

Write to Ride

How to write a letter to Your Lawmaker

It takes only a few minutes to write a letter, but those few minutes can make a big difference. When members of the House of Representatives or US Senate received enough letters on a particular issue, it does influence their vote. Unless they hear from you, many legislators may not be aware of how strongly their constituents feel about a particular issue. Your words can sway them and help them to understand why an issue is important to the folks back home. Here are some suggestions on what will give your letter the greatest impact:

User your own words and your own stationary:

A handwritten or neatly typed letter is best, so long as it is legible. Form letters, photocopies, and preprinted postcards are of very limited value.

Be concise:

A one-page letter is more likely to be read than one that is longer.

Personalize your message:

People tend to remember a good story, and one told from the heart is better than shock effect. Let your lawmaker know why the issue matters in your life.

Mention your involvement in local organizations and groups:

If it's pertinent. It is less important to mention affiliation with national conservation organizations like the National Wildlife Federation.

Identify your subject clearly:

If possible, refer to legislation either by its bill number or by its popular name, such as the Clean Water Act.

Discuss only one issue in your letter:

For example, avoid mentioning takings and superfund reauthorization in the same correspondence. This ensures that your letter will be seen by the right staff member.

Ask the lawmaker to do something specific:

For example, ask him or her to vote for a particular amendment, request hearings or cosponsor a bill.

Ask for a reply to your requests and questions.

Be sure to include a return address on your letter.

If you have time, avoid sending your letter by fax or e-mail:

Most Congressional offices pay more attention to letters that arrive by mail.

Sample Letter

Date

To a State Senator:

The Honorable (Full Name)
(Office Building), (Room Number)
Texas Senate
Austin, TX 78711

To a State Representatives:

The Honorable (Full Name)
(Office Building), (Room Number)
Texas House of Representatives
Austin, TX 78711

Dear <Senator / Representative _____ >

Para 1. Purpose of the letter: What you want your lawmaker to do.

I urge you to support H.B. 264, Helmet Reform Bill.

Para 2. Why this bill is important to you: personalize your letters.

I've been stopped and ticketed for not wearing a helmet. I had the proper insurance and documents, but was still cited. I had to take off work in order to go to court just to have the ticket thrown out. The total frustration of having to go to court and lose a day's pay because an officer doesn't understand the law is unacceptable.

Para 3. What's wrong / right with the bill:

Currently State law says riders must carry medical insurance to ride without a helmet. The Federal govt. says group medical policies must be available for riders but insurers need not pay benefits for injuries incurred while riding a motorcycle. Therefore this state law mandates that riders purchase a product that does not meet the requirements of the law.

During the 2001 Session Representative Chavez introduced and the House passed HB 2585 to rectify the existing problem. Again the Senate changed the Bill to make it less explicit and the problem has continued to escalate. Officers still do not know the law and continue to write illegal tickets. Stops for non-helmet usage turn into fishing expeditions in some cases resulting in illegal searches. Judges admit to not knowing the law. Riders are forced to ride hundreds of miles, not once but twice, to plead their case in court. Though knowing the case will be won in court most just choose to simply pay the fine rather than go through the motions of a trial. It is far cheaper than losing two days work and spend those days traveling and sitting in courtrooms.

Para 4. Reaffirm your commitment to this issue.

I cannot emphasize to you the importance I put on your vote for H.B. 264. After 7 years, this law needs to be changed to make it easy for everyone to understand it.

Para 5. Ask for a response.

I look forward to hearing your position on this issue.

Sincerely Yours,

Name
Voter Registration #
Address
(Phone Number)

Tips on Phoning Your Texas State Legislators

To find your state legislator's phone number, you can use the online state legislature directory at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/fyi/fyi.htm> or call the state's switchboard at 512-463-4630 and ask for your Senator and / or Representative's office.

Keep in mind that most state legislatures are only in session part-time, so to get the number for your legislator's district office. Telephone calls are often taken by a staff member and not the actual legislative member. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue to which you wish to comment. If they are not available, you may also leave a message. If you speak with someone other than your legislator, take down their name and title.

Upon reaching your state legislator on the phone, it's easiest to follow the four basic steps:

IDENTIFY yourself by name and the organization (if any) that you represent or the town from which you are calling.

EXPLAIN why you are calling: "I am calling to support / oppose HB ____ / SB ____." Be polite and concise. Creating 1 or 2 talking points will focus the content of your message. Too much information may confuse your message. Ask your legislator his / her position on this issue. Don't assume that your legislator has prior knowledge of your issue. Be calm, respectful, and be prepared to educate, use local examples to accentuate your point.

REQUEST a written response to your phone call if you did not speak to your legislative member. If the legislator requires further information, provide it as soon as possible.

THANK the person who took the phone call for their time and consideration.