



CLIMATE SCIENCE LEGAL DEFENSE FUND



WHAT SCIENTISTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WRITING OPEN LETTERS

Efforts to marginalize or suppress science may inspire you to send an open letter or create a public petition. While the possibility of these activities resulting in legal action against you is small, there are things you can do to avoid putting yourself at risk when you advocate for science.

- Know your institution's rules for communicating to the public and the press, and understand what the implications may be for talking with them. This is especially true for government scientists; the Supreme Court has held that there are not always First Amendment protections for federal employees who speak out against the government. For more information, see [CSLDF's pocket guide to the First Amendment and Freedom of Speech](#).
- If possible, keep communications to your off hours. It's best if you can demonstrate that your letter or petition was created away from work. For more best practices on this topic, see [CSLDF's pocket guide to Safeguarding Online Communications](#).
- Only communicate about your letter or petition from your personal email account (unless the letter or petition is part of your official role).
- Do not list your institution on the letter or petition. But, if you do, follow it with "for identification purposes only."
- If you must include an email address, use your personal one. We strongly advise against listing your phone number or mailing address.
- Do not post the letter or petition, or any references to it, on your institution's website or social media feeds unless it is truly a product of the institution.
- Be cognizant of your online presence. If your letter or petition receives public attention, there is a good chance that critics will scour the web for anything that could be used to contradict your claims or incriminate you.

This guide concerns only U.S. laws, and it does not constitute specific legal advice for dealing with the particular situation of any individual.

If you find yourself the victim of an attack, call the **Climate Science Legal Defense Fund** at (646) 801-0853 or email lawyer@csldf.org to receive a free consultation with an attorney who can discuss the specific laws and options that pertain to your case.