

WRITING TO YOUR LEGISLATORS

Why should you write to your legislators?

Letters and e-mails can be particularly **effective in influencing legislators' views**. Writing to legislators also offers an opportunity to maintain contact and keep your issues on the front burner even when you cannot meet personally.

How do I write to my legislators?

- **Keep It Brief**

- Keep letters to one page. Try to discuss only one bill or issue per letter.

- **Identify Yourself**

- Begin with an introduction of yourself or the organization on whose behalf you are writing. Use a simple statement, such as "I am a third-grade teacher at _____ elementary school" or "On behalf of the members of the _____."

- **Get To The Point**

- Follow your introduction with a brief statement of your issue or concern, such as "We urge your support for H.R. _____, which will _____." If you are writing in reference to a specific bill, include the bill number.

- Follow your opening paragraph with a concise explanation of why you support or oppose the particular bill or issue. A few strong, well-thought-out arguments are much more effective than a laundry list of reasons to support or oppose a bill.

- Whenever possible, use bullet points to outline your arguments.

- **Relate It To Home**

- Help the legislator understand why your position is important to his or her constituents.

- Include specific facts about how a bill will impact educators, students or schools in the legislator's district. If possible, include a local anecdote illustrating the problem you are seeking to address. Avoid the use of form letters or generic postcards — use your own knowledge and experience to inform the legislator.

- **Allow For Follow-Up**

- Include specific contact information and offer to act as a resource should the legislator or staff have questions or need additional information. Where appropriate, state in the letter that you will follow up with a telephone call.

- **Using E-Mail**

- E-mail can be an easy and effective tool for communicating with legislators. The tips outlined above for writing letters to legislators also apply to e-mails: keep them brief and to the point, with facts and anecdotes relevant to the legislator's district.

- **Avoid Informal Language**

— E-mail to a legislator should be treated as seriously as a written letter. Resist the temptation to use the informal language and symbols often associated with e-mail communications. Never use impolite language or make "demands."

- **Include Your Full Address and Zip Code**

— Make sure the text of your e-mail includes your full name and street address, including zip code. Many legislative offices screen e-mails for address information identifying the sender as a constituent. E-mails that appear to come from outside the district are unlikely to be read and may be blocked by filtering programs.

- **Address Your Letter Correctly**

— See the details on addressing your letter below.

How Do I Properly Address Written Correspondence?

- **United States Senators**

The Honorable (full name)

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (last name)

- **For Members of the U.S. House of Representatives**

The Honorable (full name)

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative (last name)

- **Maryland Elected Officials**

— Visit <http://mdelect.net/> and enter your address. A list of your elected officials will show up in the form of a hyperlink. Click the hyperlink for their mailing and e-mail address.

Your polling place will also be listed!

- **Frederick County Elected Officials**

County Commissioners

Winchester Hall

12 E Church Street

Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Commissioner (last name)

Board of Education

191 South East Street

Frederick, MD 21701

Dear (last name)



Writing An Effective Letter to the Editor

Why Should I Write Letters to the Editor?

Letters to the editor can be **effective in influencing public opinion and legislators' views**. The "Letter to the Editor" section is one of the most widely read parts of most newspapers and offers a chance to reach a broad audience. Letters to the editor provide readers with information and insights on issues with which they may be unfamiliar, and can also inspire readers to take action.

How Do I Write An Effective Letter to the Editor?

- **Keep It Brief** — Keep letters to 250 words or less. Discuss only one issue in a letter. Many newspapers will edit letters. Keeping the letter short will help ensure that the newspaper does not edit out important points.
- **Get to the Point** — Start with a compelling introductory sentence. Follow the introduction with short, clear factual points. Don't make broad statements without facts and examples. Focus on what is most important rather than trying to address every aspect of the issue.
- **Relate It to Home** — Newspaper readers care about how an issue will impact them or their families locally. Including brief information on the economic or other impacts of an issue in the community will draw readers' interest.
- **Personalize The Issue** — Provide an example of how the issue impacts a real person in the community to help readers understand the issue and encourage them to take action. Avoid submitting "form" letters.
- **End with a Call to Action** — Ask readers to follow-up, such as joining in calling on policymakers to address the issue.
- **Be Timely** — Try to place letters when they will be most effective. For example, letters supporting or opposing legislation will have the most impact when legislators are considering the issue.
- **Be Professional** — Letters should be typed or neatly handwritten and should follow the submission rules of the particular newspaper. Language should be polite but persuasive.
- **Identify Yourself** — Sign the letter personally. Include any information highlighting your expertise on the issue. Provide contact information, including an address and daytime phone number so the newspaper can verify the letter's authenticity.

