**Writing to Your Legislators (National Education Association, www.nea.org)**
Letters and e-mails can be particularly effective in influencing legislators' views. Writing to legislators also offers an opportunity to maintain contact and keep your issues on the front burner even when you cannot meet personally.

**Writing an Effective Letter**

**Keep it brief**

Keep letters to one page. Try to discuss only one issue in a letter.

**Identify yourself**

Begin with an introduction of yourself or the organization on whose behalf you are writing. Use a simple statement, such as "I am a third-grade teacher at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ elementary school" or "On behalf of the members of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_…."

**Get to the point**

Follow your introduction with a brief statement of your issue or concern, such as "We urge your support for \_\_\_\_\_, which will \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_." *If you are writing as in individual and in reference to a specific bill, include the bill number.* **(If you are writing as part of an organization that receives federal funding, you should not include references to specific legislation.)** Follow your opening paragraph with a concise explanation of why you support or oppose the particular bill or issue. A few strong, well-thought-out arguments are much more effective than a laundry list of reasons to support or oppose.  Whenever possible, use bullet points to outline your arguments.

**Relate it to home**

Help the legislator understand why your position is important to his or her constituents. Include specific facts about how a bill will impact educators, students or schools in the legislator's district. If possible, include a local anecdote illustrating the problem you are seeking to address. Avoid the use of form letters or generic postcards — use your own knowledge and experience to inform the legislator.

**Allow for follow-up**

Include specific contact information and offer to act as a resource should the legislator or staff have questions or need additional information. Where appropriate, state in the letter that you will follow up with a telephone call.

**Addressing Written Correspondence**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **United States Senators**The Honorable (full name)United States SenateWashington, DC 20510Dear Senator (last name) | **For Members of the U.S. House of Representatives**The Honorable (full name)U.S. House of RepresentativesWashington, DC 20515Dear Representative (last name) |

**Using E-mail**

E-mail can be an easy and effective tool for communicating with legislators. The tips outlined above for writing letters to legislators also apply to e-mails: keep them brief and to the point, with facts and anecdotes relevant to the legislator's district.

**Avoid informal language** — E-mail to a legislator should be treated as seriously as a written letter. Resist the temptation to use the informal language and symbols often associated with e-mail communications. Never use impolite language or make "demands."

**Include your full address and zip code** — Make sure the text of your e-mail includes your full name and street address, including zip code. Many legislative offices screen e-mails for address information identifying the sender as a constituent. E-mails that appear to come from outside the district are unlikely to be read and may be blocked by filtering programs.

Next, thank your legislator for their consideration and sign your name.

**Letter Template**

(Month) (Day) (Year)

The Honorable (First name) (Last name) (Room Number), State Capitol, Lansing, MI 48933

RE: (state the topic or include the bill number, author and subject if you are writing to support or oppose a particular legislative bill)

Dear (Assembly Member/Senator) (Last name):

My name is (your first and last name) and I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(service provider/advocate/community member) who resides in your district.

(State why you support or oppose issue here. Choose up to three of the strongest points that support your position and state them clearly.)

(Include a personal story. Tell your representative why the issue is important to you and how it affects you, your family member and your community.)

(Tell your representative how you want her or him to vote on this issue and ask for a response. Be sure to include your name and address on both your letter and envelope.)

Sincerely,

SIGN YOUR NAME

Print your name Street address City, State, Zip code