

WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



Guide to Writing Advocacy Letters

As members of Women's League for Conservative Judaism and its affiliates, you are encouraged to exercise your right to voice your opinion and advocate on issues that are important to you, the Jewish people, your communities and country, and the world. Our tradition teaches that taking action is a Jewish imperative:

*"It is not your duty to complete the task,
but neither are you free to desist from it"*
Pirke Avot 2:12

Sending an advocacy letter is a very easy and productive way to take action; it is the main vehicle by which elected and appointed officials are informed about public opinion. You may choose to write personally or on behalf of yourself as well as Women's League. Identifying yourself as a member of Women's League brings with it significant value-added benefits for your issue and to Women's League. It is an elected official's responsibility to be accountable to each of his/her constituents; and it is the responsibility of an appointed official to report popular opinion and/or to take action. By invoking Women's League (and indirectly the nationwide and international Jewish communities) you are given strength in numbers, improving the prospects for action, and enabling Women's League to further advocate, in its own right and as part of larger coalitions.

This guide explains how to write and send effective letters.

Guideline 1

As a member of Women's League, you can write on any topic for which Women's League has a resolution. You can access a partial list of the Women's League resolutions online at www.wlcj.org, click on World Affairs, Women's League Resolutions.

Guideline 2

Call Women's League (212.870.1260) if you have any questions about a topic you do not see.

Guideline 3

Inform your region public policy chair (or the Women's League public policy chair) of the topic of letter(s) sent and details of any responses relating to Women's League policy so that we can track levels of participation as well as the impact of those efforts.

Guideline 4

Written responses take a long time. In some instances, you may receive only an acknowledgement with no promise of action. It is important to inform Women's League of those responses as well.

Guideline 5

The preferred method for receiving constituent mail at the federal level is electronic mail. Those without email can use regular mail, but there may be significant time delays in delivery as well as in response. For the state and municipal level, email is suggested but follow any method of correspondence recommended in this guide.

Guideline 6

Determine if your issue is federal or state/provincial to determine where your letter should be sent.

Finding elected/appointed officials

Federal Legislative Branch: To find your U.S. Representative, Senator or Canadian Member of Parliament, search the main default addresses below. In the U.S. you can link directly to an electronic constituency web form in which you insert your letter. We recommended that you type your letter in a wordprocessing

program and copy and paste it into the form so as not to lose your document in the event of power/internet failure.

U.S. House:

<https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>

U.S. Senate:

http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm (blank spaces require "underscore")

Canadian MPs:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/index.asp?Language=E>, click on Members of Parliament (current).

Canadian Senators:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/senmemb/senate/isenator.asp?Language=E>

The default U.S. Congressional search:

<http://www.house.gov> or <http://www.senate.gov>

The default Canadian Parliament search:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/>

Executive Branch

U.S. President:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>

U.S. Cabinet:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/cabinet/> (e-mail not available in all cases)

Canadian Prime Minister and Canadian Ministry:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/index.asp?Language=E>, and click on The Canadian Ministry (current).

State/Provincial Officials

Governor:

<http://www.nga.org>, click on "Current Governors" and select accordingly

State Legislators:

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm>, select your state and select “Home Page”; follow links to contact or find legislators

Premier:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_current_Canadian_first_ministers

MLAs:

See your Provincial Legislative Assembly website

Municipal officials

Check your local city/town website

Formatting Your Letter

Follow business format. If you are using the U.S. Congressional web forms, the date, inside address, salutation, and your address and signature are automatically included. In other cases, you should include all of these elements.

Remember that form and content matter. Use spell check and make it look good!

Inside address: Use the recipient’s proper title and full name, office, and address. Congressional addresses should not include office locations, but rather the applicable body and zip code.

For example:

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Prime Minister Stephen Harper
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

Her Excellency Ambassador Sallai Meridor
Israeli Ambassador to the United States
Embassy of Israel

3514 International Drive, NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

Her Excellency Ambassador Miriam Ziv
Israeli Ambassador to Canada
Embassy of Israel
50 O’Connor Street, Suite 1005
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6L2

The Honorable Shelley Berkley
U.S House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-4708

Hon. Jim Abbott, MP
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Salutation: Use the recipient’s title (not necessarily the same as the honorific form) and last name. For example:

Dear President Obama:
Dear Prime Minister Harper:
Dear Rep. Berkley:

The Body of the Letter

The elements of an effective advocacy letter include:

Introducing yourself
Noting the issue and/or piece of legislation you are writing about stating your position/presenting your argument
Asking for action to be taken

If you are writing as part of a Women’s League campaign, note that you are a member of Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, the largest synagogue-based Jewish women’s organization in the U.S./Canada, representing over 70,000 women affiliated with the Conservative movement.

Additionally, when writing a letter in regard to legislation, make sure you **note the correct bill number and working title** of the legislation, for example: S. 1234, Americans with Disabilities Act (U.S.), followed by a brief description of the legislation’s intent.

When presenting your argument, make a compelling, yet concise case. State why you are in favor or opposed; include fact-based merits/demerits or unintended/unknown consequences of the proposed legislation/regulation/course of action; note why/how this issue matters to you and, to the extent applicable, any professional or other life experience you have that qualifies you to speak to this issue. Finally, reinforce your case by making reference (if applicable) to the Women's League position.

When asking for action, note how you wish the official to vote on a bill (if applicable) and/or a possible course of action that you want the official or others accountable to him/her to take.

Closing: If not using the U.S. Congressional web forms, sign the letter and provide your address to substantiate that you are a constituent.

Sample Advocacy Letter

February 25, 2009

Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-1234

Dear Rep. Norton:

My name is Alice Cohen. I am a resident of the District of Columbia writing to express my opposition to the current version of H.R. 1234, the Affordable Housing Act of 2009. I also write as a member of Women's League for Conservative Judaism, the largest synagogue-based Jewish women's organization in the North America with over 70,000 members across the United States. While this legislation attempts to mitigate homelessness in the U.S., it does not provide for an adequate level of federal appropriations for crucially needed Section 8 housing units nationwide, including for right here in the District of Columbia.

According to the National Homelessness Action Center, the District of Columbia currently has a homeless population of over X, and the need for additional Section 8 housing units is overwhelming. It has been determined that given current waiting times, the Section 8 gap of 5,000 units in the District alone cannot be met without additional federal funding. This past winter, there were 2 homeless deaths in the District associated with people who were on the waiting list for a Section 8 voucher.

It is unconscionable to me that people, including many of whom are veterans who have served our country as well as single working mothers, are homeless within blocks of the U.S. Capitol and the White House, symbols of equal opportunity for all. Further, Women's League for Conservative Judaism has recently passed a resolution that supports increased and full funding for this federal program. I urge you to offer an amendment to this bill and to work with your House colleagues who represent many of Women's League members nationwide to ensure that increased federal funding for Section 8 Housing will become a reality during this Congressional session.

Many thanks,

Alice Cohen
4100 Cathedral Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20016



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