

Sample Letters to Legislators and the Media

The talking points are only good if you talk! Writing to your legislators is an easy way to make sure they hear your message, and as a constituent, your words carry a lot of weight. Here is an easy outline to follow and a sample letter using it.

- ❖ Paragraph 1: Tell them what you are writing about in the first or second sentence. Introduce yourself and your family. Tell your legislator that your child (or you) has autism (and/or other disability/ies) and explain what that means and the effects. Tell them about the future your child (or you) hope to have.
- ❖ Paragraph 2: Tell them what issue you are writing about, and how you and/or your family will be affected. If there is no funding for new grads, will a parent have to quit their job or go on public assistance? If there were insurance coverage for autism treatments, what do you believe it would accomplish for your child or family? Would you be able to get out of debt, save for college for other children, avoid bankruptcy, etc.? Be honest and clear.
- ❖ Paragraph 3: Close by repeating your request for their support of your position.
- ❖ In any of the above paragraphs, use numbers and dollar figures wherever appropriate, and put your main points in **bold**.

SAMPLE

Dear Representative XYZ,

***I am writing to ask you to support funding for adult day services for new special school graduates with disabilities.** My wife and I have raised two wonderful children in <<neighborhood>>, Jane and Bob. Bob is 20 and has autism, a neurological disorder that affects his ability to communicate and interact with others. He cannot speak and finds it very difficult to be around crowds, but the services of the Delaware Autism Program (a public school) and the staff at <<provider>> have helped him to develop work skills like filing, shredding, and sorting to prepare him for a job in a local doctor's office when he turns 21 and is no longer eligible for school.*

*Bob works very well with some supports, and we believed he would follow the path students always have of entering adult services through the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services and working under a day service provider. **But we have learned that the proposed budget has allocated no money for new graduates of special schools, leaving them with no alternative but to sit home after they leave school.** We have always counted on having two incomes in order to meet our bills, but if Bob has no services, one of us will have to quit in order to stay home with him. I don't know how we will be able to afford it. And without services, Bob will lose the skills he and his teachers worked so hard for over 15 years, and if he is ever able to secure services again, it will take so much more to regain those skills.*

My wife and I know that the State is facing large budget deficits but the answer should not be to simply drop some of our most vulnerable citizens. We will care for Bob as long as we are able, and serving him and adults with disabilities in the community is certainly the least expensive option- an average of \$19,600 per person compared to \$331,000 if that person was institutionalized. Please help us and the many families like us keep our son at home, and fund services for new graduates in FY2011.

*Sincerely,
Pat Smith*

Writing letters to the editor is a little different. Not only do you have far fewer words available, but they can edit it even further. It's important to focus on your message, and get just one to three points across as concisely as possible. Again, be clear and honest.

A good letter will catch the attention of legislators and members of the public who might not have known about the issue you're raising- maybe you'll inspire others to write too!

These samples are provided to give you ideas, but **please do not copy them for your own**; if papers get the same story from multiple people, chances are they won't print them- and the best story to tell is always your own!

I have autism and when I graduate, I want to go to work like other people my age. But next year's budget has no money for graduates to get day services. I was in the Delaware Autism Program for 15 years, and I learned a lot; without day services, I can't use all I learned in a job. And unless the legislature fixes this, I'll have nowhere to go all day, so my mom is worried she'll have to quit her job to stay home with me. Please call your legislators and tell them that people with disabilities and their families are the wrong targets for budget cuts. They should fund services for me and the 76 other graduates of special schools in Delaware.

My daughter has autism, and my family has gone deep into debt to pay for Applied Behavioral Analysis, the most proven treatment for autism. At over \$25,000 a year, we can't keep it up as long as she'll need it, and our insurance company doesn't cover ABA. Fifteen other states require insurance coverage of autism and Delaware should be one of them. Call your legislators and ask them to vote for SB204. Help families help their kids.

My son has autism and he has a better life than I ever hoped for; with the support of a state-funded job coach, he has a job he likes sorting and delivering mail for a local corporation. But his provider cannot provide the kind of support he needs if their state contract is decreased; they haven't had an increase in years, even as gas and other costs went up. My son's job benefits the whole family; he is happy, and my wife and I can work to set aside money for when we're no longer here for him. We'll take care of him as long as we can so the state doesn't have to, but the state needs to do its part too. Call your legislators and tell them not to cut day services for people with disabilities!

Below are email addresses to which you can send your letter(s) to the editor.*

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| Brandywine, Greenville, Hockessin, and Mill Creek Community News, and Your Better Years | editor@communitypub.com | Milford Beacon | melissa@milfordbeacon.com |
| The Cape Gazette | newsroom@capegazette.com | Milford Chronicle | mc@newszap.com |
| Coastal Point | darin.mccann@coastalpoint.com | Newark Post | sgoss@chespub.com |
| Delaware Coast Press | dcp@dmg.gannett.com | The News Journal | letters@delawareonline.com |
| Delaware State News | newsroom@newszap.com | Out & About Magazine | contact@out-and-about.com |
| Dover Post | jeff.brown@doverpost.com | The Review | theudreview@gmail.com |
| El Tiempo Hispano | info@eltiempohispano.com | Seaford Leader & State Register | leader@newszap.com |
| Harrington Journal | landerson@newszap.com | Seaford Star | publisher@seafordstar.com |
| Hoy en Delaware | jsomalo@mchsi.com | Smyrna/Clayton Sun-Times | ben.mace@doverpost.com |
| The Laurel Star | morningstarpub@ddmg.net | Sussex Countian | patrick@sussexcountian.com |
| Long Neck News | longnecknews@aol.com | Sussex County Online | webmaster@sussexcountyonline.com |
| Middletown Transcript | shauna@middletowntranscript.com | The Sussex County Post | sussexpost@newszap.com |
| | | The Wave: | wave@dmg.gannett.com |

*Thanks to Douglas Marshall-Steele at www.towardequality.org for collecting these addresses and permitting their use here.