



ADVOCACY TOOLBOX

Writing Persuasive Letters

Identify Yourself as a Constituent: Put your name and complete address on both the envelope and the letter. Members of Congress (MOCs) will only feel compelled to respond to constituent mail, so it's important to establish immediately that you live in their district.

Use Proper Forms of Address: Address your MOC as *the Honorable*. Also, be sure to get their title correct, e.g. Senator, Representative. Use *the Honorable* in the address and the office title in the salutation (Dear Senator Smith).

Be Brief and Simple: Try to stay on one page but keep it to no more than two. In the first paragraph, state your purpose and what you want. Avoid the temptation to be comprehensive or go into too much detail in explaining the legislation, policy, issue, etc. Stick to one or two solid arguments for your preferred course of action.

State (and Repeat) Your Ask: Make your position and/or request clear in both your opening and closing paragraphs. Be specific by stating exactly what action you want your MOC to take, i.e. to co-sponsor legislation, to vote a certain way, etc. Don't ask your MOC to simply *care* about the issue, ask your MOC to *act*.

Personalize Your Message: A personal letter is much more powerful than a form letter. While form letters, postcards, and petitions are effective in certain situations, they don't carry the weight of a personalized, individual letter. Persuasive constituent mail humanizes issues by placing them in a local, personal and relatable context. When sample letters are provided for your use, incorporate your own words and personal perspective into the text for maximum impact.

Be Polite and Avoid Ultimatums or Rudeness: Everyone responds better to praise than criticism. Threats and ultimatums do little to convince an MOC to adopt your position. If a MOC does take the course of action that you suggest, send them a note of thanks, which will help build a long-term relationship with the MOC and his or her staff.

Do Not Exaggerate or Lie. Ever. Period.

Make Your Message Timely: Don't procrastinate. Your letter is not helpful if it arrives after a vote. Be aware of the legislative process (is the bill in committee or coming up for a vote on the floor?) and time your letter accordingly. Mail generally takes about a month to reach an MOC's staff due to volume and screening. If your issue is more urgent consider sending an email or making a phone call.