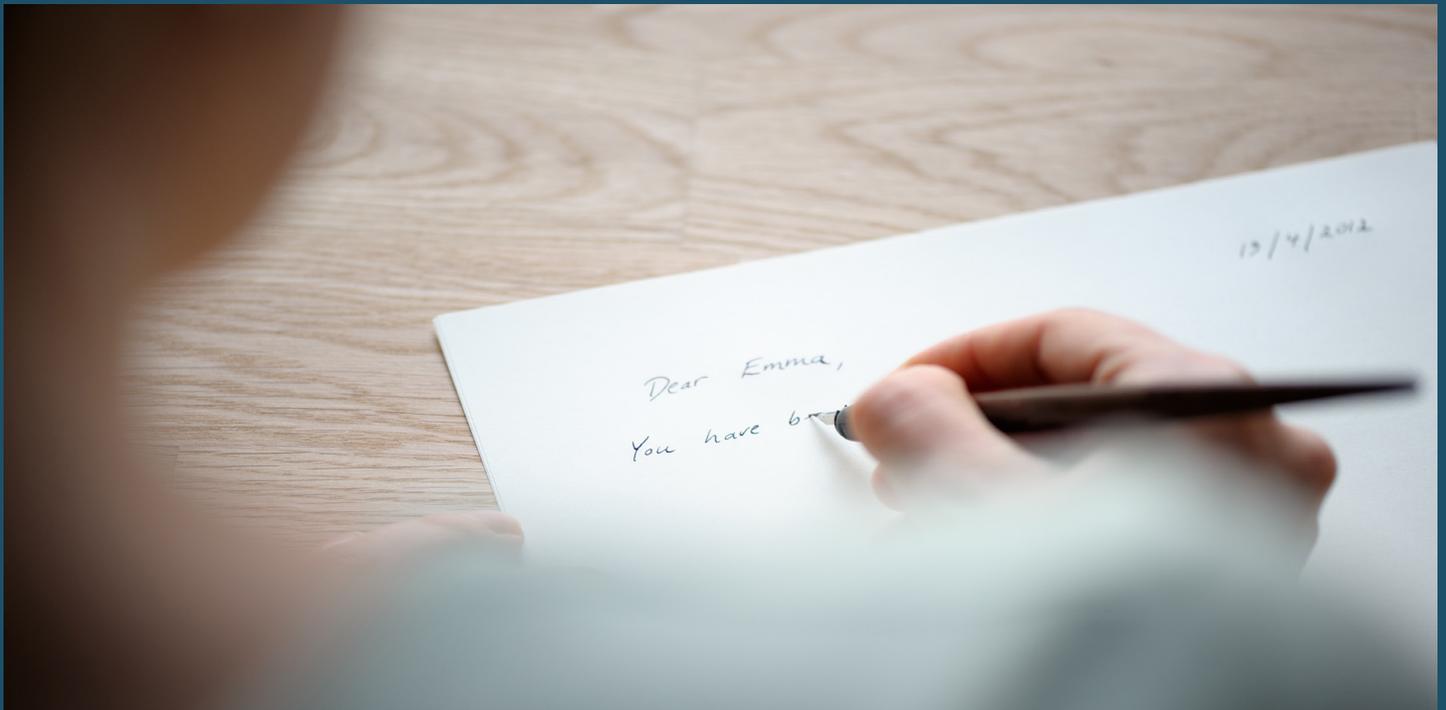


environmental youth forum

DIRECT ACTION TOOLKIT: LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN



What is direct action?

Direct action refers to the political tactics and methods used to raise awareness or force discussion on an issue. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., nonviolent direct action “seeks to dramatize the issue [so] that it can no longer be ignored.” Like voting, direct actions, which include protests and sit-ins, are an essential part of a democracy. Unlike voting, however, direct actions can happen at any time, and anybody in a society can initiate a direct action—not just those of voting age.

Letter Writing

Letter writing is a simple, but highly effective, direct action for engaging in a democracy. The purpose of a letter writing campaign is to raise awareness and sway opinion on a particular issue. Often, letters for political action are addressed to legislators and elected officials who are in a position of power to act in a way that can change the issue, by passing legislation or supporting a particular cause. Anyone can write a letter, even people who aren't of voting age, making it an excellent tool for making your voice heard.

INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1: Research the issue

Effective direct action always starts with a solid understanding of the issue you are trying to address and the community you are trying to reach with your message. First, understand both sides of the issue. Then figure out what you are trying to say and, just as importantly, who you are trying to say it to. Are you addressing people who feel differently from you to raise their awareness of your perspective? Or are you addressing people who agree with you, to create a feeling of solidarity?

Step 2: Find a recipient

It's important that you direct your letter to the right person. If you are trying to raise awareness about an issue in your community, often the best people to contact are your local representatives and legislators, whose job is to listen to the people in their communities and consider their voices when writing and voting on legislation. You can use the website www.commoncause.com to find your representatives based on where you live.

Step 3: Draft your letter

In your letter, introduce yourself, the issue you're writing them about, and why you think your reader needs to address this issue. If you have a specific action you want them to take (such as passing legislation or increasing funding for a particular cause), then make sure to mention specifically how they can help. Include a couple of important facts that support your claim. Lastly, keep it brief: half a page to a page is appropriate.

Step 4: Revise your letter

At the very least you'll want to run a Spellcheck on your letter. Or try reading your letter aloud to make sure everything sounds the way you want it to. Even better, have a trusted adult look it over.

Step 5: Send it!

Make your voice heard! The great thing about writing letters is that there are few barriers between you and your intended audience. For maximum impact, coordinate with friends or classmates to create a campaign in which you all write to the same person on the same issue. This helps show the size of your movement and encourages your reader to take your message seriously.

"In the final analysis it doesn't really matter what the political system is...We don't need perfect political systems; we need perfect participation."

Cesar Chavez
Labor Activist