

## Writing to Your Legislators

Letters and e-mails can be particularly effective in influencing legislators' views. Writing to legislators also offers an opportunity to maintain contact and keep your issues on the front burner even when you cannot meet personally.

### Writing an Effective Letter

**KEEP IT BRIEF:** Keep letters to one page. Try to discuss only one bill or issue per letter.

**IDENTIFY YOURSELF:** Begin with an introduction of yourself or the organization on whose behalf you are writing. Use a simple statement, such as "I am the Executive Director at \_\_\_\_\_" or "On behalf of Washington CACs" .... or "On behalf of our State's Children" or \_\_\_\_\_"

**GET TO THE POINT:** Follow your introduction with a brief statement of your issue or concern, such as "We urge your support the request for \$510,000 in additional state funding from our State Chapter, Children's Advocacy Centers of Washington (CACWA), which will \_\_\_\_\_." Follow your opening paragraph with a concise explanation of why you support the request. A few strong, well-thought-out arguments are much more effective than a laundry list of reasons to support this request. Whenever possible, use bullet points to outline your arguments.

**RELATE IT TO HOME:** Always explain the relevance of the issue by using "I" statements and citing specific examples. This will help the legislator understand why your position is important to his or her constituents. Include facts about how a bill will impact children and families in the legislator's district. If possible, include a local anecdote illustrating the problem you are seeking to address. Avoid the use of form letters or generic postcards — use your own knowledge and experience to inform the legislator.

**FACTUAL & COURTEOUS** — Rely on the facts but personalize the issue. Explain how the issue affects YOUR life. Avoid personal attacks, threats of political influence or demands.

**ALLOW FOR FOLLOW-UP:** Offer to provide additional information if needed or serve as a resource should the legislator or staff have questions. Don't forget to provide your contact information!

**APPRECIATIVE** — Remember to thank members for their attention. Follow the issue and thank them later if they vote your way.

**Address your letter correctly** — See the details on addressing your letter below.

#### **SENATORS**

The Honorable (full name)  
Washington State Senate  
Dear Senator (last name)

#### **MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE**

The Honorable (full name)  
Washington State House of Representatives  
Dear Representative (last name)

### Using E-mail

E-mail can be an easy and effective tool for communicating with legislators. The tips outlined above for writing letters to legislators also apply to e-mails: keep them brief and to the point, with facts and anecdotes relevant to the legislator's district.

**Be concise** — Limit your email to 500 words or less; one issue or bill per message

**Be direct** — State your subject clearly in the email subject line.

**Avoid informal language** — E-mail to a legislator should be treated as seriously as a written letter. Resist the temptation to use the informal language and symbols often associated with e-mail communications. Never use impolite language or make "demands."

**Include your full address and zip code** — Make sure the text of your e-mail includes your full name and street address, including zip code. Many legislative offices screen e-mails for address information identifying the sender as a constituent. E-mails that appear to come from outside the district are unlikely to be read and may be blocked by filtering programs.

## Writing Effective Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor can be effective in influencing public opinion and legislators' views.

The "Letter to the Editor" section is one of the most widely read parts of most newspapers, offering a chance to reach a broad audience. Letters to the editor can provide readers with information and insights on issues with which they may be unfamiliar and can also inspire readers to act.

**KEEP IT BRIEF** — Keep letters to 250 words or less. Discuss only one issue in a letter. Many newspapers will edit letters. Keeping the letter short will help ensure that the newspaper does not edit out important points.

**GET TO THE POINT** — Start with a compelling introductory sentence. Follow the introduction with short, clear factual points. Don't make broad statements you can't back up with facts. Check on the next page for statistics and other compelling information to use. Focus on what is most important rather than trying to address every aspect of the issue.

**RELATE IT TO HOME** — Newspaper readers care about how an issue will impact them or their families locally. Including brief information on the economic or other impacts of an issue in the community will draw readers' interest.

**PERSONALIZE THE ISSUE** — Provide an example of how the issue impacts a real person in the community to help readers understand the issue and encourage them to act. Avoid submitting "form" letters.

**END WITH A CALL TO ACTION** — Ask readers to follow-up, such as joining in calling on policymakers to address the issue.

**BE TIMELY** — Try to place letters when they will be most effective. For example, letters supporting or opposing legislation will have the most impact when legislators are considering the issue.

**BE PROFESSIONAL** — Letters should be typed or neatly handwritten and should follow the submission rules of the particular newspaper. Language should be polite but persuasive.

**IDENTIFY YOURSELF** — Sign the letter personally. Include any information highlighting your expertise on the issue. Provide contact information, including an address and daytime phone number so the newspaper can verify the letter's authenticity.