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## How to Write a Letter to an Elected Official

### Send an email, not physical mail

In recent years, elected officials have transitioned to no longer keeping close tabs on the physical mail that comes into the office, even mail from constituents. Many have made this switch because so little physical mail is received, and therefore many elected officials feel that it is not worth their resources. In addition, for many government offices, physical mail is substantially screened, and this can delay the delivery of mail for weeks. Therefore, it is always better to send your message via email. It is perfectly acceptable to send your message written as a formal letter but scanned as an attachment to an email.

### Only write to those who represent you

Although it can be tempting to send your message to as many interested elected officials as you can, you should only contact the elected officials who represent you. These days, elected officials have filters that will often filter out messages from those who are not their constituents. Ask yourself, “do I vote for this person?” If the answer is no, do not send them your message. Of course, it is ok to send your message to staffers who work for those for whom you vote. For example, you should send your message to the member of Congress who represents the district you live in, or their staff, but you should not send your message to the member who represents the district next to yours.

There is an exception to this rule if you are writing on behalf of an organization with members in the elected official’s District. You may send your message to those for whom your members are their constituents, but you should explain that connection in your message.

### Never use form letters

When writing elected officials, it can be easy to use an organization’s suggested form letter. This is never a good idea. Often, elected officials receive so many form letters that they set up filters to send them directly to their trash folder. It is more effective to tell your story, use your own words, and explain the issue in a way you think the elected official will find



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compelling. It can be helpful to look at a blueprint of a letter from your organization to help you get started or organize your thoughts, but never copy words or phrases that could trigger an email filter, only send personalized letters.

## **Be specific if you're able**

When writing an elected official, it is usually helpful to be specific. Rather than asking them to support problem gambling, it is more effective to name the specific bill or amendment that you're asking them to support. Of course, if there is no specific bill at the time, or you are prohibited from lobbying for some reason, it is ok to write them in more general terms.

## **Be brief and direct**

Keep your message to an elected official brief and to the point. Elected officials do not have the time to read long letters and try to find what the ask is of the letter. In addition, do not write a message that covers multiple policy areas. Send one message per policy ask. This ensures that an ask does not get lost if one stops reading after they reach an ask in the letter, and for elected officials that keep data on the number of messages they receive for each policy area, it ensures the numbers are counted accurately.