

## **Tips for Writing an Effective Advocacy Letter** (Compiled by NH LAKES, December 2011)

Every letter received by your local, state, or federal elected official is very important to them and is an example of democracy at work, allowing us all to have a voice in how our state and country is run. You may not think that just one letter can make a difference, but it could be the ‘one’ that sways an opinion or vote. Some representatives lose touch with the issues—a letter from a constituent can inform them of the political climate in their own district. You could be providing a valuable service in helping to educate your legislator and you certainly can add your political weight to the causes that the New Hampshire Lakes Association is working on with you.

When it comes to writing to your elected officials, the principles of clarity and brevity must be respected so that the chances of your message being understood and addressed are increased. Lawmakers receive many pieces of mail, email, and faxes throughout the entire day—some lawmakers may not read the entire communication that each person sends to them. Therefore, it is imperative to keep your message short and to the point while incorporating points that should grab the reader’s attention.

### **Here are a few tips that will help you write an effective advocacy letter:**

1. Before writing the letter, read the entire piece of legislation and pick out the parts of the bill that you believe are important for later reference. (Bills can be found at <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/>.)
2. Before writing the letter, ask and answer some simple questions:
  - a. Why am I writing this letter?
  - b. What is the goal of this letter?
  - c. How does the legislation affect me?
3. Compose a first draft of the letter. A template is provided following these tips to help you organize your letter. Keep the letter to one page. Consider copying the New Hampshire Lakes Association on your letter so that we know you have contacted your representative and what your thoughts are about the issue.
4. Once your draft is written, walk away from it.
5. Return to the letter with a clear mind and redraft the letter and then leave it, overnight if possible.
6. Proofread the draft the next day—be sure to use spell and grammar check.
7. Recruit a family member, friend, or business colleague to review the letter for content, grammar, and punctuation.
8. Mail a hard copy of the letter to your representative and send a copy via email. (Mailing and email addresses can be found at <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/>). Also, consider emailing your letter to the New Hampshire Lakes Association President’s and Policy Advocate, Tom O’Brien, at [tobrien@nhlakes.org](mailto:tobrien@nhlakes.org).
9. Make a follow-up call to your representative to encourage her or him to support the bill. (Phone numbers can be found at <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/>)

**The sample letter below is an example of how to organize and write a letter to your respective lawmakers.**

Date

John Doe

100 Main Street

Anywhere, New Hampshire Zip Code *[Address establishes that you are a constituent.]*

(603) 123 - 4567 *[Additional contact information invites communication from your legislator's office].*

The Honorable Jane Lawmaker

*[Elected officials are always addressed as "The Honorable."]*

200 Central Ave.

Everywhere, NH Zip Code

Re: *[House/Senate]* Bill #\_\_\_\_\_

Dear *[Senator, Representative]* Lawmaker:

Paragraph 1 – In less than four sentences, detail what action(s) you want your elected official to address. Be specific. Include the specific bill number(s).

Paragraph 2 – Describe the “problem” or action in detail, how it affects you, your lake, your watershed, and your community. Local examples concerning the impact of this legislative action can be very powerful in telling a compelling story.

Paragraph 3 – State the problem or action once again and what you want your elected official to address. Re-state how this action will benefit our lake, your watershed, and your community. End with a strong but positive statement or specific example and ask for a response.

*[Keep the letter to one page.]*

Sincerely yours,

*[Your signature]*

*[Your printed name]*

cc: Tom O'Brien, President and Policy Advocate, New Hampshire Lakes Association

*[Email a copy to us at [tobrien@nhlakes.org](mailto:tobrien@nhlakes.org).]*

(Sources consulted: <http://www.hlade.org/advocacy-letter.htm> and [http://www.hcvadvocate.org/community/community\\_pdf/WritingTips.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/community/community_pdf/WritingTips.pdf))

