



Communicating Effectively with Legislators

A How-To Guide



How to write a letter to your U.S. Congressperson or Indiana Legislator

Elected officials often learn the views of their constituents and of industry through letters, phone calls, faxes, or e-mail. Personal face-to-face meetings are typically left to the hired association lobbyist.

Today, more than ever, your elected officials want and need to receive written communications from their constituents. Writing effective letters to elected officials is not difficult. Properly done, your letter can help leverage the broader effort.

Letter writing guidelines...

- Use your company's letterhead or personal stationary.
- Include your return address on your letter, not just on the envelope. This will help to ensure a response-most envelopes are discarded right away.
- Be accurate. Spell names correctly, and verify information.
- Be brief. Tell why you are writing, and get right to the point. If you know the name or number of the bill that is of interest to you, include it. If not, give as much information as possible about the bill.
- Use INLA sample letters as guidelines when they are available. These will give you specific information such as bill numbers and titles. Look for them on the INLA website at www.inla1.org under "Legislative."
- Relate your reason for writing to a personal experience-this is the best supporting evidence for your opinion. Explain how the legislation would affect your business, your fellow employees, and the community in which you live.
- Ask for a response or for the member to explain his or her position on the issue in the reply so you can avoid receiving a typical "form letter" response. As a constituent, you are entitled to know how and why your representatives feel and how they may vote on a particular issue.
- Contact officials within Indiana and your congressional district-see the INLA Legislative Directory to find your Senators and Representatives.

E-mail Notes: If you choose to communicate via e-mail, follow the same guidelines you would use to write a letter (including the correct salutation). It is also a good idea to send a hard copy of your note or letter to the member's office when composing a message via e-mail.

Suggested Addresses and Salutations...

House

The Honorable (fill in full name)
United States House of Representatives
(Room # and Building Name) House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515
Dear Representative (last name only)

Senate

The Honorable (fill in full name)
United States Senate
(Room # and Building Name) Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Dear Senator (last name only)

Indiana House

The Honorable (fill in full name)
Indiana House of Representatives
200 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2786
Dear Representative (last name only)

Indiana Senate

The Honorable (fill in full name)
Indiana State Senate
200 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2785
Dear Senator (last name only)



For more Indiana
contact information, go to
<http://www.in.gov/legislative/contact/>



**How to call
your U.S. Congressperson
or Indiana Legislator**

Telephone calls are helpful when an urgent issue has arisen, if a vote is imminent, or if members are closely divided over a critical issue. Sometimes, writing letters can be too lengthy a process. Calling a member's office creates a fast and effective way of communicating your position (and the association's position) on a particular piece of legislation.

- Use the Legislative Directory or the INLA website to locate phone numbers for Washington, DC offices and local district offices for each Congressional member, and Indianapolis and District numbers for each Indiana Legislator.
- Calling both offices for your Congressperson or both offices for your Indiana Legislator can never hurt. Use the direct office number: do not go through a switchboard.

- You will almost always speak with a staff member and not the representative. Treat the staffer as if you were speaking directly to the member.
- Know which staffer to ask for (example: "Could I speak with the staff member who handles tax issues?"). You do not want your call to stop at the reception desk.
- Rehearse your conversation or work from background notes.
- Be brief, and stick to one issue. Keep the call between two and three minutes. Express your position, ask for a follow-up call on how the member will vote on the issue, and give your thanks. If you have promised to follow up with any additional information, do so promptly.

After You Receive a Response...

Forward a copy of the response to the IUFC so we know where your Indiana Legislator or Congressperson stands on an issue. Regardless of the type of response you receive-positive, negative, or non-committal-you should always write a brief, timely thank-you letter for his or her response and address the position taken.