
Advocates Tip Sheet

Communicating with Legislators



Effective communication is the foundation of effective advocacy. This tip sheet provides useful information on how to effectively convey your message to legislators and other elected officials.

They Care What You Think

First, know that legislators pay attention to their constituents' communications. You have the power to vote for or against them in the next election. So your opinion matters to them!

Lawmakers are busy people. In New Jersey, most hold full-time jobs in addition to their part-time posts in the state capital. So, the number one rule to communicating with politicians is keep it brief and get to the point.

Keep your letter to one page, if at all possible. Even though you may feel strongly about the issue, resist the urge to tell the "whole story" in a long letter. A short, concise letter is much more effective. If you have a long story to tell, close with, "If you need additional information, please let me know."

If you are writing about a specific bill, include the bill number and a brief statement on the subject matter at the beginning of the letter. Because thousands of bills are introduced each session, it is impossible for individual legislators to track all of them.

Discuss only one bill or issue in your letter. This makes it far easier for legislators or staff to track. If you wish to comment on several issues, write separate letters.

Your letter should be neat and your tone sincere and polite. Guard against complaining or being overly negative. Do not threaten or belittle.

Your letter should contain the following components:

- A brief statement (10 words or less) on the subject and the bill number if you are writing about a specific bill.
- An introduction of yourself that explains why you are interested in or concerned about an issue or bill.
- A short personal anecdote about how the bill will affect you, your family, your community, your business, your job, your school, etc.
- Some facts, including supporting information and data to support your position. (ACNJ's KIDS COUNT Data Center is a good source for finding relevant data. Visit www.acnj.org.)
- An invitation to contact you to discuss the bill.
- A request for a reply if you need one.
- A statement of appreciation for consideration of your position
- Your full name, address, phone number and signature

You may also opt to use e-mail to contact your legislator. In general, the letter writing rules apply for e-mail, but you might try to be even more concise. You should also remember to include your full name, home address and telephone number in the body of your email. Most legislators want to know who sent the email, especially where you live as they pay more attention to voters living in their home district.

See ACNJ's **Find Your Legislator Fact Sheet (available at www.acnj.org)** to learn how to contact your Legislators.

The Advocates for Children of New Jersey is the state's foremost child research and advocacy organization. For more than 30 years, ACNJ has advocated for policies and programs that improve the lives of children and families in New Jersey. Over the years, ACNJ's issues have expanded from child welfare and juvenile justice to include early learning, health and family economic success.

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