

Tips for Writing Your Legislator

Begin by stating that you are a constituent or are writing on behalf of a constituent.

Make sure you write your return address on the envelope, so that the legislator's office staff knows immediately that you are a constituent. If you are sending an e-mail, state that you are a constituent in the subject line.

Personalize your letter. Research consistently shows that handwritten letters have the most impact. In making your case on the issue, use personal examples to further distinguish your letter. Include with your letter a fact sheet on dental care for patients with disabilities.

If the legislator has supported your issues in the past, acknowledge this. Give reasons why the legislator must continue or intensify his or her support.

Show restraint. Keep your letter brief—one to one-and-a-half pages at the most.

Quantity Counts. Persuade a like-minded friend, family member, or colleague to write a letter as well. Again, quantity is critical. Legislators pay attention to issues when they believe that many of their constituents care about that issue.

Follow up. In the letter, ask your legislator for a response. To get a better picture of your legislator's position, consider following your letter with a phone call or visit.

Report your letter. When you're part of a grassroots lobbying effort, your participation is helpful only if the people mobilizing the effort know about it. Let your grassroots organization know you wrote the letter, copy the President and/or the Legislative Committee Chairperson, and what you intend to do to follow up.

Communicate more than once. Again, **quantity is important.** As you monitor the issue, communicate with the legislator through phone calls, additional letters, e-mail, or visits to ask for specific support or action as appropriate to the process.

If you use e-mail to communicate with your legislator, do so in the context of an ongoing relationship in which you use other methods as the foundation of your communication.