

Local and State Declarations of Independence

Historical Background

The Continental Congress voted to break away from King George III on July 2, 1776. Then it approved the final wording of the Declaration on July 4. But the delegates didn't make that decision on their own. People across the colonies already supported independence. **Towns, counties, and states** sent messages to their **representatives**, urging them to vote for separation. These actions show that ordinary Americans across the colonies played a key role in the push for independence—not only leaders in Philadelphia.

After the Revolutionary War began in 1775, some Americans stayed loyal to the king. Others began to believe the colonies should break away and become independent. Many Americans read *Common Sense*, a pamphlet published by Thomas Paine in January 1776. It swayed more people to believe that Americans didn't need a king and that they should rule themselves.

In May and June 1776, Virginia and Rhode Island declared independence. Other states sent official messages to their delegates in Congress telling them to vote for independence. Some towns and counties also sent official messages to Congress supporting independence. Maryland formally declared independence four days after Congress.

About 100 years before the American Revolution, an English thinker named John Locke shared the idea of **consent of the governed**. This means the government has power only because the people agree to let it rule. The American colonists were putting this idea into practice. They believed that leaders should listen to the people.

Local and state declarations show the people sharing their opinions with their representatives. They also show the people giving their permission for a new government.