

Tips For Writing To Your Policy-maker

As has been pointed out, your policy-makers welcome your opinions and expertise on issues affecting you, your community, and your state. Write to your legislators to voice support or opposition for a piece of legislation, inform them of a problem in your community, share with them your knowledge, thank them for their vote on a certain measure, or offer your expertise for future legislative and regulatory efforts.

A letter to your legislator can be very effective in influencing the outcome of a piece of legislation and informing him/her of the impact the bill would have on you, your family, and your state. You can write the offices of any of your policy-makers – for example, Congressional Representative, State Senator, Governor, or the President – regarding any issue – taxes, pollution, health insurance. Offices also accept constituent mail via fax or email.

Keep the following tips in mind as you correspond with your policy-makers.

- **Accuracy and attention to detail.** Be sure to use the proper form of address and correct spelling of the policy-maker.
- Whenever possible, use your **organization's letterhead**.
- Remember to identify yourself as a **constituent**.
- **Identify yourself as a public health professional in the text of your letter.** Whenever possible, give your official title and any professional degrees, following your signature.
- **Short letters are best** - try to keep them to one page. Be sure not to use jargon or confusing technical terms.
- **Concentrate on a single issue.** Letters should cover only one topic or bill and be timed to arrive while the issue is alive.
- **Praise, Praise, Praise.** If your legislator pleases you by supporting a public health issue, write and tell him/her so.

In addition, there are important points to remember regarding the substance of your letter.

- **State your purpose for writing at the outset.**
- **Correctly identify the legislation.** If you are writing about a specific bill, remember to describe it by its official title and number, as well as by its popular name.
- **Tell your legislator how the issue would affect you and the rest of his/her constituents.** Your own personal experience and district specific information are the



best supporting evidence. In addition, data and research supporting your position is important.

- **Be sure that your facts and assertions are accurate.** Often legislators use constituent mail to make points during speeches or debates and to convince fellow legislators of their position.
- **Ask your policy-maker for his/her position on the issue.** Indicate that you look forward to hearing from him/her on the issue.

Your letter will be read by the legislator and/or a member of the legislative staff. Sometime after it is received, you should receive a letter from the legislator, which will include the legislator's opinion on the topic, an update on the legislative status of the bill, and any other relevant information about the issue. You may want to send a note of appreciation if your position is supported.

Correct Forms of Address

To your Senator:

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator _____

To your Representative:

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representative _____

Forms similar to the above, addressed to your state capital are appropriate for your state representatives and senators.

To the President:

President _____
The White House
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

To the Vice President:

Vice President _____
2203 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Mr. Vice President:

