

Writing Your Legislators

Letters may be written to a legislator's home address or to the State House during hearings, committee process or legislative sessions. The structure of the letter should include:

1. The focus of your letter (preferably an action statement informing your legislator what you want done).
2. If a bill, identification by name and number.
3. Your credentials or why you have special knowledge about the issue.
4. Major consequences of the proposed legislation.
5. Rationales for your point of view (facts and statistics).
6. Observations, personal anecdotes, or concrete examples supporting your rationales.
7. A reiteration of what you want the legislator to do (vote yes, vote no, introduce legislation, encourage others to act).
8. The effects proposed legislation will have on constituents (not just nursing).
9. A request for your legislator's response (you are entitled to this information).

Other suggestions for improving your letter writing are as follows:

Letterheads portray to legislators whom you represent. Use personal stationery rather than letterhead from your health care facility, agency or school. ISNA stationery is acceptable when representing official association positions authorized by ISNA headquarters and mailed from the ISNA office.

Always include your name and address on the letter. A letter cannot be answered if there is no return address or the signature is not legible. Envelopes with return addresses are usually discarded.

Letters may be handwritten or typed. The deciding factor will be the legibility of your handwriting. Form letters are discouraged, because of their limited influence on legislators. Lawmakers want to hear their constituent's viewpoints, not "canned" responses funneled through their constituents. Sample letters designed to assist nurses in composing letters should be used only as a guide. Personalize your letter and make it your own.

Keep your letter brief. Legislators are far too busy to read much more than one page. Include relevant and concise information – such as a fact sheet, summary document or newspaper clipping – when it lends more power to your letter. **Do not** apologize for writing and taking the legislator's time.

Letters are most effective when written to your legislator and when directed toward legislators in key decision-making positions (for example, chairpersons and pertinent committee members).

Time your letter to coincide with key events in the legislative process. A letter campaign is most effective during interim study committee meetings pre-session and during committee meetings in-session. Committees are where ideas are honed and formalized for presentation to the General Assembly. Do not write members of the House while the bill is still being considered in the Senate and vice versa. The bill may be quite different by the time it leaves one chamber.

Keep in mind that you write letters to legislators to help them better represent you. It is not your place to cajole, demand or threaten. Avoid emotionalism or righteous clichés like "as a citizen and a taxpayer." Legislators respond best to courtesy and recognition of their previous actions supporting health care and pro-nursing initiatives.

Generally avoid writing a legislator more than once on the same issue. Your time will be better spent persuading peers in your legislative district or peers of every legislator to write letters on the same issue. Also, avoid covering more than one topic per letter. Multiple topics dissipate the force of your argument.

Follow-up to a legislator's actions may include a letter of commendation or "Thank-you" note when he or she has done something of which you particularly approve. Legislators like to be rewarded for "good behavior," too. Follow letters with visits.

Please send a copy of your letter to ISNA headquarters.

Adapted from Communication materials provided by Melinda Rider, 1988.

Address your elected officials in a respectful manner with attention to the correct spelling of their names and proper titles.

State Senators

The Honorable (full name)
Indiana State Senate
State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Senator (last name):

State Representatives

The Honorable (full name)
Indiana House of Representatives
State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Representative (last name):

Governor

The Honorable (full name)
Governor of the State of Indiana
State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Governor (last name):

Source: League of Women Voters