



# 5 steps for medical students to make an impact in letters to Congress

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**Brendan Murphy**

Senior News Writer

Medical students have a powerful voice that can help shape the future of health care. One medium in which they can use is through correspondence with members of Congress, along with state and local lawmakers.

At the [AMA Advocacy in Action Workshop](#)—an event offering medical students grassroots advocacy skills training—Katie Dapper, the AMA’s assistant director of congressional affairs, offered medical students guidance on how to effectively correspond with their elected officials.

Here is a step-by-step guide to writing a letter that will reach its desired audience and resonate.

## Step 1: The basics

Knowing who represents you, as basic as it may seem, is the first step in any advocacy effort. [Congress.gov](#) offers a directory that provides links to both your representative’s webpages, along with their contact information.

As far as structure is concerned, a professional format adds credibility. To do that, a letter writer wants to:

- Date the letter and use the congressperson’s full address at the top.
- Address them as “The Honorable representative/senator’s name.”
- Include a proper greeting—“Dear Rep. [Last Name].”

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change at the state and federal levels through trainings, meetings and events in Washington, D.C.—and online.

## Step 2: Introduce yourself

In the opening paragraph of your letter, make it clear that you are writing as a medical student and a constituent. Include your name, medical school and year of study. Your identity as a future physician is likely to add weight to your message to lawmakers and staff members who may be reading your letter.

If you are writing a letter on behalf of an organization, include that in your introduction. However, your membership in a group may not qualify you to write on its behalf. For instance, a medical student would never write on behalf of the AMA.

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## Step 3: Highlight your concern

After introducing yourself, get to the motivation behind your letter. It may be related to a specific policy or a larger issue. Including patient stories that you have experienced can help your letter gain traction.

“You are the boots on the ground,” Dapper said. “You are seeing all these issues. Adding your own personal anecdotes can help you connect with the office and highlight your concerns.”

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## Step 4: Make your ask

The story you tell is to motivate the congressperson or other lawmaker to whom you are writing to take action. But the story alone isn't enough. It's vital to include a specific action request.

Those asks could include signing a letter, cosponsoring a bill or introducing a piece of legislation. If you are writing a letter in response to a specific piece of legislation, it is important to include the bill number (also available at [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)).

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- [Looking to find time for medical student advocacy? Here's how](#)
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## Step 5: Submit your letter

As a former staffer on Capitol Hill, Dapper found that email is the most effective method to reach your congressperson.

“You can physically mail the letter, but remember, because of the security protocols, it's going to take a couple of weeks to get to them,” she said. “So by that time things may have changed.”

Most congresspeople’s official contact forms are available online. If you can’t find an email address online, you can always call a congressperson’s office and ask for it.

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