



Advocacy 101: Writing a Letter to Your Congressional Representative

Connecting with your elected representatives is a powerful way to influence the issues you care about. Follow this guide to ensure your message is heard, your concerns are addressed, and your advocacy efforts make an impact:

Purpose of Writing a Comment Letter

- Raise the visibility of the issue of social isolation and loneliness
- Encourage policymakers to engage with diverse stakeholders and outline key policy objectives critical to the Coalition's continued success
- Advance the Coalition's policy priorities by influencing legislation through written communication.

Objectives

- Gain written support for members of Congress to prioritize social isolation, loneliness, and social connection in the 118th Congress
- Encourage support for Coalition-sponsored pieces of legislation and support for policy solutions on a bipartisan basis, like the OAA Reauthorization
- Educate members of Congress on the importance of member activations, like OAA Reauthorization Member Activation
- Identify future leaders in the policymaking realm to partner with for future Coalition initiatives

Best Practices

- Be concise and focused in your letter.
- Use personal examples and anecdotes rooted in your experience to make a compelling case.
- Avoid discussing personal political views unrelated to the issue at hand.
- Proofread your letter to ensure it is clear and free of errors.
- Send your letter via email or traditional mail, and consider following up with a phone call to the representative's office.
- Stay in touch to maintain relationships with the representative's office.

Steps for Writing a Comment Letter

Introductions

- Begin with a brief introduction of yourself and your connection to the issue, such as being a member of the Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness (CESIL) or having personal experience with social isolation and loneliness.

Purpose of the Letter

- Clearly state the purpose of your letter. Explain that you are writing to advocate for the prioritization of social isolation, loneliness, and social connection in upcoming legislative sessions.

Overview of the Coalition

- Briefly describe CESIL, emphasizing its role as a national alliance of influential consumer groups, patient advocates, health plans, community-based organizations, behavioral health groups, and private sector innovators committed to advocating for policy change.

Issue Description & Key Statistics

- Provide a concise description of the issue and support it with key statistics

Specific Legislative Request

- Identify the specific legislation or policy you are advocating for, such as the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA).

Call to Action

- Urge the congressional representative to take action by supporting or co-sponsoring relevant legislation.
- Encourage them to prioritize funding and resources to address social isolation and loneliness.

Closing

- Thank the representative for their time and consideration.
- Offer to provide additional information or answer any questions.
- Mention your willingness to continue the dialogue and stay engaged on this important issue.

Sample Language

CESIL Overview: The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness (CESIL) is the premier national alliance that brings together some of the most influential consumer groups, patient advocates, health plans, community-based organizations, behavioral health groups, and private sector innovators committed to advocating for policy change to combat the adverse effects of social isolation and loneliness.

The Older Americans Act Overview: The Older Americans Act (OAA) was established in 1965 to create a network of community based services to address older adults' health and social needs. In 2020, when the OAA was last reauthorized, Congress expanded the role of the Aging Network in addressing social isolation and loneliness through screening, prevention, research, and long-term planning.

Brief Issue Description & Key Statistics:

- Over 1 in 2 Americans - or 58% - report experiencing loneliness.
- Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk for premature death by 26% and 29%, respectively, while social connection reduces our risk of early death by 50%.
- Isolation and loneliness can be associated with reduced community trust in government institutions, mistrust among neighbors, and low levels of perceived social support.
- Communities with strong social networks and higher levels of social capital are more equipped to handle natural disasters and coordinate emergency response plans.
- People who volunteer in their communities are 27% more likely to be employed within one year of losing their job.

Key Priorities for the Older Adults Act Reauthorization: To continue building on the strengths of the OAA's role in addressing social isolation and loneliness and fostering social connection, we urge Congress to:

- Safeguard the core mission of the OAA to maximize the independence, wellbeing, and health of older adults and their caregivers while modernizing the Aging Network's systems and programs to meet current and future needs.
- Significantly increase the authorized funding levels for all OAA programs and invest in the Aging Network's capacity to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older adults and caregivers by:
 - a. Increasing funding for OAA nutrition programs and supportive services to enhance community-based assistance and community service programs;
 - b. Dedicating funding to expand multigenerational support services as a part of community programs;
 - c. Expanding access to evidence-based disease prevention and health promotion services and advance care planning; and
 - d. Extending the RAISE Family Caregivers Act and allocating additional funding to the National Family Caregiver Support Program to bolster its capacity to provide resources, access to services, respite, education, and training
- Codify directed funding to Aging Network organizations to provide resources to support training, technical assistance, and evaluations. These resources would proliferate innovative interventions, evaluated by scientific experts to address social isolation and loneliness and promote social connection, including the use of emerging technologies.
- Direct ACL to provide guidance and technical assistance, informed by research and practice experts, to help states incorporate screening tools and measures on social isolation, loneliness, and social connection in their aging plans.

About the Coalition

Since its founding in 2018, the [Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness](#) has been advocating for policy change that addresses the detrimental effects of social isolation and loneliness. The Coalition represents over 50 of the most influential consumer groups, patient advocates, health plans, community-based organizations, behavioral health groups, and private sector innovators in the United States, all who share a mission to create a more socially connected nation. Through disseminating research findings, leading public awareness, and advocating for legislative and regulatory interventions, the Coalition envisions a society where every individual will one day have the opportunities and support necessary to be socially engaged.