



*End discrimination based on
sexual orientation and
gender identity*

Tips for Writing Effective Letters to Public Officials

- **The most effective form of written communication with your legislator is a hand-written note.** Legislators hear from many of their constituents and interest groups on a daily basis. Much of what is given to them is “mass produced,” readily ignored, and often immediately discarded. If you have taken the time to send a hand-written note, your public official will notice, and will take your position more seriously.
- **If your handwriting is completely illegible, a typed, but hand-signed letter is appropriate.** Leave enough space at the bottom of the letter to write a few extra words in a PS, such as “it was nice meeting with you yesterday,” “thank you for your time in our phone conversation,” or “your vote means a lot to me.”
- **While email can be an effective means of communication, it is often misused.** Many public officials have staff who screen all mail, including email. Because of the volume of email they receive, staff will forward only those emails they think the official needs to see. If a legislator is receiving a flood of email “for” and “against” a single issue, staffers will often give the legislator a tally of the number of emails on either side. There are a few techniques you can use to maximize the impact of your email:
 - **Avoid common subject lines**, such as “Vote no on HB2260.” Instead, think of how you would name the email if you were sending it to an acquaintance: “My thoughts on HB2260” or “A letter from your neighbor about SB56.” Be creative!
 - **Personalize the language of your email as much as possible.** Overuse of copying and pasting from organizational talking points is one of the fastest ways to have your email ignored.
 - **Officials often publish two email addresses.** Send your email to both of them. Their contact information is usually on their official web page.
- **In most cases, you will be writing your elected official about a specific bill, law, or policy.** It’s important that you keep your letter on the topic of that legislation. If you’re writing about employment non-discrimination, don’t branch out to marriage equality or hate crimes.
- **Be sure you have a clear understanding of the issue about which you are writing.** Equality Kansas may have suggested talking points, sample letters, or other information you can use in preparing your letter.
- **Never send a form letter!** It cannot be stressed enough that the use of form letters will have little to no persuasive impact with public officials. If Equality Kansas has suggested specific language to use in your letter, try your best to re-write it in your own words. If you are uncertain about the wording of your letter, ask someone in the organization for input or clarification on the right way to frame your argument.
- **Keep the length of your letters reasonable.** Letters of 150 to 250 words, whether printed or emailed, are more likely to be read by your public official than a longer letter. If you need to present

more information than will fit within 250 words (approximately one full typed page), do so with attachments of reports or studies you are referencing in your letter.

- **Be sure to include your personal story.** Why is this subject important to you? Tell your legislator how this issue affects your life, and the lives of your family and friends.
- **A good letter to your public official has four parts:**
 1. **The introduction, which refers to the specific law, bill, or policy.** Make that reference clear in your letter. Be sure to include the bill or ordinance number if you know it, and a general description of the policy issue you are writing about.
 2. **The facts you wish to present to support your position.** Do not repeat entire studies. Instead, quote a statistic or fact or two from a specific source, and cite your source. If you believe it's important for the official to have the source document(s), include them as attachments.
 3. **Your clearly stated opinion of the facts.** This part of your letter should begin with the words "in my opinion..." or "I believe..." or "I think that..."
 4. **The Big Ask. It is vital that you conclude your letter with a request for support.** "Please vote 'yes' on the employment non-discrimination bill," "I hope I can count on your support on this issue," or similar language. If you do not include a clear and specific ask in your letter, your public official may not see a need to take a position on your issue.
- **Unless you are clearly stating your opinion on an issue, always remain factual.** Do not invent or exaggerate! The opposition is also providing information to public officials, and if you are untruthful, the public official will find out.
- **Never insult, attack, or demean others.** You will ruin your own credibility and the credibility of our organization, and you could end up turning supporters into opponents.
- **Be sure to address your official with the proper honorific:** "Dear Senator Jones," "Representative Smith," and "Councilman Doe" are correct. Do not address them by their first names, or by Mr. or Ms.
- **Never use ALL CAPS, and use underline, *italics*, or **bold** sparingly.** Your words should contain their own emphasis.
- **Conclude your letter with an offer of more information, and with your contact information.** Your full name, address, email address and telephone number should be included on all of your correspondence.
- **Include a "PS."** If you are sending a typewritten letter, a typed or hand-written PS will draw the eye and help make your point. The PS is often the first part of a printed letter that's read.
- **If your public official responds with a request for more information, please follow up immediately!** If you are unable to provide what they are looking for, do not hesitate to ask your organization's leadership.

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