

Tips for Effective Letter Writing

The Basics

- Spell your policymaker's name right
- Write the address correctly
- Include your name, address, and phone number on the letter itself, envelopes can get lost
- Identify yourself as a constituent
- Personalize your letter, get facts from the Food Bank or other reliable sources, but then use your own words
- If possible, consider faxing your letter to ensure a quick arrival

Identify your issue clearly

- Don't assume they are experts in this issue. Be sure to provide some background information, such as the types of services you provide
- Focus and be as specific as possible
- Demonstrate the significant community based support, especially the people you help to feed. Reinforce that you are not just representing your opinion, you represent a large segment of your community
- Know your facts and make sure they are accurate – never exaggerate - the truth is enough
- Talk about local examples and the local impact on the community. Statistics and facts are helpful, but personal stories make a unique impact and are easier to remember

"My name is Bruce Bond and I run a food pantry in Broome County that feeds 70 families a month. I am concerned about proposed Food Stamp Program cuts and the effects it will have on low-income people. Currently food stamps often do not last through the entire month and these cuts will likely further reduce the benefits of this vital program, hurting the many working individuals and their children who depend on them for a sufficient diet. I encourage the policymaker to vote no on all budget bills cutting food stamps to protect our most vulnerable citizens, those who do not have enough food to eat."

Acknowledge opposing views

- Respectfully counter the opposing argument
 - Be persuasive, not argumentative or demanding
 - Use facts and figures, not morally or emotionally charged arguments
 - Don't knock the opposition. They probably believe in their position as sincerely as you believe in yours
- "While I understand the need to reduce the deficit, according to the United States Department of Agriculture, the number of food insecure individuals has steadily increased for four consecutive years to a total of 38.2 million people in 2004. Reducing the deficit and passing more tax cuts should not come at the expense of our most vulnerable citizens' basic needs."*

Ask for a written response

- Be clear in your letter you are expecting a written response regarding the policymaker's views on the issue
- Be aware that due to the volume of input, it could be weeks or a month before your response arrives

Always

- Be brief, letters should be no longer than one page
- Be polite and respectful, even if you are frustrated, angry or disappointed
- Demonstrate your personal experiences and commitment
- Focus on specific issues rather than vague goals
- Deal with reality, not ideology
- Identify how you or people you know will be affected by what's being proposed
- Say thank you

Thank you to the Food Bank of Central New York for this resource.

