

Building public interest for your cause...

The media play an important role in shaping public policy at the local, state, and federal level. Authoring a letter to the editor is a very effective and inexpensive way to increase public awareness about a particular issue.

Letters to the editor of your local newspaper are a great way to build public interest around an issue. Writing about pending legislation can get the attention of elected officials. Letters to the editor are fairly easy to get published if you follow the tips listed below.

Tips for writing your letter

Consider how to send your letter

Many newspapers prefer to have letters to the editor e-mailed to them. If a letter is e-mailed, the staff can simply cut and paste the text rather than retyping your letter. If you do e-mail your letter, it always helps to call first and ask to which e-mail you should send the letter, as some papers have a separate account for letters to the editor. NEVER include attachments in e-mails to the media. Many newspapers have a policy of deleting all mail with attachments. Instead, include your letter in the text of the e-mail. It is also acceptable to fax or snail mail your letter.

Include your contact information

Newspapers follow up with people who submit letters to the editor before printing the letters (to verify the identity of the author). Be sure to include your full name, address, and daytime phone number when submitting your letter.

Keep it brief

Most papers have a policy of only printing letters that are 200-300 words long. Try to focus on one major point in your letter. If you attempt to tackle too many issues in a single letter your main point may be diluted or confused.

Make it local

Local newspapers typically focus on news and letters that will affect their readership. The more you can show that your issue will have a local impact, the more likely it is that the paper will print your letter.



Make it timely

Newspapers are most likely to print a letter that refers to or responds to an issue that has been in the news lately, especially something that has appeared in their paper. If you are not responding to such an issue, try to find a way to relate your letter to a recent news topic in some way to make it appear to be well-timed.

Back it up

Provide brief, logical arguments as to why you are supporting a certain position on an issue. Try to include specific facts and personal anecdotes whenever possible. If you can tell a story about how the issue that you are writing about will affect you or your family, be sure to include that information. The more personal your letter, the more likely it is to impact the reader.

Follow up

It never hurts to call the newspaper and inquire about whether they received your letter and if they are considering publishing the letter. If they say that they are not interested, be sure to ask why and, if possible, make any suggested changes to your letter and re-submit the piece.

Pass it on

Send a copy of your letter to your state representative and senator and to the OEC. It is very helpful for the OEC to keep track of which letters are being written across the state. Also give copies of your letter to friends and family and ask them to use it as a sample from which to write their own letters.



Sample letter to the editor

Your name
Your address
Your city, state, zip
Your daytime phone #

Date

Name of Newspaper
Attn: Opinion Editor
Address of Newspaper
Newspaper city, state, zip

To the Editor:

Ohio has already lost 90% of its original wetlands, yet recent reports say that our state legislators are considering a bill that might cause us to lose what few wetlands we have left. I urge citizens to contact their state legislators and ask for **stronger-**NOT weaker—wetlands protections. Other Midwestern states, such as Wisconsin, have recently passed laws to better protect wetlands. Ohio, however, is going the opposite direction by considering House Bill 231. Please urge your elected officials to **oppose** H.B. 231.

Ohio wetlands are extremely valuable to the citizens of our state. Wetlands act like nature's kidneys, purifying our water and replenishing groundwater. They also help control and prevent flooding and provide recreational opportunities and important habitat for birds, fish, amphibians and other wildlife.

As a mother of two I am very concerned about what kind of environment we are leaving for future Ohio generations. If passed, H.B. 231 would weaken the protection for (list a specific area or two) here in (name of your city or county). If this bill is not halted it will become easier and cheaper than ever for developers to fill, dredge and pave over our havens for birds, amphibians and other wildlife.

Sincerely,

Your name

Resources

Use the following websites to find contact information for your local newspapers. Click on the link to your newspapers website and then look for "Contact Us" or "About Us" or "Staff" (look for Editor or Opinion Editor). Some newspaper websites will list the address, phone number, and e-mail for the newspaper at the bottom of the home page.

Newslink

www.newslink.org/ohnews.html

U.S. Newspaper List (USNPL)

www.usnpl.com/ohnews.html

50States.com

www.50states.com/news/ohio.htm