

KEY TIPS

How to Contact Your Legislator

Click [here](#) to view document on for your State Representative's contact information.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are a good way to bring light to an issue, educate the public on the issue and they also open opportunities for dialogue with friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc.

Write a letter to your local newspaper. Here are some good tips:

- Keep it under 200 words. The shorter, the better chances it has to get published (both letters in this sample were under 190 words).
- Stay on the subject. Bring your main point at the beginning of your letter and close with it.
- Do not get discouraged by comments made by the opposition; use their comments to educate others who don't hold extremists' views (10% of your audience). Don't waste your time with them. Talk to those who sincerely want to know more (they are about 60% of your audience).

Creating Talking Points

Talking points are ideas, usually compiled in a short list with summaries of the group's agenda for legislators and the people to help the client focus their public comments to agreed "key messages". These key messages are often developed based on opinion polling and focus group research.

Quick Tips - Writing Successful Talking Points

Writing talking points can be quite easy, once you determine the answers to a few simple questions:

- What is the purpose of the bill? What message are you trying to convey through introducing this bill?
- Who is the audience of this message?
- What can the speaker say in their speech that will reinforce the key message of your bill? Can the speaker say anything special that will be more effective coming from him/her? The answers to this question, will give you the key components that should be included in the talking points.

Knowing this, keep the following points in mind while writing talking points:

- Talking points (TPs) should convey one – or at the most two – key messages.
- TPs should be written in bullet points, size 22 font, and no more than 3 pages.
- Please try to make sure that the speaker does not say anything in his/her TPs that will be said by another speaker of the bill [i.e. common, well-known statistics, project specifics.]
- Use the introduction to get your listeners' attention – relate the bill to the audience, state the importance of the bill, arouse curiosity about the bill, question the audience, and/or begin with a relevant quotation.
- Provide good examples that support your key messages. Talk in specifics, never be vague.

- The conclusion always reinforces the key messages of the TPs. Try to end on a memorable, emotional note (when appropriate).

How to Contact my Legislator? How to Let my Legislator Know How I Feel About an Issue?

One way is to call your legislator's office. Email is a second method. Email is most effective if it is not a blanket mailing to all members, but a specific mail message to your representative or senator. When sending an email, remember to include your name, postal address and phone number. The best way to get a legislator's attention is with a short, well-reasoned letter. Here are a few *do's* and *don'ts* on how to write an effective letter to your representative:

Do . . .

Be brief; never write more than one page.

- Make your letter neat and easy to read (type or print).
- Make sure you understand the [legislative process](#).
- Identify the issue at the top of the letter and cover only one issue per letter. If you have more than one issue that needs to be addressed, write separate letters for each issue.
- Remember; you're the expert; make your letter informative.
- Identify yourself and the reason for your expertise.
- Get right to the point. For example, you may wish to begin your letter like this: "I hope you will support (oppose) HF or SF___." Give your reasons for supporting or opposing the measure. Tell your legislator why you think the bill, if it becomes law, will help or hurt you, your children, your business, or your community. Explain what it means to you.
- Use terms they will understand and avoid using abbreviations.
- Offer to be of assistance. Offer to testify if there is a hearing regarding the issue with which you're concerned.
- Ask for a reply if you want one. However, keep in mind how many meetings and hearings your legislator must attend. They will call or write to you as soon as they are able.
- Be polite and reasonable. Lawmakers can't please everyone. They may disagree with you. Try to respect their views. Don't lose your temper, even on paper. Tell your legislator what you think and why, but be polite.
- And finally, be sure to say "thanks."

Don't . . .

- Don't use form letters or post cards. Use your own words. Legislators say, "I'd rather get one short, simple, handwritten letter than a hundred form letters that organizations urge people to write. The letters come in stacks 300 deep. Even if they're handwritten, they're word for word the same." Also, use personal or business stationery, or a plain sheet of paper.
- Don't threaten legislators. Legislators say, "Some folks don't know how you stand on an issue, but they'll attack you right off the bat. They'll say, 'Vote for HF___ or else,' and you may already think it's a wonderful idea. Or they'll write, 'Why aren't you supporting this bill, you fool?' and you're the sponsor of the bill. Threats and insults don't work."
- Don't address a legislator as "Congressman."

Proper Way to Address your Letter:

Representative (Full Name)
Iowa House of Representatives
State Capitol Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

or

Senator (Full Name)
Iowa Senate
State Capitol Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

The salutation should read: Dear Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. (Surname):

Here are a Few More Tips:

- Make an appointment. It's best to let your legislator know when you're going to be at the Capitol so he or she can arrange to spend some time with you. Call or write.
- If you're calling about a specific piece of legislation, find out the House or Senate file number and status before you contact your legislator. For help, call Legislative information Office at (515) 281-5129 or via email at lioinfo@legis.state.ia.us.