

CLOSURE

- Acknowledge your respect for the legislator's responsibilities. Indicate your appreciation for their work on your behalf on a larger scale; this is one way to slide in your request as reasonable on the smaller scale.
- Include your name and address on the letter itself; envelopes get lost.
- Indicate who else will be receiving copies of the correspondence. If you belong to an organization, indicate "cc: president of your group". If other agencies are affected by or would react to your position, indicate that you are sending them a copy. This strategy lends credibility and seriousness to your position. Depending upon the other recipients of your letter, it can also ensure proper follow-through to your letter. From: EMTs and Injury Prevention, Advocacy for Children - a draft publication of Georgia Emergency Medical Services for Children.

LINKS TO WEBSITES:

The United States Senate: www.senate.gov

The United States House of Representatives: www.house.gov

The White House: www.whitehouse.gov