



Letter to a Helping Agency

If you are having difficulty solving a problem in your community such as with a particular property owner, you might need to escalate the issue. Address the first letters to those who can take direct action such as a police officer, code inspector, or other person tasked with addressing such problems. Don't write to managers or political leaders until you have given the chain of command a chance to work. As necessary, follow up your calls and letters with personal appointments.

Here are suggestions when writing such a letter:

- Describe the legal violations at the property. The challenge is to separate emotional impact from legal violation. The letter should focus on the most serious violations of the law, while keeping lesser violations, despite sometimes greater emotional impact, in perspective.
- Describe how long the problem has persisted. A sense of the location's history can support arguments that it's time to act.
- Give a brief history of what has already been done to address the problem. It is important to document that the letter being written is not the first effort to address the problem.
- Respectfully request specific action by a specific date, such as a meeting with decision makers. Keep the tone reasonable, but insistent. The intent is to encourage action, not to distribute blame.
- Make sure each statement is accurate and supportable. Efforts to stop a nuisance can stall while the credibility of the parties is evaluated. There is a human tendency to embellish facts to fit one's level of anger — rumors can be stated as truths and suspicions stated as facts. For example, if a letter states that neighbors have called police many times, such a statement should be supportable from neighbors who can describe specific instances.

While a long letter may seem appropriate, similar results are possible by listing or documenting the statements without going into lengthy, incident-specific detail.