

How to write a letter to an elected official on an issue of science policy

Length

Above all, be reasonably brief. Your letter should have single spaced paragraphs with a double space between paragraphs. The letter should be longer than a full page but should not exceed two pages important to you. You are not educating them on the subject. Always limit the letter to one single subject or issue.

Approach

Be courteous. Request action and do not demand it. Be constructive, not negative. If writing a congressman about a bill that deals with a problem and the bill seems to be a wrong solution, propose constructive alternatives. Write in your own words. Be yourself. If you are copying a model letter, put it into your own words.

Organization

Use the "three tells" organization for this sort of letter. In the first paragraph, tell them what you're going to tell them. Explain your reason for writing (on one single subject or issue). If it's relevant, describe your "credentials" or experience but **DO NOT say things such as I am just a student. Don't give away power by discounting your value. You are a potential voter.**

Your Message

In the second and subsequent paragraphs discuss the issue and explain your stand. Frame your discussion in a national, rather than a personal perspective. Cite relevant facts while avoiding emotionalism. Give them information they can use, including what you are hearing from others. Be specific and practical.

Wrapping Up

In the last paragraph summarize by telling them what you told them. Offer assistance if you have some expertise to offer. Ask a question needing more than just a yes or no answer. This kind of question requires a response.