



**NASPA**<sup>®</sup>

Student Affairs Administrators  
in Higher Education

# Guidelines for Legislative Letter Writing Campaigns

*NASPA Hill Days*



*Student Affairs Day of Action*



## 2018 NASPA Hill Days and Student Affairs Day of Action

*In conjunction with the 2018 NASPA Hill Days and National Student Affairs Day of Action, these guidelines are provided for student affairs professionals to use to organize campus-based letter writing campaigns for state or federal legislative advocacy. Please note that specific sample letters for both federal and selected state advocacy will be available in early July for campuses to use in letter writing campaigns around the National Student Affairs Day of Action on July 17, 2018. You are welcome to use or adapt one of the templates provided by NASPA or to create your own.*

### Why a Letter Writing Campaign? A Message to Student Affairs Administrators

Sources differ on the most effective form of communication in reaching out to elected officials. In late November of 2016, Emily Ellsworth,<sup>1</sup> former Congressional staffer from Utah, released a series of tweets that went viral on how to effectively engage with lawmakers. She stated that while emails and social media shares are popular, they were largely ineffective. Instead, she suggested that letter writing to local or district offices is more effective than national-based letter writing and that calling into a legislative office was the best method of all. She described an instance when a local radio gave out a legislator's district office phone number as part of an issue campaign. The office was bombarded with phone calls for the entire day, preventing several staffers (including herself) from getting any other work done.

This straightforward guidance seems applicable at both the local level and for reaching district offices of federal elected officials. In a March 2017 New Yorker article "What Calling Congress Achieves," Kathryn Schulz<sup>2</sup> describes throngs of calls to DC offices of federal elected officials following President Trump's inauguration. Unfortunately, the large volume of calls lead only to filled voicemail inboxes and automated email messages redirecting senders to "contact the recipient directly." In this case, senders had to raise awareness through any means of communication possible, from fax to the mailing service, to sending a text<sup>3</sup>, or from attending a meeting or event<sup>4</sup> to marching in the streets.

Advocacy since the 2016 Presidential election has quickly become mainstream and persistent, with constituents using diverse avenues of participation, both old and new, in an effort to uplift the voice of the nation. The NASPA Policy Basics Series<sup>5</sup> available on the NASPA Research and Policy Institute website also offers a wealth of foundational information for those who need a jumping off point. Today, individuals have become surprised by the effectiveness of collective participation across various forms of communication. The power of social media is most recently demonstrated through the #MeToo<sup>6</sup> campaign created by non-profit advocate Tarana Burke, and popularized by pop culture celebrities such

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<sup>1</sup> related:<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/us/politics/heres-why-you-should-call-not-email-your-legislators.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/06/what-calling-congress-achieves>

<sup>3</sup> <https://resist.bot/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://townhallproject.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.naspa.org/rpi/posts/naspacts-policy-basics-your-role-in-our-representative-democracy>

<sup>6</sup> <https://metoomvmt.org/>



as Alyssa Milano. More direct advocacy, such as the college and university-based rallies<sup>7</sup> that led to the preservation of the graduate tuition waiver in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Bill<sup>8</sup>, proved effective in the final weeks of 2017.

There is no one recipe for effective collective advocacy. NASPA believes that no matter an individual's position, title, or area of expertise, student affairs professionals may engage in public policy conversations in a myriad of ways that translate into effective advocacy at the personal, student, and institutional levels.<sup>9</sup> Letter writing campaigns help to expand the breadth of advocacy campaigns and raise general awareness on issues of importance within higher education. A campus-based letter writing campaign is just one way student affairs professionals can participate in the 2018 National Student Affairs Day of Action.

Let's get started!

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/12/the-changing-landscape-of-student-protest-in-higher-education/548867/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.naspa.org/rpi/posts/engage-options-for-advocacy-for-student-affairs-professionals>



## General Letter Writing Campaign Guidelines

An effective political letter writing campaign centers on a specific policy issue or piece of legislation or regulatory action. There are factors important to consider before launching a letter writing campaign.

### **Timing is key.**

Letter writing campaigns are most successful when the recipient has a solid window of opportunity within the legislative process to consider and apply the written suggestions. If a letter writing campaign addresses more topical or general suggestions without advocating around a specific policy or piece of legislation, it is best to schedule it while the issue is alive and relevant, perhaps corresponding with a related event or holiday.

### **Collective participation raises awareness.**

Letter writing campaigns are most effective when they are coordinated around a common date, in which letters are written together, either using a provided template or simple, concise instructions for participants to put together a set of letters consistent to the topic with an added personal touch. Holding a letter writing event on campus is a great way to make sure letters are sent collectively! Personal letters usually warrant a less standardized response, while prepared letters increase the breadth and ease of access.

**Less is more, and specifics are best.** A one-page limit on a letter to an elected official might seem short, especially for crucial issues such as sexual violence and free speech, which deeply affect the campus community. However, a legislator with hundreds of letters to sift through is looking for themes of impact that make a case for the value of a specific vote, regulation, or action. In addition, referencing specific legislation of concern, in as much detail as possible, such as using TX HB 50 instead of referencing a Texas “Bathroom Bill,” offers a more reliable, quick reference point.

**Respect your legislator, but remain firm.** Letter writing often occurs when constituents are passionate about a particular policy, practice, or regulation. Passion can lead to powerful letters, however, an insistent or accusatory tone is not an effective way to address elected officials. Student affairs professionals can operate under a personal and institutional value system of diversity and inclusion while maintaining a respectful demeanor in engaging with legislative representatives.

**Always include your personal address and ask for a response.** Elected officials represent constituents in a particular geographic area. Including your address allows for quick and easy identification as a constituent of the person you are writing and allows the recipient to respond to you personally. An important part of letter writing is to write in a way that will invoke an individual response, rather than an automated response. One way to do this is ask directly how an elected official intends to vote or for information about the actions they plan to take regarding a particular issue or problem.





### Sample Letter Template

The Honorable Greg Abbott  
Governor's Office  
PO BOX 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Governor Abbott,

I am writing to express opposition to the introduction and potential passage of discriminatory Texas "Bathroom Bills" such as TX HB 46 and TX HB 50. These policies negatively impact students attending public institutions which may be subject statewide legislation.

As a student affairs professional, I am concerned that such legislation would deeply impact the reputation of my institution and deter students from enrollment at the University of Texas at Austin and institutions of higher learning across the state. College students make-up the future leaders of our state and student affairs professionals work to ensure the success of these students.

TX HB 50 and TX HB 46 would disallow local jurisdictions from implementing anti-discrimination policies, which is both discriminatory and anti-trans. Discrimination does not belong in Texas or in America.

In the case that TX HB 46 or TX HB 50 were to make it to your desk I am asking how you intend to vote during the Texas Special Session. I appreciate and anticipate your response in advance.

Sincerely,

*#SAAdvocate*

#SAAdvocate

Address

City, State, Zipcode

