

Let Your Voice Be Heard!

When was the last time you wrote a letter to your elected representatives? Well if it has been a long time, this section of the WASFAA website will help you voice your opinion. New members of Congress need to be educated about student aid issues and all members need to know how proposed changes or regulations will affect your students.

Remember to get your students involved! Hearing from financial aid administrators is helpful, but getting letters from the students who actually benefit from the financial aid programs would make a big IMPACT!

Making the Contact Electronically

All letters sent to members of Congress are examined for dangerous substances which can delay delivery from 10-14 days. If timing is critical, send your letter by fax or email. (Generally they will only open email from their own constituents) It is easy to find out who your representatives are and their contact numbers. Just go to the following websites.

Senators: http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>

You just need to enter your state or zip code (with additional 4-digit code) and you will get to the web site of your elected representatives. Usually there is an area that you can fill in and send an e-mail message easily.

Telephoning Your Representative

Sometimes the easiest way to voice your opinion on a current bill or issue is to make a telephone call. You can get the phone number by using the two websites above or you can call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Senator's and/or Representative's office.

Telephone calls will usually be taken by a staff member but they input your opinions directly to the member of Congress. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue you wish to comment about.

After identifying yourself, tell the aid you would like to leave a brief message. For example: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S. ___ /H.R. _____)".

You may also want to state your reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your Senator's or Representative's position on the bill. Remember to thank the person who took the phone call for their time and consideration.

Writing a Letter

If you decide to write a letter, follow these helpful tips to improve the effectiveness of the letter.

- State the purpose for writing the letter in the first paragraph.

- Cover only one subject or issue. If a bill is the subject, cite the number
- If possible, keep the letter to one page.
- Be factual and provide information to support your position not emotional or philosophical arguments.
- If you are opposing legislation, provide adverse effects and make suggestions for a better approach.
- Offer you assistance or technical information (optional)
- Include your appreciation for past support of higher education aid programs.
- Make sure your name and return address is included and legible
- Make sure you address your letters properly:

For Senators:

Honorable (Full Name)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator (Last Name)

For House of Representatives:

Honorable (Full Name)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. or Mrs. (Last Name)
(or Dear Congressman)

Talking Points

- Financing a college education today is a significant expense for students and their families.
- Every student should have the opportunity to pursue a college degree.
- If the United States is to maintain its leadership position in the world, it is essential that we support and encourage a well-educated populace.
- Students and families need more help, not less, to pursue the American dream of achieving a college education, and in turn, reinvigorate the economy.
- Reductions to the student aid programs will take college opportunities from low and middle income students.
- The number of Pell Grant recipients has increased by nearly 1 million students in recent years, while the maximum Pell Grant award has been effectively frozen.
- The limit on how much students may borrow through the student loan programs has not increased in over a decade, forcing many students to obtain loans from private lenders to finance college.,
- With state funding on the decline, and projected enrollment growth on the rise, we face a massive access crisis without a substantial federal investment in student aid.
- There is overwhelming evidence that a college education makes more productive workers and better citizens.
- The Campus-Based programs, SEOG, Perkins and Federal Work Study, are programs that require matching funds from the institution and have provided critical aid to the neediest students. Congress should enhance and continue to support these valuable programs.

- The most effective way to address tuitions, in addition to bringing student aid up to date, is to empower consumers in the higher education market, not establish new federal controls or regulate how colleges operate and educate their students.
- Building the economy and work force of tomorrow means investing in America's college students today.

Sample Letter

Date

The Honorable (Full Name)
(Address)

Re: Support of H.R. _____

Dear Senator/Representative (Last Name)

I am writing to ask for your support of _____. (State your position, and why you support this position)

Students from low and middle income families at my school have utilized this program to pay educational expenses at our institution. (Give facts to back your position and examples of how the issue affects your students).

We appreciate your past support of financial aid programs that have made higher education possible for those who could not otherwise attend higher education. Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,

(Your full name, address, phone number and e-mail address)

cc: Senator/Representative _____ (You can send your letter to other concerned legislators)