



Your Right To Write

As an American, you have the constitutional right to vote for your government leaders. But voting is only one of the many ways citizens can participate in the political process. Writing a letter to your elected officials is another powerful way to have your voice heard - it is a fundamental component in democracy's toolbox!


WHY BOTHER?

While elected officials are swamped with information from professional lobbyists and special interest groups, a single letter from a constituent voicing a personal experience has a genuine chance of breaking through the daily legislative clutter.

 **A letter from one woman saved football from being outlawed in Georgia in the late 1890's.**

 **Letters from two women to Congress led to the admission of women to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1975.**

 **A grassroots, letter-writing campaign by Georgia cosmetologists convinced the General Assembly to change cosmetology certification standards in 2001.**

 **Letters from Georgia high school students convinced state legislators to support legislation based on their school wetlands project.**

Former Arizona Congressman Morris Udall wrote that, "As for impact, there have been many instances where a well-worded and persuasive letter either changed my mind or caused me to review my opinion."




WHAT TO WRITE?

- ☑ **Be Brief.** Begin your letter by stating that you are a resident of the official's district, and follow with your main point. For elected officials, it boils down to a "yes" or "no" because that is how they must vote.
- ☑ **Be Specific.** Stick to one issue per letter. Discussing multiple topics could dilute your message. Be sure to include the bill number, title and sponsor if you are commenting on specific legislation.
- ☑ **Be Confident.** Draw from your own experiences and opinions, which will show elected officials that you are passionate about the issue you are writing about.
- ☑ **Be Direct.** Let your elected official know what action you want him to take, such as introduce legislation, vote for or against a bill or speak out on an issue.
- ☑ **Be Polite.** However much you disagree with an official's position, do not threaten, insult or call the elected official names.
- ☑ **Don't Forget to Compliment.** Give credit or thanks when it is due. Finish your letter with a short, complimentary close and your signature.
- ☑ **Keep Your Letter Timely.** Keep track of when the issue will be discussed or voted on and send your letters at the appropriate time in the process.
- ☑ **Personalize Your Letter.** The more effort that is put into a letter, the more seriously it will be taken. A personalized letter may count more than an e-mail, form letter, post card or phone call.

THE FORMAT

The heading of the letter should include your return address and the date. The inside address and greeting should follow the examples below:

<p>President of the United States:</p> <p>The Honorable (full name) The White House Washington, D.C. 20500</p> <p>Dear Mr. President:</p>	<p>Governor of Georgia:</p> <p>The Honorable (full name) 203 State Capitol Atlanta, Georgia 30334</p> <p>Dear Governor (last name):</p>
<p>Members of the U.S. Senate:</p> <p>The Honorable (full name) United States Senate Washington, D.C. 20510</p> <p>Dear Senator (last name):</p>	<p>U.S. House of Representatives:</p> <p>The Honorable (full name) U.S. House of Representatives Washington, D.C. 20515</p> <p>Dear Congressman or Congresswoman (last name):</p>
<p>Members of the Georgia Senate:</p> <p>The Honorable (full name) Georgia Senate (Office Address)</p> <p>Dear Senator (last name):</p>	<p>Members of the Georgia House:</p> <p>The Honorable (full name) Ga. House of Representatives (Office Address)</p> <p>Dear Representative (last name):</p>

 Make certain that all your address information is current.

THINK, WRITE, MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Who to Write?

☒ **Who Are Your Congressional Representatives?** You can easily determine who your elected officials are online. The U.S. Congress (thomas.loc.gov) offers a user-friendly search engine. First enter your 9-digit ZIP code or other address information. A list of your elected officials is instantly generated, which provides an email address and/or a mailing address for each of the officials.



To contact your congressional representatives or senators by phone, call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121, and be prepared to provide your ZIP code.

☒ **Who are Your State Officials?** Visit the Secretary of State's poll locator at www.sos.state.ga.us/elections/locator.htm to find information on your state elected officials. You may also contact the Georgia House of Representatives Office of Public Information toll free at (800) 282-5800. The Georgia Senate may be reached at (800) 282-5803. Information on either branch of the Georgia General Assembly may be obtained online at www.legis.state.ga.us.

☒ **Who Are Your Local Officials?** To reach local or other officials, consult the blue pages of your telephone book. If all else fails, call your local elections office and ask for help!

Keep in mind that letters to your own representative are much more effective than letters to a representative who is interested in issues you favor but does not represent your distrust.

Where to find more information?

Democratic Party: www.democrats.org

Green Party: www.greens.org

Libertarian Party: www.lp.org

Reform Party: www.reformparty.org

Republican Party: www.rnc.org

Project Vote Smart: www.vote-smart.org
A comprehensive source for information on political candidates and issues.

League of Women Voters: www.lwv.org
A nonpartisan organization that provides information to voters and encourages civic participation.

State of the Vote: www.stateofthevote.org
A nonpartisan site supported by the National Association of Secretaries of State.

If you're an English or Social Studies teacher looking for lesson plans, assignments, or extra credit projects, or a faculty adviser for a civic-minded student organization looking for ideas, please visit our webpage at www.sos.state.ga.us.

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GEORGIA COUNTS

Your Right To Write



*Influence your elected
officials by writing a letter*

*Secretary of State
Cathy Cox*