

TIPS ON WRITING TO A LEGISLATOR

The letter is the most popular choice of communication with a legislative office. If you decide to write a letter, this list of helpful suggestions will improve the effectiveness of the letter.

- 1) Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If the letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H.B._____, Senate bill: S.B. _____.
- 2) Be courteous, to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position.
- 3) Address only one issue in each letter, and, if possible, keep the letter to one page.
- 4) It is recommended to fax the letter before mailing it. The delivery of mail to Springfield takes very long due to security and safety precautions.

Addressing correspondence:

To a Senator:

The Honorable (full name)
Illinois State Senate
Springfield, Illinois

Dear Senator (last name):

To a Representative:

The Honorable (full name)
Illinois State House of Representatives
Springfield, Illinois

Dear Representative (last name):

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as;

Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman:
or Dear Mr. Speaker:

SENDING E-MAIL TO A LEGISLATOR

When addressing an E-mail to a member of the General Assembly, follow the same suggestions as for a printed letter.

For the subject line of your E-mail, identify your message by topic or bill number.

The body of your message should use this format:

Your name
Address
City ST ZIP

Dear (title) (last name),

Start your message here.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A PERSONAL VISIT

Meeting with a member of the General Assembly, or legislative staff either in Springfield, IL, or in their district office, is a very effective way to convey a message about a specific issue or legislative matter. Below are some suggestions to consider when planning a visit to a legislative office.

PLAN YOUR VISIT CAREFULLY: Be clear about what it is you want to achieve; determine in advance which member or committee staff you need to meet to achieve your purpose.

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT: When attempting to meet with a member, contact the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler. Explain your purpose and whom you represent. It is easier for legislative staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the member.

BE PROMPT AND PATIENT: When it is time to meet with a member, be punctual and patient. It is not uncommon for a legislator to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted due to the member's crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a member's staff.

BE PREPARED: Whenever possible, bring to the meeting the information and materials supporting your position. Members are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a member may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share with the member information and examples that demonstrate clearly the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.

BE POLITICAL: Members of the General Assembly want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the member's constituency. If possible, describe for the member how you or your group can be of assistance to him/her. When it is appropriate, remember to ask for a commitment.

BE RESPONSIVE: Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information in the event the member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up the meeting with a thank-you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials requested.