

Here is an example for a GENERIC MESSAGE:

Dear _____:

I am writing to let you know I am one of the cyclists who used to ride across the Friendship Trail Bridge between Tampa and St. Pete as part of my weekend ride (or work commute or whatever). Since this bridge had to be closed due to structural problems, I am now riding across the Gandy bridge using the same spans as cars and trucks. It is not safe, but the "breakdown" lane can be used as a bike lane and it is my only alternative. I realize the cost to repair the old Friendship Trail would run into the millions and is not likely to ever happen. For a fraction of this cost, the D.O.T. could install some "Share the Road" signs on the Gandy Bridge to at least make it a little safer for cyclists like me who must now share the road with motorists. It would also be nice if the breakdown lane could be cleaned more regularly. This lane must now be used as a bike lane, but is frequently littered with debris and broken glass. Though unnoticed to someone traveling in a car or truck at 55+ mph, these are serious hazards to someone on a bicycle. It would be great if a streetsweeper could pick up the garbage in these lanes once a week, twice a month, or at least once a month. Thanks for your help in making the Gandy bridge safer for all of the cyclists who use it to travel across Tampa Bay.

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Here is an article taken from the Florida State House website. FYI.

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Effective Communication With Your Representative

As a Floridian, one of your greatest responsibilities is to help elect the representatives who represent you and the state's more than 14 million other residents. But your role in the democratic process of government does not end at the polls. By sharing your opinions and ideas with your representatives and senators in Tallahassee, you help them decide what to do about the issues and pending legislation that affect us all. They value your suggestions and encourage you to express them.

Your representatives receive a huge amount of phone calls and mail from their constituents. Unfortunately, their full agendas limit their ability to personally read and respond to it all. How then, can you be sure your voice is heard? Here are some tips to help you get the most impact out of your communications with your representatives in Tallahassee.

General Tips

- ▶ Know who your representatives are and how to contact them. If you don't know who represents you, you can find out by using the online guide. Your representatives' web pages will give you their mailing addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.
- ▶ Make sure you understand the legislative process. Even the most basic understanding of the process will help you effectively express your ideas.
- ▶ Contact your representative about a particular issue before the Legislature takes action on it. Most matters coming before the Legislature are well publicized before session.

- ▶ Use a variety of communication methods. You might choose to telephone, write, e-mail, fax, or visit your representative. You might also choose to give testimony at public hearings held by the Legislature. (To give testimony, you would need to contact the appropriate committee secretary before the hearing to sign up.)
- ▶ Tell your representative what effect you think a particular bill, if it becomes law, will have on you, your children, business, or community. Be concise, but specific.
- ▶ Be polite, even if you disagree strongly with the representative you are addressing. Lawmakers cannot please everyone. Your communication will be more effective if you are reasonable in your approach.
- ▶ Suggest a course of action and offer assistance. Don't make promises or threats.

Writing Effective Letters

Address letters to Members of the House of Representatives as follows:

- ▶ The Honorable John Doe
Florida House of Representatives
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300.
- ▶ Address letters to senators this way:
Senator Jane Doe
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100.
- ▶ Be absolutely certain you spell your representative's name correctly and use the correct address. If you don't, you could lose your audience.
- ▶ Type or print legibly. Sign your name neatly and give your address correctly so they can respond to your letter.
- ▶ Keep letters, e-mail, and faxes brief. Never write more than one page. Concise written correspondence is more likely to grab and keep the reader's attention.
- ▶ Identify your issue or opinion at the beginning of the letter, don't bury your main point under trivial text.
- ▶ Cover only one issue per letter. If you have another issue to address, write another letter. Back up your opinions with supporting facts. Your letter should inform the reader.
- ▶ Avoid abbreviations or acronyms, and don't use technical jargon. Rather than impressing your reader, such terms will only frustrate him or her.
- ▶ Don't send the same letter to more than one representative. Personalized letters have more impact.

Calling or Visiting Your Representative

- ▶ Plan your call or visit carefully. Keep to the point and discuss only one issue. Organize your thoughts ahead of time and make notes to help you stay on track.
- ▶ When planning to visit your representative, make an appointment. Don't just drop by your representative's office and expect him or her to drop everything to see you. Call or write for an appointment as soon as you know when you are going to be at the Capitol.
- ▶ Prepare a one-page fact sheet concerning your issue to give to your representative. This will help him or her better retain what you present.