

# Contacting Your Elected Officials

## Tips on writing or e-mailing your Congressman or Legislator

The letter is the most popular choice of communication with a congressional office. If you decide to write a letter, this list of helpful suggestions will improve the effectiveness of the letter:

1. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter/mail. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House Bill: H.R. \_\_, Senate Bill: S. \_\_, or House Joint Resolution: H.J.R. \_\_, etc. When writing an email, state the Bill number and title in the subject box.



2. Be courteous, to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position.
3. Address only one issue in each letter/email, and if possible, keep the letter/email to one page.



### Addressing Correspondence:

#### To a Senator:

The Honorable (full name)  
Room # \_\_, (name of) State Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (last name, optional):

#### To a Representative:

The Honorable (full name)  
Room # \_\_, (name of) Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative (last name, optional):

*Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as: Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman; or Dear Mr. or Madam Speaker. Similar form should be used for Missouri legislators, substituting Senate or House Post Office of US Senate or House; Jefferson City, MO 65101. (For e-mail addresses, see websites in 2nd column.)*

## Tips on Telephoning your Congressman or Legislator

First, find the numbers and addresses BEFORE you need them. Local numbers, fax numbers, etc. can usually be found in your phone book. Be sure you have where you can find them quickly in case of an alert.

To find your representative's phone number, you may call the US Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or Missouri information at (573) 751-2000 and ask for the appropriate office, or you may look it up on one of the websites listed below.

Remember that telephone calls are often taken by staff members, not the legislator. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue on which you wish to comment (be sure to get the aide's name for future reference). After identifying yourself, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as, "Please tell Senator/Representative (name) that I support/oppose Senate or House Bill # \_\_, for the following reasons..." Remember to ask for and make note of your representative's position on the bill. When possible, try to have a copy of the bill when you call (if it is short enough), or know precisely what you object to or support in the bill. You may also ask for a written response to your telephone call.

### Internet websites for information on legislators:

**US Senators:** [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

**US Representatives:** [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

**US President:** [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

**All Missouri Officials:** [www.state.mo.us](http://www.state.mo.us)

Proverbs 19:2 states "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way."

We home educators are well-known for our zeal in guarding our freedom to home educate our children as we see fit, as past legislators have found out in situations like the HB 540 battle. Unfortunately this can sometimes cause us to act hastily or before we have all the facts. We would like to

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encourage you to always check out information before you act.

We need to build good working relationships with legislators. Below is information that will help you build bridges with both old and new legislators.

Many times Legislative Alerts come through and must be dealt with during working hours, which leaves the women making the decisions and contacts. The following checklist is from FHE's former lobbyist, Kim Spangler. You will note that some of the points are directed toward women as they are often the ones available to make the necessary calls. Please read through these before your family takes any action on any alert you may receive.

*Liberty is not Free*



## Building Bridges, Not Boundaries

### Before you Act Checklist

- Have I already established a relationship?
- Am I reacting or responding?
- Have I prayed before I respond?
- Do I have my husband's covering?
- Am I reacting out of fear?
- Am I defensive or angry?
- What is my focus? What am I trying to accomplish? Do I have notes?
- Can I articulate my concern in a brief and concise manner?
- Have I checked my sources?
- Can I follow up appropriately?
- Do I have a point of view which can be communicated such that I am not perceived as a Bible-thumping, legislator-bashing extremist? (Note: This is not compromise. Refer to James 3:17)

# How to Write Your Lawmakers

The information below is from a flyer put out by the Family Watch organization that was located in Missouri until their move from the state a few years ago. This information is a bit more detailed than what is written on the previous page and may help you feel more confident and be more effective when writing to your lawmaker.

*“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. (see previous page)
- **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.

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## **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. (Make a commitment to pray for your lawmakers.)
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.

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