

How to Write Letters to Congress and Other Elected Officials

Elected officials are eager to hear the views of their constituents, whom they represent. Legislators realize that they must please voters if they are to be re-elected, which is what makes constituent input so important and powerful. An in-person, face-to-face meeting is the most influential means of expressing your views to lawmakers. However, phone calls and letters are also very useful and they do not require a great deal of time or preparation.

Here are a few tips on how to write letters to elected officials:

- **BE BRIEF.** Keep letters concise and to-the-point, ideally no longer than one-page.
- **EXPLAIN THE PURPOSE.** State the reason for writing your letter in the first paragraph, expanding on it in succeeding paragraphs (using as many facts as possible to explain your position and why it is beneficial). Tell why the issue you are raising is important.
- **NAME THE ACTION.** Express clearly and briefly what action you would like the decision-maker to perform, such as support for a particular piece of legislation, policy, or a specific issue. Always include the name of the bill or policy being debated (e.g. S. 2095 or H.R. 5713 or other reference information).
- **USE A POLITE AND RESPECTFUL TONE.** This will make it more likely that your position will be given proper consideration. If possible, start off by commending the official for any relevant positions or actions with which you agree. If you are a supporter of the official or have met her/him in the past, say so.
- **STATE YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN THEIR CONSTITUENCY.** If you are a resident of that reservation, district, or state, or member of that tribe, be sure to mention it in the letter.
- **PROVIDE CONTACT INFORMATION.** Be sure to note that you are a constituent and to provide your name and mailing address.
- **HANDWRITE OR TYPE YOUR LETTER.** A mailed handwritten or typed letter on official letterhead will definitely receive more attention than a preprinted card or letter. If your letter is time-sensitive, however, send it by e-mail or fax. At the very least, be sure to hand sign every letter. Note: Regular mail service to certain state and federal offices may be delayed due to security procedures.
- **ADDRESSING CORRESPONDENCE.** Use the following format when addressing a letter to the US Congress. Note: When writing to the chairman of a committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as: Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman; Mr. Speaker or Madam Speaker.

To a Senator:

The Honorable ____ (full name) ____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator ____ (last name) ____:

To a Representative:

The Honorable ____ (full name) ____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative ____ (last name) ____: