



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

Washington Office for Advocacy

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TIPS ON WRITING TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Writing letters in your own words is probably the most efficient and effective way to influence members of Congress.

They need to hear from you! They depend on you to educate them about what is happening in their district and what legislation is most important to their constituents. Writing a letter and making a follow-up phone call only takes a few minutes of your time, but it ensures that your representatives know how you want to be represented. A staff person reads every letter and many are also read by the Member. Since congressional offices receive only a handful of letters on most issues, each letter carries real power. Identifying yourself as a person of faith makes your letters even more compelling!

Letter-Writing Tips

Think about your letter as having three paragraphs, or parts. The opening part should clearly state your position and why you hold it. Urge the Member of Congress to take specific action (e.g. vote for/against a particular bill or amendment; co-sponsor a bill; etc.) The second part should give more information on the bill/action in question and evidence supporting your position. The third part should be a brief summary and provide final encouragement. When possible, somewhere in your letter you should also try to thank your Member for some action they've taken in the past.

1. Be personal.

A mailed or faxed handwritten letter receives much greater attention than a preprinted card or letter. A short story about your personal experience makes your letter more powerful.

2. State your request clearly and concisely.

Make a specific request. Keep your letter short and to the point.

“In order to protect the civil liberties of all Americans, please support S. 1552, “Protecting the Rights of Individuals Act” that will be offered by Senators Murkowski and Wyden.”

“Speak to key decision makers on the Senate HELP committee in support of fully funding Head Start programs.”

3. Make it real.

Provide some brief information (a story, a few statistics, etc.) to make the issue concrete and very real for your member of Congress. For example:

“Research from several countries reveals a lower reliance on abortion in areas where contraceptive use is higher—reflecting greater access to family planning services.”

“The World Health Organization recently estimated that some 70 percent of people in Africa co-infected with TB and AIDS do not even have access to the \$10 worth of anti-TB drugs needed for a highly effective, low-cost strategy for curing TB called DOTS. This is not due to lack of infrastructure, but simply lack of funds to keep already existing programs running.”

4. Follow up.

Call your member of Congress’s office and ask to speak to the aide in charge of your issue. Mention your letter and repeat your request. Get a definite answer to your request (a yes or a no) or make plans to get a definite answer in the near future.

More Things to Keep in Mind

- One-page letters are ideal. Say what you need to say, but be as brief as possible.
- Keep your letter to one issue. A letter with a laundry list of issues has less impact than a letter on one topic.
- Make it legible and neat. Legible handwritten letters and well-typed letters are both effective.
- Do not worry about a specific bill number. Most Members of Congress follow issues rather than bill numbers, and many important issues arise as amendments.
- Do not write nasty or insulting letters to your elected officials. It is not an effective means of persuasion.

Where to send your letters:

The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515