

FAQs for Contact Congress

Who can write?

Answer: Anyone can write to Congress, whether you are a German national from Munich or a lobster fisherman from Maine. However, not everyone will get a response.

Our general "rule of thumb" is anyone who has a mailing address in the United States can write to Congress. The reason we say this is because, if you have a U.S. mailing address you live in that Congressional district and state; you live, work, pay taxes, send your children to school, in that district. You are a part of that community and your voice should be heard.

You do not have to be a citizen of the United States or be registered to vote in order to write either. Neither of these effect the Constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech, which is exercised when you write to Congress.

I am not a US citizen, can I still write?

Answer: Yes; as long as you have a U.S. address, you can write. See above "Who can write" answer for why.

I am not registered to vote, can I write?

Answer: Yes; you have a constitutionally protected right to speak with and lobby your elected representative. That is what they are there for, and it does not matter if you are register to vote. See above "Who can write" answer for why.

I am a federal government employee at a national lab/government agency/branch of the armed services; can I write?

Answer: You can write, but you must do so as a private citizen, not in your capacity as a federal employee.

What this means, when you enter your contact information, you must enter your personal mailing and e-mail addresses. Using federal government resources (such as your office mailing address, or your ".gov" or ".mil" e-mail address) to lobby the federal government is a violation of federal ethics rules and can get you in trouble. However, this does not means you have given up your constitutional rights to speak to your elected representatives.

I work for a state university, does that mean I can't use my university mailing and e-mail address?

Answer: Since state universities and colleges are *state* institutions, they are not covered under the *federal* ethics rules. You are free to use both while lobbying your federal representatives.

I wrote last year or last week, my representatives don't want to hear from me again, right?

Answer: Wrong. It is imperative that your concerns are heard at each stage of the process for your issue. The only way to make sure you are heard is to follow up at each stage of the process. This has the added benefit of making clear to Congressional staff that you are an active constituent, who will be watching this issue, and their boss's (i.e. Senator or Representative) actions.

Does my communication make any difference?

Answer: Absolutely! All congressional offices are sensitive to matters of importance to their constituents. Further, your message becomes a point of access for APS advocates. The APS software tracks how many people have signed the letters to each congressional office, and once a certain threshold is reached, those advocates will follow up with a phone call or a visit, magnifying your original letter's impact.

Is an individual message more effective than the Contact Congress letters?

Answer: There is no clear answer for this. Each office on Capitol Hill is run uniquely. Some do not respond well to similar looking constituent letters; others do not discriminate the communications they receive. The bottom line is that writing the letter, and opening the dialogue, is the most important thing to do.

However, keep in mind, individualizing your letter will not be a guarantee it will be read, and it will be a significantly more time consuming effort for you. The APS Washington Office recommends using the letter they have prepared.

I am a graduate student, should I write?

Answer: Absolutely! You are the future of the scientific field, and a vibrant economy for the country; members of Congress absolutely want to hear from you. As well, since a great number of graduate students receive their grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF), it is essential that NSF has its advocates. If no one makes a case for it, what reason would members of Congress have for funding it?

I am an APS officer and I shouldn't write, correct?

Answer: No, you absolutely should write. As a leader in your community (in this case, the physics community), you are in a special position to speak on behalf of more than just yourself. In addition, your words will carry more weight because you are a leader in your community.

Should you have any questions, contact Brian Mosley in the APS Washington Office.
202-662-8701 or mosley@aps.org