

LETTER WRITING

Writing letters in your own words is an efficient and effective way to influence members of Congress or your state legislators. Since congressional and legislative offices receive only a handful of letters on most issues, each carries real power especially when it conveys your personal story and puts a face on the issue. In today's world of email, a letter has even more impact.

To your own legislator, your opinion carries more weight than that of any lobbyist. You have the power to re-elect or deny any legislator his or her position at the state or federal level. When multiplied by all of the members of your chapter(s) or support group, that creates a voting bloc.

NOTE: Please keep in mind, that due to concerns about security, mail to legislators can often be delayed. Please allow plenty of time before a key vote. If you are writing about an urgent issue, consider either faxing or email.

LETTER WRITING

The best time to write to a legislator is when an issue is first made known and before there is a heavy mail response. While this is not always possible, it could assure you that you will find an audience for your letter. The CHADD national office will monitor federal and state initiatives on your behalf. Check out the public policy area of www.chadd.org to see if there is AD/HD legislation being considered in your state. Local groups will have a better handle on county or school district issues

There are a number of advantages to writing letters to get our views across. Even when you present your issues orally during testimony or an office call, a letter or fact sheet giving the pertinent facts can be a very useful tool.

WHEN IS LETTER WRITING APPROPRIATE?

- *When you are not under time constraints.*
- *When you want to educate the policy maker.* A letter can be an educational tool. The policy maker has a written record of the issue and your request that can be referred to and used as a resource document.
- *When you are presenting complex material(s).* Offering information on your issue in writing allows you to organize the information so that it can be more easily understood. A written presentation also allows the policy maker time to consider it and understand it more fully.

- *Use a letter to thank a legislator for supporting your issue.*
- *Use a letter as a follow-up to a visit with the legislator and to thank them for their time.*

LETTER WRITING TIPS

Think about your letter as having three paragraphs, or parts. The opening paragraph should clearly state your position on the issue at hand and why you feel strongly about the issue. Urge the legislator you are writing to take specific action (e.g., vote for/against a particular bill or amendment; co-sponsor a bill; etc.). If you think the language in a bill should be changed, be sure to include the exact language you would suggest. This always makes it easier for the legislator and far more likely your concerns will be properly addressed.

The next paragraph should provide the legislator (or staff person) with more information on the bill/action in question and evidence supporting your position. Tell the legislator how the bill will affect your family, your friends, your community, etc. Include specific examples whenever possible. The third paragraph should be a brief summary. Always try to thank the individual for some action they have taken in the past.

QUICK TIPS

- *One page letters are ideal. Say what you need to say, but be as brief as possible.*
- *Keep your letter focused on one issue. A letter with a laundry list of issues has less impact than a letter focused only on one topic.*
- *Introduce yourself in your letter and let the legislator know why you are interested or concerned about the issue.*
- *Include supporting information or one or two facts that support your position. When possible, include a specific bill number*
- *Use a sincere and respectful tone. Be positive. Do not be argumentative.*
- *Express your appreciation for considering your position.*
- *Provide contact information if they desire additional information.*

REFER TO SAMPLE LETTERS BELOW.

ATTACHMENT 1
SAMPLE LETTER TO LEGISLATOR

Date

The Honorable Jane B. Doe
Texas Senate
PO Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711-2068

Dear Senator Doe:

Please actively support SB 5142, the Teacher In-service Training Act, which would increase.

The Senate hearings, which were held on March 14, show the importance of training our public school teachers to effectively educate all children with disabilities. Children with AD/HD are the largest group of children with disabilities in our school system and are present in every classroom. When my son Jimmy, has a teacher who understands his AD/HD, his academic performance and classroom behavior are significantly improved. All of our children need the same level of expertise from their teachers.

I deeply appreciate your many years of support for all children with disabilities. I ask you to once again show your support by co-sponsoring SB 5142. Your active support can make the difference on passage of this bill. If I can provide you with any additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely

Jennifer Smith

ATTACHMENT 2
SAMPLE LETTER TO LEGISLATOR

Date

The Honorable Jack Smith
Member of the Senate
State Capitol, Room 1234
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Senator Smith:

I recently became aware of Senate Bill 3173 and I am writing to voice my concern. This bill appears to restrict open communication between teachers and parents about children with behavioral difficulties in the classroom. I am particularly concerned about the portions of the bill that would stop teachers from mentioning that my child may need an evaluation for AD/HD.

When my daughter Anne was in second grade, we thought she was just a rambunctious and highly energetic child who did not do very well in school. But when her teacher suggested we might want to have her evaluated for AD/HD, it was a godsend. Now that she is retrieving treatment, every aspect of her life (and our family life) has improved. We used to struggle every day to get Anne out the door and on her way to school. She hated going. But today, now that she is learning and experiencing success, she loves school.

Often school is the first place that a child has to control behavior and focus for extended periods of time. For Anne this was not possible until we realized she had AD/HD. Passage of this bill will make it more difficult for thousands of families to understand their child may need treatment.

As a strong supporter of the rights of families and parents, please vote against a bill that would deprive parents of essential information to help their children. Please oppose any efforts to pass this legislation as it is now drafted. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Tom Jackson