Tips For Writing To Your Policymaker

Elected officials welcome your opinions and expertise on surgical issues affecting you, your community, and your state. Write to your legislators to voice support or opposition for a piece of legislation, inform them of a problem in your community, share with them your knowledge, thank them for their vote on a certain measure, or offer your expertise for future legislative and regulatory efforts. Start building a relationship with your elected officials – you never know when it may come in handy to have the ear of your representative when an issue arises!

A letter to your legislator can be very effective in influencing the outcome of a piece of legislation and informing him/her of the impact the bill would have on you, your family, and your state. You can write the offices of any of your policymakers – for example, congressional representative, state senator, governor, or the president – regarding any issue that is important to you. Most offices also accept constituent mail via fax or email.

> *"Everybody's vote counts in America, but those who sit down and write letters make their votes count more times. Nothing is more effective than a letter that reflects both an understanding of the question involved and a sincere expression of a personal viewpoint based on that understanding."* – President John F. Kennedy

Keep the following tips in mind as you correspond with your policymakers.

- Accuracy and attention to detail. Be sure to use the proper form of address and correct spelling of the elected official's name.
- Whenever possible, use your organization's letterhead.
- Remember to identify yourself as a constituent.
- Identify yourself as a public health professional in the text of your letter. Whenever possible, give your official title and any professional degrees following your signature.
- Short letters are best — try to keep them to one page. Be sure not to use jargon or confusing technical terms.
- Concentrate on a single issue. Letters should cover only one topic or bill and be timed to arrive while the issue is alive.
- Praise, praise, praise. If your legislator pleases you by supporting a public health issue, write and tell him/her so.

In addition, there are important points to remember regarding the substance of your letter:

- State your purpose for writing at the beginning of the letter.
- Correctly identify the legislation. If you are writing about a specific bill, remember to describe it by its official title and number, as well as by its popular name.
- Tell your legislator how the issue would affect you and the rest of his/her constituents. Your own personal experience and district-specific information are the best supporting evidence. Data and research supporting your position is also important.
- Be sure that your facts and assertions are accurate. Often legislators use constituent

mail to make points during speeches or debates and to convince fellow legislators of their position.

- Ask your policymaker for his/her position on the issue. Indicate that you look forward to hearing from him/her on the issue.

Your letter will be read by the legislator and/or a member of the legislative staff. Sometime after it is received, you should receive a letter from the legislator, which will include the legislator's opinion on the topic, an update on the legislative status of the bill, and any other relevant information about the issue. You may want to send a note of appreciation if your position is supported.

Correct Forms of Address:

To the President:
President_____
The White House
Washington DC 20500
Dear Mr. President:

To the Vice President:
Vice President_____
2203 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington DC 20510
Dear Mr. Vice President:

To your senator:
The Honorable_____
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510
Dear Senator _____

To your representative:
The Honorable_____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515
Dear Representative _____

Forms similar to the above but addressed to your state capital are appropriate for your state representatives and senators:

To the Governor:
The Honorable _____
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S Monroe St
Tallahassee FL 32399
Dear Governor _____

To your state senator:
The Honorable_____
Florida Senate
404 S Monroe St
Tallahassee FL 32399
Dear Senator _____

To your state representative:
The Honorable_____
Florida House of Representatives
402 S Monroe St
Tallahassee FL 32399
Dear Representative _____