



### Writing a Letter to a Government Official

Writing a letter can be an effective way of making your voice heard in your town, county, state or in Washington, D.C. To give your correspondence the most impact:

- Address only one issue in each letter.
- Be brief. Try to keep your letter to one page.
- Be courteous, but make your point and don't be too apologetic about it. If you're angry or feel strongly, you can let that show, but be polite.
- State your specific purpose or position in the first paragraph of the letter.
- Refer to specific legislation by number and title.
- Mention whether you are a constituent, or identify another connection with the recipient's district.
- State why you support or oppose a particular measure. Don't concede the other side's points, even if you agree with some.
- Personalize your letter. If you must use a form letter, type or write it over yourself.
- Before sending an e-mail letter in response to a legislative issue, call the legislator's office and ask his or her staff if e-mail from constituents is given any credence by that particular legislator. Use normal rules of etiquette for sending e-mail.
- Your letter may be read by an office staff member, who will report to the legislator the volume of correspondence and its general content. These people may deal with many issues, and huge amounts of correspondence. It is important for your letter to be concise and clear.

**To a Federal Senator:**  
The Honorable (name)  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**To a Federal Representative:**  
The Honorable (name)  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear  
Senator \_\_\_\_\_:

Dear Congressman or Congresswoman \_\_\_\_\_:

### Meeting with a Government Official

Meetings with legislators can be a very productive way of communicating, although some may be able to meet personally with only a tiny fraction of their constituents. To give your meeting the maximum effect:

- Schedule an appointment in advance.
- Plan, time and rehearse your comments prior to the meeting.
- Be on time. The government official may be late, but you shouldn't be.
- Be prepared to wait. Legislators' schedules are often very hectic.
- Appoint a spokesperson who will do the talking for the group beforehand if you go with a small group.

- Get to the main purpose of your visit in the first five minutes.
- Other group members may add comments, but they should only be to reinforce or elaborate on your main point.
- Expect the meeting to be brief. If the legislator wants to keep talking, that's a bonus.
- Answer any questions accurately and briefly. If you don't know the answer, say so and offer to follow up.
- End by asking the government official to do what you want him or her to do, such as, "Will you vote for Senate Bill 150?"
- Leave a one-page statement of your issue and position.
- If you meet with a staff aide instead of the legislator, remember that educating the staff is very important, too. Many legislators rely heavily on their staff's advice.
- Follow up with a thank-you letter, answers to any of the legislator's questions that were not handled during the meeting or any other information you offered to gather for the legislator on the issue.

### **Calling A Government Official**

When there is no time to write a letter, a phone call to your legislator's office can be effective in delivering a quick, simple message. To give your phone call impact:

- Plan exactly what you want to say before you call.
- When you place your call to a state or federal official, ask to speak to that person's legislative assistant who handles the issue you are interested in. If you get to speak to the state or federal Senator or Representative directly, that's a bonus.
- If you are calling a town, city or county official, they may or may not have an office staff, depending on the size of the locality. If they do have a staff, ask to speak to the staff assistant who handles the issue you are calling about. If they do not have a staff, you will probably get to speak directly to the legislator.
- Make your message short and simple. State your name and your main point: "Please vote in favor of the amendments to Code Section 10" or "Please vote against Senate Bill 123." Then say why in a few sentences.
- End by repeating your name, where you live and/or your connection to the legislator's jurisdiction. Give a phone number and offer to provide more information if the legislator requests it.
- If the person who handles your issue is not available, leave your name and phone number. If your call is to support or oppose an upcoming vote, also give your main point as part of the message.
- If you don't know a federal legislator's direct number, call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask for that Senator or Representative's office.
- Look in the telephone book for listings of government offices to find telephone numbers for state and local officials.
- Follow up with a letter if there is sufficient time.

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