

## **Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials**

Letters and faxes are an extremely effective way of communicating with your elected officials. Many legislators believe that a letter represents not only the position of the writer but also many other constituents who did not take the time to write. These tips will help increase the effectiveness of your letter:

**Keep it brief:** Letters should never be longer than one page, and should be limited to one issue. Legislative aides read many letters on many issues in a day, so your letter should be as concise as possible.

**State Who You Are and What You Want Up Front:** In the first paragraph, tell your legislators that you are a constituent and a psychologist, and identify the issue about which you are writing. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, it helps to identify it by its bill number (e.g. H.R. \_\_ or S. \_\_).

**Hit your three most important points:** Choose the three strongest points that will be most effective in persuading legislators to support your position and flesh them out. The Government Relations office can help.

**Personalize your letter:** Tell your elected official why this legislation matters in her community or state. If you have one, include a personal story that shows how this issue affects you or your clients. A constituent's personal stories can be very persuasive as your legislator shapes her position.

**Personalize your relationship:** Have you ever voted for this elected official? Have you ever contributed time or money to his or her campaign? Are you familiar with her through any business or personal relationship? If so, tell your elected official or his staff person. The closer your legislator feels to you, the more powerful your argument is likely to be.

**You are the Expert:** You do not need to understand the nuances of the political process to speak forcefully on mental health issues. Your training, your experience with clients, and your knowledge of mental health issues in your community made you an invaluable voice in mental health advocacy.