

Tips for Writing an Effective Advocacy Letter

Contacting a legislator or government official need not be difficult or intimidating. Consider sharing with your association members these simple tips on writing an effective letter to state officials.

Writing to state legislators and regulators is one way you can influence policy makers and educate them on veterinary medicine's issues and perspective. Below are some simple tips that you can use to write more effective letters:

- **Use Proper Salutation.** The salutation should be "Dear Representative Smith" or "Dear Senator Smith" or "Dear Assemblyman Smith" depending on the office held. The address should read: Honorable Jim Smith, Address, City, State, Zip. Address state government officials as you would a business communication, indicating the recipient's title (Jim Smith, Director, Department of Agriculture, Street Address, City, State, Zip).
- **Avoid Righteous Indignation.** A polite and informative tone is best. Avoid opening by saying "as a citizen and taxpayer," since the legislator can assume that you are both. Begin the letter with a short paragraph that describes the issue and the request you are making. An example of a standard opening sentence is: "I am writing about HB 1234, the Animal Welfare Rights Act, currently before the legislature. I encourage you to oppose this legislation as written on the grounds that"
- **Focus on Key Points.** Don't make the communication too wordy. Try to use common terms and language. Explain the potential impact on music and music education, quality of instruction, performances, and your work, if relevant. A one-page letter is ideal, but two pages are acceptable. Avoid discussing tangential issues that will dilute or confuse your message.
- **In Closing.** Avoid threatening language. Simply recap the main points and encourage specific action. Don't be vague. Requests should be clear, concise and as specific as possible, such as to co-sponsor a bill. Offer to speak with the legislator or regulator by providing a telephone number where you can be reached. Veterinarians generally are viewed in a positive light and are seen as experts on animal health issues. If contacted by the policy maker or a staff member, be sure to make the time to talk or visit with that person.

Letters should be written on your stationary. Use your own words and personal examples. Form letters that look alike don't have the same impact.