

# **Guidelines for Contacting Your Legislators**

**Posted 3-14-2023**

We all need to remember that as we communicate to our legislators, we are Ambassadors for our homeschools. You may be the only homeschool family your legislator will meet. Let's be great, positive Ambassadors for homeschooling!!!

Thank you to those that attended the FHE 2023 Homeschool Day!!! You were wonderful!!!!

The following are some excerpts from the Families for Home Education booklet, *First Things First: A Guide for the Missouri Home Educator* (pages 12 & 13).

During our visits to legislators, we need to be sure to dress our best and take only our children who can behave properly to help make a good impression. Also, we need to leave any extra equipment we may have such as strollers out in the halls (especially when visiting with representatives who have very small offices) to show that we realize and respect the fact that they are conducting business. When legislators see professionally dressed parents and well mannered, well dressed children, it helps to leave a positive image of home educators in general. When they see with their own eyes proof that the excellent statistics about home schooled students are accurate, we have gone a long way towards influencing them positively towards home educators and protecting our freedom.

During your visit with your state senator and representative, you can use the following ideas to help make your visit a productive one:

1. Identify yourself as home educators and constituents.
2. Inform them you are satisfied with the current law on home education.
3. Leave literature, surveys, data, etc. on home education. (You can purchase these at a small cost from Home School Legal Defense Association and the National Home Education Research Institute. See FHE's website for links to these organizations.)
4. Express appreciation for their work and ask for support of home education.
5. Do not enter into a heated debate about home education. If your legislator expresses an unfavorable view, politely thank him or her for his or her time, and notify FHE. We will use our lobbyist and other tactics to gently try to persuade that individual. Above all, do NOT make threats such as "I will never

vote for you again,” or “I’ll be working for your opponent in the next election.” Such talk serves no useful purpose.

Remember to not be over-awed by the people who serve us as our legislators. They are just ordinary people like the rest of us. However, we do need to show them the proper respect due to those who serve in an elected office, even if we do not like their particular political views.

*“Writing a courteous, well-informed personal letter can sway opinion-makers and legislators.”* (Jane Chastain, Citizen Magazine, April 1989)

- **BE SPECIFIC:** Write about one issue per letter. Identify bill number when possible.
- **BE SELECTIVE:** Concentrate on the lawmakers representing your districts.
- **BE BRIEF:** A lengthy letter will be skimmed, and the main points are often lost.
- **BE COURTEOUS:** Use the correct form of address for you elected officials.

Address:

The Honorable (Full Name)  
Name)

Missouri Senate  
Representatives

201 West Capitol Avenue  
Avenue

Room (number)

Jefferson City, MO 65101  
65101

Salutation:

Dear Senator (Surname)  
(Surname)

The Honorable (Full

Missouri House of

201 West Capitol

Room (number)

Jefferson City MO

Dear Representative

- **BE INFORMED:** Know the issue, read the newspaper and/or other resource materials. Enclose newspaper clippings when possible.
- **BE TIMELY:** Follow the issues and keep up with day-to-day developments. The best time to write is when you first hear the issue is going to be considered.

- **BE TENACIOUS:** State how you would like your lawmaker to vote and request a response.
- **BE PERSONAL:** Write from your heart — explain how the issue will affect you, your family, and your community.
- **BE SUPPORTIVE:** After the vote is taken, write and say thanks if your lawmaker voted correctly.

### **IMPORTANT “DON'TS” TO REMEMBER WHEN WRITING YOUR LAWMAKER:**

1. **DON'T** use threatening, hostile, abusive or disrespectful language.
2. **DON'T** try to convert your lawmaker to your religion. You want to influence his/her voting patterns.
3. **DON'T** use form letters. A personal letter carries more weight.
4. **DON'T** be afraid to point out any experience you might have had concerning this issue.
5. **DON'T** just write so that your lawmakers receive tons of mail — write a quality letter about issues you feel are important.
6. **DON'T** fail to write because you're afraid of doing it wrong. Remember, as long as you are sincere and polite, there is no wrong way to write a letter to one of your lawmakers.

(Ideas excerpted from *I'd Speak Out On The Issue If I Only Knew What To Say*, Jane Chastain, 1987.)

A couple of extra points FHE would like to make are:

- 1) do not make any contact on any issue with your legislator unless he/she is involved with the bill. Many times, a bill is only in committee and the only people who should be contacted are those on the committee where the bill has been assigned. All representatives or all senators should be contacted only when the bill is coming up for a vote on the floor. Also, do not contact your senator when a bill is only in the House of Representatives or your representative when the bill is in the Senate
- 2) do not identify yourself as a home schooler unless the issue is a home school issue. On issues that are not home school related, you should write or call as a concerned citizen.

Both of these scenarios have happened in the past and they created extra work for our FHE lobbyists who had to spend hours explaining that FHE did not ask people to contact legislators who were not on a committee or contact them as home schoolers about a bill that was not related to home education. When these things happen, home schoolers appear to be uninformed and uneducated about proper procedures in the Missouri legislature and their responses are written off as knee-jerk reactions and are not as effective as they could be. **You will find that FHE is very specific about who to contact in the legislative alerts we send out.** If you carefully read the e-mail alerts you receive, you will be given and/or directed to sources of information about the issue and specifically told who to contact concerning the issue.