

*Whether sending an e-mail, fax or letter by mail, these tips for communicating with your legislators will help you be more effective:*

- ★ ***Make it clear you're from their district.*** As a general rule, legislators are more likely to take note of your communication if you are one of their constituents. Exceptions might include the leaders of the U.S. House or Senate who are considering a future run for president — or a legislator who is over a special committee.
- ★ ***State your purpose for writing in the first sentence.*** For example: “I am writing to urge your support for the Marriage Protection Amendment.”
- ★ If you're writing about a specific piece of legislation be sure to ***identify bills by name and number.*** (In the U.S. Congress, House bills are referred to as H.R. \_\_\_\_; Senate bills are designated as S. \_\_\_\_\_. It is also important to know the status of the bill. *CitizenLink's* Action Center is a good resource for this — it keeps a current list of important bills by name and number. See example below:



The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "CitizenLink - Action Center" with the URL "http://www.family.org/cforum/action\_center.cfm". The page features the "CITIZENLink" logo and a navigation menu with options like Home, Elected Officials, Issues & Legislation, Elections & Candidates, and Media Guide. A sidebar on the left lists various site features. The main content area displays "Congressional Legislation" for the "Marriage Protection Amendment (109th Congress)", including the bill number "S.J.RES.1", the original sponsor "Wayne Allard (R-CO)", and the cosponsor total of 29 Republicans.

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**Congressional Legislation**

**Marriage Protection Amendment (109th Congress)**

Bill # S.J.RES.1

**Original Sponsor:**  
[Wayne Allard \(R-CO\)](#)

**Cosponsor Total: 29**  
(last sponsor added 10/27/2005)  
29 Republicans

Take Action Now  
Enter Your ZIP Code

- ★ ***Address only one issue per e-mail or letter.*** (Putting more than one could make it difficult for congressional aides to register your opinion or communicate it briefly to the legislator.)
- ★ ***Include reasonable and courteous points*** about why the issue matters to you. Focus has plenty of talking points on almost every issue on its *CitizenLink* Web site. You can find them by going to [www.citizenlink.org](http://www.citizenlink.org) and clicking on “Focus on Social Issues” in the left-hand column — you will see a list of issues, including “Marriage & Family,” “Education” and “Constitution & Government,” to choose from.
- ★ ***Close the letter with a restatement of your purpose and indicate the response that you expect.*** For example, “Please send a confirmation that you’ve received this e-mail,” or “Please mail a response to this request to the following address.”

## **HOW TO ADDRESS YOUR CORRESPONDENCE TO U.S. SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES**

### **To Senators**

The Honorable [John Doe]  
\_\_(room number)\_\_\_\_\_ (name of Senate building)  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator [Doe]:

### **To House members**

The Honorable [John Doe]  
\_\_(room number)\_\_\_\_\_ (name of House building)  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative [Doe]:

- ★ Telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member, not the legislator. So ***ask to speak to the aide who handles the issue*** you're calling about. (*CitizenLink* has an online guide to congressional staff at its Action Center.)
- ★ After identifying yourself as someone who lives in the legislator's district, ***tell the aide you would like to leave a message***, such as "Please tell Senator/or Representative \_\_\_\_ that I support Senate bill No. \_\_\_\_\_."
- ★ ***State one or two of your reasons*** for wanting the legislator to support or oppose the bill.
- ★ ***Keep it brief.*** If you're calling about controversial legislation that's generating lots of calls, the congressional aide you are speaking to is most likely keeping a simple "yes" and "no" tally sheet.

So on a hotly contested bill, it's much more effective to have 30 people from the congressman's district spend one minute each telling him how they want him to vote — than to have one person call and spend 30 minutes debating with the aide.

★ ***Ask for your legislator's position*** on the bill.

★ ***Request a written response*** to your phone call.

### **A senator's perspective**

"Phone calls, e-mails and letters to the editor help immeasurably," Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist told Focus' *Citizen* magazine, "because they reflect where the American people are. And unless people speak, [politicians] will rely on traditional liberal bias that is so prevalent in the media today."

# tips

## for writing a letter to the editor

- ★ ***Play by the rules.*** Stick to the instructions on the opinion page — which can mandate letter length, no e-mail attachments, etc. Any violation is a one-way ticket to the trash.
- ★ ***Think local.*** Editors pay for opinions about what’s going on in Washington, D.C. Only you can provide insight into local issues. Even when you write about national topics like abortion or abstinence education, look for statewide and local examples to prove your point.
- ★ ***Remember the facts.*** Be sparing in your use of sentences that begin with “God says.” This isn’t usually the best way to persuade a secular audience; it’s better to show why God hates divorce by offering statistical or anecdotal evidence of its devastation.
- ★ ***Speak the truth in love.*** The focus of a letter that affirms biblical morality should be to change hearts, not mock or lecture unbelievers. Those who disagree with you need truth, yes. But they also need to see God’s love reflected in your words.

### **Why it’s worth doing:**

Legislators have staffers track local newspaper letters sections, so they can keep abreast of public opinion.