

Letter Writing 101

So, you're going to write your Legislator? Good idea. Make it a good letter.

People who think Legislators pay little or no attention to constituent mail are plain wrong. Concise, well thought out personal letters are one of the most effective ways we have of influencing law-makers. But you want your letter to stand out. Whether you choose to use the Postal Service or email, here are some tips that will help your letter have impact.

Think Locally

It's usually best to send letters to the legislator from your own Representative or Senatorial District. Your vote helps elect them -- or not -- and that fact alone carries a lot of weight. It also helps personalize your letter. Sending the same "cookie-cutter" message to every Legislator may grab attention but rarely much consideration.

Keep It Simple

Your letter should be very simple. Typed, one-page letters are best. A simple three-or four paragraph letter structured like this is recommended:

1. Say who you are and why you are writing. If you want a response, you must include your name and address, even when using email.
2. Provide details. Be factual not emotional. Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others.
3. Close by requesting the action you want taken: to oppose or favor a position.

The best letters are courteous, to the point, and include specific supporting examples.

Addressing Members of the RI State Legislature

To Your Senator:

Senator (full name)

Home Address

Dear Senator Last Name

To Your Representative:

Representative (full name)

Home Address

Dear Representative Last Name

When writing to the Chairperson of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, address them as:

Dear Mr. Chairman

Dear Madam Chairwoman

Dear Mr. Speaker

Dear Madam Speaker