

ADVOCACY

Children's Advocacy Days 2015

LETTERS TO LEGISLATORS

"I think letters have an effect on members of Congress. Everybody's vote counts in America, but those who sit down and write letters make their votes count more times. Nothing is more effective than a letter that reflects both an understanding of the issues and a sincere expression of a personal viewpoint based on that understanding."

-President John F. Kennedy, 1963

Letter writing is probably the most widely used means of communicating with legislators, and they do pay attention to their mail. Legislators readily acknowledge that a good letter-particularly for a constituent-can make an impact. That is why it is so important that your letter is powerful.

Ensure That Your Letter Will Have Maximum Impact.

- The letter should be brief, preferably one page. Even if you feel strongly about the issue, resist the urge to tell the "whole story" in a long letter. A short, concise letter is much more effective. If you have a long story to tell, close with, "If you need additional information, please let me know."
- A form letter, preprinted card, or other superficial means of communication has little effect. Generally, these are treated as one "contact," and run the risk of annoying decision makers, rather than influencing them.
- If you are writing about a specific bill, include the bill number and a brief statement on the subject matter at the beginning of the letter. Because hundreds of bills are introduced each session, it is impossible for individual legislators to track all of them.
- Discuss only one bill or issue in your letter. This makes it far easier for legislators or staff to track. If you wish to comment on several issues, write separate letters.
- Your letter should be neat and your tone sincere and polite. Guard against complaining or being overly negative. Do not threaten or belittle.

Your Letter Should Contain the Following Components.

- Address your letter to: The Honorable _____ at his/her office address.
- The salutation for a senator is "Dear Senator Smith," or for a representative "Dear Representative Smith."
- Write legibly or type so your letters are easy to read. Readable handwritten letters are best.
- A brief statement (ten words or less) on the subject and the bill number if you are writing about a specific bill.
- An introduction of yourself which tells why you are interested in or concerned about an issue or bill.
- A personal anecdote about how the bill will affect you, your family, your community, your business, your job, your school, etc.
- Some facts, including supporting information and data to support your position.
- If you think a minor change would improve the bill, suggest an amendment.
- An invitation to contact you to discuss the bill.
- A request for a reply if you need one.
- A statement of appreciation for consideration of your position.
- Write now, while the issue is hot! Don't postpone or it will be too late!
- Include your full name and address.
- Write to legislators in your legislative district.
- Express your approval for a good job or a position you appreciate.