

Letter Writing

Letter writing is an effective way to persuade legislators to support your position. State legislators receive an enormous amount of mail each day, so give careful thought to your letter. If you know the legislator, make that clear in the first paragraph. This will alert the person opening the mail to give the letter special attention. Write your letter on your business letterhead. Some legislators downgrade the importance of a letter if it is obviously part of a letter writing campaign. Therefore, avoid form letters. Mass-mailed postcards are a waste of your time and money. Make your letter as personal as possible and be certain to mention that you are a LACMA member.

Try to keep your letter to one page in length. Use your own words and cover only one issue per letter. In the first paragraph, ask for the action you want the legislator to take. Identify the legislation clearly by name and number. State the reasons for your position on the bill and conclude the letter by thanking the legislator for his or her consideration. Chances are good that the legislator is aware of the political fallout of not voting for your issue, so do not mention it. Be certain your legislator receives the letter before a vote.

Thank legislators who support your positions and let legislators who do not know of your disapproval. Provide copies of your letters to the District GAAC Chair, to LACMA (fax number) and the CMA Sacramento Government Relations Department (fax number)

A Checklist for Letter Writing

- _____ Letters should be on personal or business letterhead with a return address on both the letter and envelope.
- _____ Each letter should be about only one piece of legislation and should identify the bill by its number and author. Make sure you tell the legislator how you want them to vote.
- _____ Immediately reference the bill number, author, and action you want. Restate what you want in the last paragraph.
- _____ Legislators discount pre-printed form letters. Even if the wording is the same, have members copy the letter on their own letterhead or in their own handwriting.
- _____ Stress how a particular issue would affect people in the legislator's district - namely you.
- _____ Try to keep your letter to one page, but bear in mind the reader may not be familiar with the subject matter.
- _____ DO NOT include anything you would not want quoted on the evening news!
- _____ Ask for a reply indicating the legislator's position.
- _____ Visit LACMA's website for letter examples.
- _____ Use the proper form of address:

The Honorable John Smith
California State Senate
(Committee name if applicable)
P.O. Box 942848
Sacramento, CA 94248

The Honorable John Smith
California State Assembly
(Committee name if applicable)
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249

_____ Send LACMA and CMA a copy of the letter.

Despite technological advances, letters and personal meetings remain the most effective means of communicating with elected officials. There are circumstances, however, when it may be appropriate to use e-mail. For example, if a committee is scheduled to take action on a piece of legislation tomorrow and your legislator is on that committee, then an e-mail or phone call would be the quickest way to communicate. Also, if you are pressed for time, an e-mail is better than no communication at all. Once you develop a relationship with a legislator's office, you may find that staffers may prefer to communicate with you by e-mail when they are looking for input on health issues or scheduling a meeting.

If you choose to e-mail your elected officials follow the same rules you would if you were writing a regular letter. Include your return address and identify yourself as a constituent. To ensure that your e-mail is read, keep your message brief and to the point.

To e-mail an Assemblymember, go to: www.assembly.ca.gov/acs/acsframeset2text.htm.
To e-mail a Senator, go to: www.sen.ca.gov/~newsen/senators/senators.htm