

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

Write to your legislators

*Tips for advocates from the Treatment Advocacy Center
(www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org)*

Even a handful of letters can have a tremendous impact on your state legislator and their decision on whether to focus on or support treatment law reform. Letters do not have to be long-winded or full of statistics – in fact, short letters with personal stories are the most likely to be read.

IDENTIFY YOUR LEGISLATOR(S)

If you don't know who your legislator is, call your local library or go online to a site like www.vote-smart.org or www.congress.org. These websites allow you to enter your ZIP code and get the names of your legislators; www.vote-smart.org also allows you to find out more about your legislators. Once you know who your legislators are, www.congress.org gives you the option to write all of your legislators in a form on their web page, with one click.

WRITE YOUR LETTER

Remember that you probably know more than your legislator about severe mental illness. Follow these tips for making sure your letter has maximum impact.

- Type or write legibly.
- If you are writing about a specific bill, include the bill number in the first few sentences or a reference ("RE:") line above the salutation.
- Be brief and to the point (preferably one page or less). Short letters get read!
- Use your own words and avoid the appearance of a form letter.
- Give your reasons for supporting or opposing a bill.
- Use a personal story, if possible.
- Be courteous and reasonable.
- Use correct grammar and short sentences.
- Include a newspaper article/editorial that supports your view (there are some good articles on the TAC website for this purpose)
- Personalize the heading and salutation for each legislator to whom you send a letter.
- Proofread and spell check.

DO NOT ...

- Be long winded.
- Be rude or threatening.
- Remind the legislator that you are a taxpayer.



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- Use form letters (the form on Congress.org is only for format and mailing, so this is an excellent tool.)
- Say, or even hint, that politics is sleazy or dishonorable (no matter what you think).

ADDRESS YOUR LETTER

The correct method of address is:

The Honorable (Name of Legislator)

(Your State Name) State (Senate or Assembly/House of Representatives)

State Capitol Building Room _____

City, State, ZIP Code

The salutation is "Dear Senator/Assemblyperson/Representative (Last Name)"

Please forward a copy of your letter to The Treatment Advocacy Center – via fax (703 294 6010), email (info@treatmentadvocacycenter.org), or regular mail (200 N. Glebe Road, Ste. 730, Arlington, VA 22203). This helps us in our efforts to change the law.

EXAMPLE LETTER

See page 3 for sample.

NOTE: This letter is only an example. Please use your own words.



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October 11, 2010
The Honorable Joe Brown
Florida State Senate
State Capitol Building Room 123
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Dear Senator Brown:

Senate Bill 2748 will allow Florida to provide earlier and more continual treatment for people with severe mental illnesses who are too ill to access services voluntarily. Please support this vital legislation.

My brother, Frank, is like many people with schizophrenia. He does not realize he is ill. We use to think "lack of insight" (anosognosia) was willful denial because of the stigma involved with mental illness. Newer research shows that for many people the inability to recognize their own need for treatment evolves not from denial but from brain dysfunction itself.

Because Frank does not realize he is sick, he sees no reason to accept the services that are available. Instead he revolves through hospitalizations, homelessness and incarceration. A supportive, supervised, and mandated outpatient treatment program like the one included in pending Baker Act reform is Frank's only hope. It can find him treatment, point him toward recovery, and bring him back to us.

I ask you, plead with you, to support revision of the Baker Act. My brother's health and future depend on it. Please feel free to contact me for more information.

Sincerely,
(Your name)
(Your address)
(City, State, Zip code)
(Phone number)



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