

# Writing Letters to Public Officials

## **Who is a public official?**

Public officials are those individuals who the people have elected to represent them, or serve as leaders. Examples are mayors, legislators, governors, federal representatives, senators, etc.

## **Will a public official read what I write?**

In one way or another, yes, all public officials read what their constituents (the people they represent or serve) write to them. Sometimes, if the official is very busy, such as a governor, a member of the staff will read the letter and will report the concerns to the appropriate person or office in the official's office. You will most often receive a written response from the public official, or the staff, as well.

## **Yeah, okay, but will they really care what I say?**

Yes, they will! In general, if a public official receives a letter about a particular issue, they consider that twenty-five other people feel that same way! So, writing a letter to a public official carries a lot of weight in terms of getting your opinion across.

## **What should I say?**

Public officials represent you, and they need to be informed about how their constituents feel in order to represent them well. If you are concerned about a particular issue, you should write your opinion on that issue and provide reasons that explain your opinion. Also, it's important to explain that you are a constituent of that public official. She will listen to you more since you can vote her in, or out, of office!

## **How long should it be?**

Since public officials are busy, it's best to keep your letters to a single page. It is sometimes difficult to get all you want to say in a page, but your letter will get more attention if you can keep it short. Sometimes it works to draft out what you want to say, without thinking of length and then cut it down to size.

## **How important is grammar/spelling/punctuation?**

You should be careful with this type of letter. However, if you have a single typo or mistake, it will not matter. Although, if you have too many, your letter will probably not be taken as seriously as it should be.

## **Does it need to be typed/computed?**

Yes.

## **How do I find the addresses?**

Almost every public official has a web page, usually linked to the city, county, state, or federal government pages. These always contain "Contact Us" links that will display the postal mail addresses and also email addresses. (However, e-mails only represent between 5 and 10 constituents, much less than the 25 people that a written letter represents.)

The Community Writing Center has some books that give examples of letters. They will provide you with questions to help generate ideas for your letter, and advice on how to make it as brief and clear as possible. CWC Writing Assistants are available to assist you at any state of your letter writing process.

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