

# Lobbying by Letter: Guidelines For Writing to Legislators

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Effective letter writing campaigns are essential to successful pro-life legislation efforts in Congress and in your state legislature. Letter writing campaigns will be most effective if they are conducted according to the following guidelines:

1. **Be timely:** Letters are of little value if they arrive after an issue has been decided. They are most effective if they are received before a legislator has committed himself on an issue.

At any given time, there are dozens of abortion-related bills and amendments which have been introduced in Congress. Many of these may be publicized in various pro-life publications, but relatively few will actually come to a vote during any given year.

All of these measures are monitored by the National Right to Life Federal Legislative Office, but legislative alerts are mailed out to pro-life chapters across the country only when letters on a specific issue are really necessary. Local pro-life leaders and grassroots pro-lifers should regard such alerts as a priority and act on them immediately. Legislative alerts should be given as wide a distribution as possible, as quickly as possible.

2. **If you write a letter on the letterhead of an organization,** be sure that the opinions you express reflect official policy of the organization. If your organization is an NRLC affiliate, the letter should also conform to NRLC policy. You may not, for example, advocate unlawful activities if you are an NRLC affiliate.
3. **Letters Must Be Personal:** Letters to legislators can be typed or neatly handwritten. You can use information and arguments from legislative alerts, National Right to Life News, etc., but the letter should be in your own words. Generally speaking, a legislator pays more attention to one personal letter than to a dozen form letters or preprinted post cards.
4. **Give reasons for your position.** If possible, refer to your own observations and experiences, and to any special expertise which you may have on a specific subject. Where appropriate, discuss the effect which a measure would have in the legislator's own district. If you are aware of the legislator's past votes or statements on the issue, refer to them in your letter.

5. **Be Concise:** Generally, your letter should be short and to the point-one page is usually sufficient. Make your point in the first paragraph. Mention the official name (and number, if applicable) of the bill or amendment you are writing about, if you have it. Avoid discussing two unrelated issues in one letter.
6. **It is sometimes helpful to include supportive material** (a newspaper clipping, a legislative fact sheet, etc.) with your letter. Be sure that such material comes from a reliable source. Do not send a copy of the Legislative Alert which you receive.
7. **Be Respectful:** State your views in a firm but courteous tone. Abusive language or explicit threats ("I will vote against you") will not convert an unsympathetic legislator, but may motivate him to work against pro-life interests. Offensive letters may also anger legislators who previously were undecided or sympathetic.
8. **Follow Through:** Expect a response to your letter. If you write a representative, the initial response will often be a vague form letter. Often, such letters merely explain what a bill does, without expressing the representative's position on the measure. If the response is not satisfactory, write again, referring to the earlier correspondence and asking specific questions (e.g., "Will you vote for the pro-life amendment?").
9. **Pay Attention to Your Representative:** Roll calls on important pro-life issues are published in the NRL News, and in compilation such as those found in this handbook. Pay close attention to how your congressman and senators vote (including votes in committee). When they vote pro-life, write to thank them. (Too often, consistently pro-life legislators are taken for granted by pro-lifers, and so they receive mostly pro-abortion mail.) When they vote pro-abortion, write letters criticizing specific votes.