



E-mails and Letters

Contacting members of Congress and other political decision makers can be a powerful way to influence public policy. Know your issue, know the role your addressee plays and be sure to ask for specific action.

Organize an E-mail Campaign

Legislators usually respond better to the traditional advocacy tactics of letters, phone calls or visits. However, e-mail is a quick and easy way to send many letters in a short period of time. Online petitions are effective this way, too.

Tips

- If you send a pre-formatted e-mail, remember to insert your own voice, to edit the subject line of the e-mail and to add your personal perspective. Legislators appreciate individualized correspondence much more than stock letters.
- Wireless Internet allows you to sit in a public area, (e.g. a coffee shop), where you can send hundreds of letters to your legislator(s) in a short period of time. (See the “Creating a Petition” sheet for virtual petition strategies.)
- E-mails and petitions are only taken seriously if an address is included. That is the only way a legislator knows you live in his/her district.
- An effective e-mail should follow the same guidelines as regular letters (see below).

To find your members of Congress go to:

- <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>
- http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Organize a Letter Writing Campaign

You can address your concerns to your Representative, Senator, the President, the Secretary-General of the United Nations or any other elected official relevant to your issue. Strategically, it’s important to pressure the legislative branch, but choose the person who most directly affects what you want to happen.

Do keep in mind that many congressional offices discard mail that is not from a constituent in the corresponding district or state. It’s best to write to a representative with whom you have a connection.

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What? Your letter should be brief, but be sure to include all necessary information. Don’t forget to add a few sentences of background information on the issue, a specific request of what you want the official to do, the correct bill number and title if applicable, why this issue is important to you and why it should be important to the official. If you know the official has been helpful on this issue in the past, thank them for their previous support.

Where? Write letters at group meetings, at work or at related events in the community. Make sure each person includes his or her name and full address at the end of the letter.

Why? All it takes are ten to twenty personal handwritten letters to draw attention to an issue. Remember: your representative's job is to serve you. Be courteous, yet assertive.

Sample Letter

Your Representative
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Representative **(1)**,

I am deeply concerned that the effects global food prices are having on those who are already malnourished and lack enough food to live sustainably. **(2)** I recognize that the Congress passed a bill this spring that addresses issues like food subsidies and issues related to food aid. However, not enough has been done by far to alleviate the hunger, poverty and resulting ill health and lack of productivity that high and rising food costs are having on the extremely poor worldwide. I urge you to

I also ask that the United States to take the following steps **(3)** :

* POINT 1

* POINT 2

* POINT 3

*POINT 4

In a world of relative plenty, we have the power and the moral authority to do more than stand by and watch as hundreds of millions of people worldwide go to bed hungry every night. I urge you to [vote for XX legislation] OR [vote against XXX legislation] OR [increase funding for XXX by XX dollars]. **(4)** For the sake of our shared humanity, we cannot afford to fail.

Sincerely,
Joe Somebody
123 Fake Street **(5)**
Anytown, NY 10001

- 1) Always start with the proper title. Honorable or Representative/Senator.
- 2) Be brief and courteous. Many effective letters are only 4 or 5 sentences long. If you can, begin your letter by thanking the person for a recent vote or speech that you appreciated.
- 3) Be Specific. Highlight the particular issue you are writing about and briefly explain why you want your representative to take action. Choose the three strongest points to disclose to your legislators. If there is a specific bill that you are addressing, identify it by its number (e.g. H.R. __ or S. __).
- 4) Write your own letter and personally sign it. Include your personal experiences in the developing world or other personal connections to the cause. It is not always the fact filled argument, but a concerned person who shared his/her own experience or observations that sways opinion.
- 5) Include your return address on the letter as well as on the envelope. Most congressional offices respond to constituent mail with a letter. Your address shows your member of Congress that you are a constituent.