How to Write an Effective Letter to Your Legislator

* Keep your letters simple and to-the-point.
* Know your legislator. Find out his or her positions on the issues you’re focusing on.
* Let them know you are a constituent.
* Choose one or two topics to address, and be specific whenever possible. (Such as voting for a specific bill.)
* Use a key point or short personal story that supports your position.
* Provide local context. If it affects your local community (and thus the legislator’s constituents), say so!
* Ask for a commitment.
* Communicate more than once. Follow-up with an e-mail, a call, another letter. Quantity is as important than quality. Really!

Sample letter:

Dear Representative Smith, *(Make sure you have the title correct!)*

My name is Susie Jones, and I live at 123 Main Street in Cedar Rapids. *(Tell him or her right away who you are and that you are a constituent.)* My husband and I voted for you in the last election *(attend your church, etc. – something that connects you to them, if possible)*, and we especially appreciate your support of last year’s PALs bill to support youth exiting foster care. *(Be sure to thank them for all their hard work – be specific, if possible.)*

As you know, Danny and I provide family foster care here in Linn County. Over the last four years, we have provided a safe and secure home for 25 children who have been abused or neglected, and we recently adopted three siblings. *(Tell them briefly that you are a foster/adoptive/kinship parent. Do not give too much detail.)*

*(State your issue in one short paragraph or two.)* The support we receive from the Department of Human Services helps us to be able to parent these children, many of whom come to us with multiple issues, such as behavior problems and developmental disabilities. However, our current caseworker at DHS has more than 60 children on her caseload *(give concrete examples)*, so there is no possible way she can give us and our children the time and assistance we really need. Please, when considering budget cuts this session, do not cut funding to foster and adoption services. *(Describe an action you want the legislator to take – or not take.)*

Thank you, again, for all you do to support families in Iowa. If you ever have questions about foster care or adoption, please feel free to use me as a resource. I will attend the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association Legislative Breakfast in Des Moines on March 13, and I look forward to talking with you more then. *(Offer to be a resource, to follow up with a phone call, or to send more information, if necessary.)*

Sincerely, Susie Jones