

How to Write a Letter to a Politician

Elected officials hear often from industry representatives, trade associations, and myriad other special interest groups. They don't hear enough from the people who actually put them into office - citizen voters. Regardless of the issue, letters from voters play a key role in influencing Members of Parliament (MP), members of provincial legislatures, and local elected officials.

It has been estimated that one letter indicates to a politician that 50 people have the same position. Political parties spend thousands of dollars each year trying to find out how people stand on different issues. Save them money and write! Your MP is obligated by law to respond to your letter. Send a copy of your letter to leaders of the opposition. And when your MP responds to your letter, write back. Become pen pals! A follow-up letter shows you are following your legislator's actions and are truly concerned. Finally, remember: any letter is better than no letter.

Sample Letter to a Politician

Your Name
28 Main St.
Anytown, Anyprovince
X1X 1X1

Month, Day, Year

Re: _____

Politician's name
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6
(Note: no postage is required
when writing to your federal MP)

or

Politician's name
Provincial legislature
OR Anycity Council
Anytown, Anyprovince
X1X 1X1
(Postage is required for letters
to provincial & local officials)

Dear _____,

This sample letter to your legislator outlines the key elements for maximizing the impact of your letter. You should use personal stationary rather than a post card or form letter. Type the letter if you can. If you can't, make sure your handwriting is legible.

The letter should fit on one page; if you have more information than will fit on one page, summarize it and include the surplus as background material. You should be brief, specific and timely. Write the letter in your own words, and include your own thoughts.

Follow the three R's: be right, reasonable and repetitive. In the first paragraph, discuss just one issue, and state exactly why you are writing. Make it clear which issue you are discussing by writing at the top of the page "Re: _____", filling in the blank with the issue or the bill number. By demonstrating familiarity with your MP and his/her record your letter will evoke respectful interest. When writing about specific legislation, refer to the bill in question by name and # if possible.

In the next paragraph, explain why this issue is of importance to you. Give specific examples of how it affects you personally or others in your community. Anecdotes can be very persuasive. Let your MP know that you are concerned, and that you have committed yourself to informing yourself on the issue.

Along with your personal experiences, include some hard facts. You may have more information about the issue than the politician. Take this opportunity to educate him/her by quoting national statistics or respected studies. Demonstrate your familiarity with the issue and/or the bill, and with its current status. Maintain a respectful tone. In general, be helpful, not threatening; attacking the legislator could do more harm than good.

In closing, be specific about what you want your legislator to do. Request a response informing you of his/her position on the bill or issue and answering your specific questions.

Sincerely,

