



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.

"World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats"

Quick Recipe for a Grassroots Letter

Many cat lovers are now well aware of federal, state and local ordinances being proposed that are detrimental to cats, pedigreed cat breeding and pet ownership. Some people would like to help but find it difficult to write a letter to lawmakers. Here is Sharon Coleman's recipe to help you get started.

Just as a nice salad bowl, fresh packaged greens and dressing from the pantry will produce a presentable on-the-go pot luck contribution in minutes, a quick recipe approach makes sending effective grassroots letters to lawmakers easy. Just as the pot-luck main course will be provided by someone else, leave the complex policy arguments to the organizations and lobbyists.

To write a concise one page letter, step back and ask yourself "what is this bill really about?" From your own point of view, of course. Lawmakers and aides will not read a lot of detail, and you want your letter to pack punch, not fizzle. Also, be sure to caption your letters so that it is clear what bill, current version, you are writing on and your position. Start out with your position, then your key point(s) and close by saying what you want, phrased appropriately for the recipient:

1. Use one page of paper, or equivalent if email is appropriate. The entire letter should be easy to read, so use adequate margins.

Hint: Either keep a formatted template on hand or cut and paste your basic formatting from a previous letter.

2. Set up your letter with an easy to read caption that makes clear the specific proposal, amendment version, forum (such as a committee) and your position.
3. Be sure to include your name and regular mail address. Phone number is optional but definitely include it if you are a constituent.

Hint: Some lawmakers only want to hear from constituents, but often the views of non-constituents are very relevant if the writer has a connection to the lawmaker's area or special expertise. Mention this when it applies, e.g. you a constituent; or are a regular visitor, are considering relocating, an expert, etc.

4. Ask yourself what the proposal is about - in one sentence, or so, and why should the lawmaker take the action you request? This is the heart of your letter.

Hint: Use plain, clear language and terminology that supports your position rather than repeating opponent's "offensive" terms.

5. Add one, and probably not more than 3 points to support your position.

Hint: Grassroots letters should be easy to read. In the one page format, this could be one paragraph or simply bullet points.

6. . Close by repeating your specific request, such as "For these reasons, please do not support Bill 123 that would prohibit cat breeding."
7. Proofread and be sure there are no glitches from copying old formats.
8. Dispatch your letter by the best means available, appropriate and timely. If using email, format your letter in plain text. If using fax, be sure the font and formatting will be readable. For regular mail, make your envelope and letter look as clean and professional as possible, although handwriting is always acceptable for envelope or letter.
9. Keep copies for future reference and use.

Grassroots letter writing is like any other kind of writing -- a little practice helps a lot and builds confidence. Focus on the format you want from the start instead of trying to pare down an essay. Also, learn to think in terms of the kind of points that resonate with legislators and staff and avoid things that might bother us but may be irrelevant or frivolous to them. Grassroots letters are important by numerical count more than content, so being able to send one is paramount. Establishing a routine procedure for letter writing will build your skill and confidence to be able to do this quickly as well as include fresh, memorable and personalized content in your own words.

Following is a sample letter for a bill that is thankfully fictitious but illustrates the need to oppose well-intended but misguided proposals. In typical fashion, this one has already been "amended" but not necessarily improved. In analyzing a proposal, always ask yourself: 1) are the basic facts and assumptions correct? 2) Would there be unintended consequences, especially those worse than the original "problem"? 3) Is it necessary at all? 4) If there will be increased costs, who will pay them? 5) Who will be hurt? Always refer back to "What is this about?"

Senator John Q. Doe
Chair, Senate Committee on Public Safety
State Capitol
My State 00000

Re: SB 6666, "Black Cat Safety Act", as amended October 31. OPPOSE

Dear Senator Doe:

I am a life long resident of Kittyville in your district and ask that you not support SB 666 currently in the Senate Public Safety Committee. This bill, creating a new crime by requiring that all black cats wear glow-in-the-dark collars, was well-intended but a misguided effort to allow drivers to see black cats at night despite the recent amendment deleting the requirement for battery operated lights on the collars.

Cats are nocturnal animals afforded natural protection by darkness from both predatory animals and potential human abusers. SB 6666 would have the unintended consequences of reducing or eliminating this protection which should be a higher relative priority than protection from drivers.

This bill is unnecessary for cats kept exclusively indoors, and many outdoor cats are simply cared for by citizens but loosely owned or un-owned so that caretakers will face criminal liability for providing care without placing the required collars on the cats.

Not only will this bill *increase the costs to cat caretakers, the consequences of a criminal charge or conviction are severe in terms of expense, time and bars to employment, licensing and other personal needs.*

For these reasons, I ask that you do not support SB 6666. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

Jane C. Fancier
Kittyville, My State

Sharon Coleman, CFA Legislative Legal Analyst
July 1, 2006

To correspond with the CFA Legislative Committee, please email Legislation@CFA.org