

# TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE

Members of Congress are genuinely interested in the opinions of the people they represent. Therefore, letters of Congress remain one of the primary means of access to decision makers by their constituents.

Americans send millions of letters and postcards each year asking for support of their positions on issues before the house and senate. No Senator or Representative has time to read all the mail – generally key staff personnel who specialize in constituent service perform this task. They act as the Representatives’ and Senators’ eyes and ears, keeping them apprised of this mail as well as keeping records of how their state or district feels about each issue. Letters are a “vote” with important consequences.

- Form letters or postcards distributed by organized interest groups and mailed in by citizens are effective, but not to the same degree as truly personal letters. Identical letters and post cards indicate that the writer has been supplied with the message.
- Well thought out, clearly written personal letters signed, dated, and bearing the sender’s address will often be forwarded to the Representative or Senator as examples of constituent interest or response to an issue.
- Your ability to influence your Representative or Senator depends on the points you make and the clarity with which you make them. Keep it simple and be brief.
- State the purpose of your letter in the first paragraph. Refer to the legislation you address by its bill number, e.g. Senate bill: S. (bill number), or its title.
- Be clear about whether you feel the legislation is good or bad. Support your opinion with examples.
- Personalize your correspondence. Show familiarity with their voting record: “I was glad to see you support Medicare last year, and now I urge you to vote against the proposed cuts.”
- Focus on one issue in each letter. If possible, keep the letter to one page.
- Steer away from emotional outrage and threats. Thank members for voting the right way.
- Make sure your letter is neatly typed or legibly written. Have someone check it for readability and typos before you mail it.
- Be sure to sign your name and include your full address.

## ***Addressing Correspondence:***

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_:

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_