

Writing to Your Legislators

[Adapted from an article by Kara Joy McKee, *Together Oklahoma*, April 18th, 2016]

Hand-written letters can be particularly effective in influencing legislators' views. Why? Who tends to hand write things? You guessed it! Older Oklahomans write and older Oklahomans vote. Writing to legislators also offers an opportunity to maintain contact and keep your issues on the front burner even when you cannot meet personally.

Keep It Brief — Keep letters to one page. Try to discuss only one bill or issue in a letter. (Though the budget crisis is complicated, it can still be considered one issue.)

Identify Yourself — Begin with a brief introduction of yourself. Use a simple statement, such as "I am a third-grade teacher at _____ elementary school". Tell them if you are their constituent.

Be Polite — Even if you've disagreed with this legislator in the past, they'll be more likely to be persuaded if they feel that you are being respectful of them as a fellow human being.

Get To The Point — Follow your introduction with a brief statement of your issue or concern, such as "I urge your support for HB_____, which will _____." Be specific! Include the bill number if you have one AND what it is about. They can't memorize all 2,000 bill numbers each session. Follow your opening paragraph with a concise explanation of **why** you support or oppose the particular bill or issue. A few strong, well-thought-out arguments are much more effective than a laundry list of reasons to support or oppose a bill. Whenever possible, use bullet points to outline your arguments. (Trust me, more pages does not mean you've necessarily communicated more. Whether we like it or not, a few quality points that touch on the concerns that matter to that legislator are more important than a huge quantity of evidence.)

Relate It To Home — Help the legislator understand why your position is important to his or her constituents. Include specific facts about how a bill will impact you and/or people in the legislator's district. If possible, include a local anecdote illustrating the problem you are seeking to address. Avoid the use of form letters or generic postcards — use your own knowledge and experience to inform the legislator. (You know more than you think you do, so be authentically you!)

Remind Them Of Your Specific Request — You want them to know the one important thing from your letter and to take action. Examples: "Can I count on you to reject a bad budget that doesn't include new revenues?" or "Please oppose HB 2665 for the sake of me and my family." Be ready to take note of how they vote, so you can follow up with another letter and HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE.

Allow For Follow-Up — Include specific contact information and offer to act as a resource should the legislator or staff have questions or need additional information. Where appropriate, state in the letter that you will follow up with a telephone call, ask them to call you back, or ask for someone from their office to contact you to set up a small group meeting with you and your fellow constituents either at the Capitol OR in the district.

Addressing Written Correspondence

OKLAHOMA STATE SENATORS
The Honorable (full name)
Oklahoma State Senate
2300 N Lincoln Blvd,
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
The Honorable (full name)
Oklahoma State House of
Representatives
2300 N Lincoln Blvd # 401,
Oklahoma City, OK 73105