

WRITING LEGISLATORS

The letter is the most popular method of communication with a member of the General Assembly. There are many ways to write your representatives or senators – by signing your name to a petition, signing a preprinted postcard, sending mail (express or regular), and e-mail. All types of written correspondence exert influence and make an impact – some more than others at any given time.

You can visit www.legis.state.pa.us to look up the name and address of your state representative or senator. Generally, the more personal the written contact, the more effective the message will be. If you decide to write a letter, this list of helpful suggestions will improve the effectiveness of the letter:

1. Try to keep it to one page.
2. Be sure to write legibly, if writing longhand. Don't write on the back of the page.
3. Include your name, address' and e-mail address if applicable; to permit a reply and prove district residency.
4. If you are a constituent, say so immediately.
5. Focus on one issue.
6. Be concise and to the point. Include key information, using examples to support your position.
7. Be courteous and reasonable. Never threaten.

8. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter or the subject line of an email. If the letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g. House bill: HB _____, Senate bill: SB _____.
9. Be persuasive, but take every precaution to be factual.
10. Never apologize for taking his/her time.
11. Don't write a legislator from another district just because you don't like the views of your own representative.

Addressing Correspondence

Senators

The Honorable (full name)
Senate Box _____
Harrisburg, PA ZIP

Dear Senator (last name):

Representatives

The Honorable (full name)
Office Number
P.O. Box _____
Harrisburg, PA ZIP

Dear Representative (last name):

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as:

Dear Madam Chairwoman or Mr. Chairman; Dear Madam Speaker or Dear Mr. Speaker (whichever is applicable to your correspondence)

Addressing E-mail

When addressing an e-mail to a legislator, follow the same suggestions as for the printed letter. For the subject line of your e-mail, identify your message by topic or bill number. The body of your message should use this format:

Your name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear (title) (last name)

(Start your message here)

Steps Toward Clear Constituent Correspondence

1. Put your thoughts into your own words. Your own personal experience makes for excellent supporting arguments.
2. Indicate the state, congressional district, city, and county in which you are a voter. If you have family, business or connections related to the issue, explain them.
3. Be factual. Support your position with specific information about how the proposed legislation is likely to affect you and those you know.
4. Try to be constructive. If you believe that proposed legislation is wrong and should be opposed – say so! But indicate specifically the likely adverse consequences and suggest a better approach.
5. Ask for the legislator's vote in support of your view on the issue.

What to Expect from Your Efforts

Expect a reply, even if it's only a form letter.

Follow the issue after you write.

*Plan to take further action, by sending a thank you letter if your legislator pleases you with a vote or pronouncement on the issue.