

How to Write to your MP

We have often asked our members to write to their representatives in Parliament to tell them how they feel about the current voluntary euthanasia legislation. It seems such an easy thing to do: get pen and paper (turn on computer nowadays), find out who our MP is, his/her address, write down our grievances and requests, sign, post the letter. Done!

However, to be done well, letter-writing is NOT as easy as it seems.

What is important, and often not realised, is **how the letter is written**.

Just jotting down a few lines, telling your MP in no uncertain terms what to do, or giving an emotional account of your bad experiences, may relieve your frustration, but will it invite him/her to share our view? Imagine yourself in your MP's shoes. What would be your reaction? Would you feel sympathetic and willing to listen, motivated, compliant? Your letter will, at best, be ignored, or worse, may cause our MP to be very circumspect about becoming involved.

So, before putting pen to paper, **think of what you are trying to achieve**.

You want the current VE laws revised. We know that only members of Parliament can do this and that many may be willing but hesitant to broach the issue. As they are only human, they will **not be forced** into action. It is up to us to make them **want to become involved**. In order to achieve this, we must try and get them to see things our way.

But how is this done? The Dutch achieved it not by persecution or applying pressure, but by solid reasoning, gentle persuasion, firm conviction and dogged determination. Their advice is:

Keep in mind that certain rules apply to good letter-writing:

- a personalised (individual) letter is proven to be the most effective
- briefly explain your reason for writing (introduction)
- use a respectful tone (no matter how annoyed you are)
- make sure your message is clear and concise (not long-winded or too emotional)
- ask (reasonable) questions to encourage interest and thought or invite a response
- supply correct information to encourage awareness (include references)
- end with a conciliatory note
- don't forget to include your personal details

Writing letters is only one way to influence our representatives in Parliament.

If done well, it can be very effective. Chances are that you will receive a polite, though often non-committal, response. You may not have gained complete agreement and total co-operation, but it means that your letter has not been in vain. The fact that your busy MP has taken the trouble to respond is, in itself, a sign of willingness to acknowledge the issue. He/she is now aware of your views and may take this into account next time when approached or when the issue is raised in Parliament.

Your positive attitude may pave the way for further communication – you have opened a channel. Next step: pay him or her a visit.