Appendix J: Sample Letter to Legislator

Although your national legislators’ Washington addresses are given here, because of the security checks letters must go through before being delivered, they will arrive much faster if they are sent to the legislators’ local addresses in your state. This can be found online.

To Your Senator: The Honorable (full name) United States Senate Washington, DC 20510

To Your Representative: The Honorable (full name) U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

You should close your letter with “Sincerely yours,” and please sign your full name. If you should wish to add your title (Mr. ) (Mrs.), please put it in parenthesis. This is the same form you would use to address your state representatives or senators when you write them in their state capital offices.

Not all school districts want you to write your letters on your school’s letterhead, but if you can, use it. If you must use plain bond paper, you should add your title, School Librarian, your school, and your school district. This tells the recipient that you are competent to write this letter.

Please remember:

1. Your legislators, just like your principal and community, like to have information that keeps them informed of your library activities.

2. If you are supporting a specific bill or opposed to its passage, please state its number and its popular name. Your legislators, both national and state, have many bills before them during the year, and they need to know exactly which bill you are referring to.

3. Please be careful to write a carefully written letter stating your position. Your opinion
matters whether or not they agree. However, they must understand your position, and that requires your care not to use poor grammar or punctuation. Also, please do not use acronyms that they, not being experts in our field wouldn’t understand. Your expertise is very specialized, and you need to share the facts in support of your request.

4. You need to be as brief as possible in writing your letter. Staff members will probably do the first read, and they will be more interested in a brief, well-presented letter than a long, rambling discourse if they are going to share the letter.

5. Please be certain the bill is still alive. If the bill has been passed or voted down, the letter will do no good.

6. Always follow through with a thank-you letter.

7. Write when you are interested in the outcome of any legislation affecting schools and school libraries when you can support or ask to have the bill reconsidered or when you are asked to do so by your colleagues. Many times, legislators hear nothing from your side of the discussion and those who are of another opinion will be the only voice heard. Offer your carefully written arguments about the issue.

It would be better if you didn’t:

1. Write a letter discussing votes for or against a certain bill without saying what vote you want them to make and why it is important. Legislators need to know why, and if you don’t tell them why, they can easily ignore your request.

2. Don’t threaten to withdraw your support in an upcoming election or brag about just how influential you are in your community. They can easily find out if you are a registered voter and to which party you belong.

3. Bills that are not out of a committee change when the evidence is heard and the committee’s report is made. Wait until you see what the committee is suggesting before you craft your letter.
4. Beware the form letter being sent by an organization. Your carefully chosen wording will show your experience and will be much more influential.

5. Your address identifies you to your legislator. If you write a letter to the legislator in the next district or next state, your letter may be forwarded to the appropriate office, but you are not that legislator’s constituent, so your letter will have little or no effect.

6. It’s better to write a well-researched letter when necessary rather than flooding a legislator’s office on a regular basis. Quantity is very important to legislators, but that quantity should be from multiple constituents, each of whom writes an excellent letter.