

How to Write Your State Legislator

1. Don't hesitate to write your legislator if you have something to say that you think should be called to their attention.
2. Every legislator is sensitive to grassroots opinions. They keep in close touch with voters in their district. Letters from constituents, which arrive every day at their home or in Springfield, are one for the best indications of what those constituents are thinking about.
3. Thoughtful, sincere letters on issues that directly affect the writer get the most attention. Such letters are often quoted in committee hearings or in debate.

You Want Your Letter To Be Persuasive... Here Are the Fundamental Do's...

DO address your state legislator properly.
DO write legibly. (Handwritten letters are fine if they are readable).

DO be brief and to the point; discuss only one issue in each letter; identify a bill by number and title if possible.
DO use your own words and stationery. If you are writing as the representative for a group, use the organization's stationery.

DO be sure to include your address and sign your name legibly. If you have any family, business or political connection in regard to the issue, explain it. It may serve as an identification when your point of view is considered.

DO be courteous and reasonable.

DO write when your legislator does something of which you approve. Legislators hear mostly from constituents who are against something; this gives them a one-sided picture of their constituency. A note of appreciation will make your legislator remember you favorably next time you write.

DO write early in the session before a bill has been introduced if you have ideas you would like included in legislation. If you are "lobbying" for or against a bill, and your legislator is a member of the committee to which it has been referred, write when the committee hearings begin. If your legislator is not a member of the committee handling the bill, write them just before the bill comes to the floor for debate and vote.

DO write the chairman or committee members who will hold hearings on you bill. However, remember that you have more influence with legislators from your own district.

DO write the Governor after the bill is passed by both houses if you want to influence his decision to sign the bill or veto it.

There Are a Number of Things You Should Not Do in Writing Your Legislator...

DON'T write on a postcard.

DON'T sign and send a form letter.

DON'T begin on the righteous note of "as a citizen and taxpayer." They assume that you are not an alien, and they know we all pay taxes.

DON'T apologize for writing and taking their time. If your letter is short and expresses your opinion, they are glad to give you a hearing.

DON'T be rude or threatening. It will get you nowhere.

DON'T be vague. Some letters are written in such general terms that they leave the legislator wondering what in the world the writer had in mind.

DON'T send a carbon copy to other legislators. Write each legislator individually.

DON'T write to the members of the House while a bill is being considered in the Senate and vice versa. The bill's provisions may be changed dramatically before it leaves the chamber.

REMEMBER – It is the straightforward letter carrying the appeal of earnestness that commands the interest and respect of legislators. It is especially helpful if you can state how the bill would affect you and your community. Legislators must decide how to vote on hundreds of bills at each session, and they need and want your help in telling them how these bills would affect their district.

How to Address Letters

State Senator

Dear Senator Doe:

The Honorable John Doe

State Senator

(Springfield or District Office mailing address)

State Representative

Dear Representative Doe:

The Honorable John Doe

State Representative

(Springfield or District Office mailing address)

Governor

Dear Governor Doe:

The Honorable John Doe

Governor of Illinois

State House

Springfield, IL 62706

United States Senator

Dear Senator Doe:

The Honorable John Doe

United States Senator

(Wash., DC or District Office mailing address)

Member of Congress

Dear Representative Doe:

The Honorable John Doe

Member of Congress

(Wash., DC or District Office mailing address)