

Strategic Tactic Guide: Letter to the Editor

Strategic Value: Elected officials and staffers monitor newspapers in their districts to find out what issues are gaining local attention. The letter to the editor (LTE) section is extremely valuable because it is a chance to connect a personal story to an issue being covered in the news, as well to call on your elected official to take an action in the public arena. **LTes are strategic when we need to highlight personal stories, combat an unfair representation of the issue in the news, publicly demand action by an elected official or rally community members to action.**

Not every letter will be printed, but papers are more likely to print a letter on a certain issue if they receive several of them from different readers.

Logistics:

- Before beginning your letter, check your local paper's submission guidelines. Most papers have a 200-250 word limit, so be sure to stay within that.
- Some papers have a dedicated email address for LTes, others have an online form. Some smaller papers might require you to mail in the letter. Find out the best way to submit your letter ahead of time.
- Find an article to respond to. The article should be timely and hit on your issue. While you can submit a more general LTE, letters are more likely to be published if they are relevant to current topics in the paper.
- Once you submit your letter, call the newspaper and confirm that they received it. This will flag your letter for the editors and increase its likelihood for publication.
- Be on the lookout for a call or email from the newspaper confirming your letter. Newspapers like to make sure that you actually wrote the letter before they print it.

How-to: These are the main points to hit in your letter:

1. **Lead-in** (*one sentence*)
 - Reference the relevant article (or general topic if you don't have a specific article) and why you are responding to it.
2. **Story** (*two to five sentences*)
 - Share a personal story that relates to the letter's topic.
 - Describe a situation that you or someone you are close to experienced, and use concrete details.
 - Describe how this experience affected your life.
 - Connect this experience to the broader community. Feel free to use a statistic from our issue one-pagers to help make this point.
3. **Specific Ask** (*one to two sentences*)
 - As opposed to a call or a letter, you have two possible targets for a specific ask: your elected official or the general public (or both).
 - If your elected official has not taken a stand on a particular issue, you can ask them to vote for or against a specific bill, or publicly state their support or opposition. Ask the

community to back you up by calling or writing to the office.

- If your elected official is on the wrong side of an issue, you can ask them to reconsider, as well as asking the community to call and write letters in support of your position.
- If your elected official is on the right side of an issue, you can thank them. Elected officials love public praise.

4. **Closing** (*one sentence*)

- Sum up your argument in one clear sentence.
- Include your name and contact information so that paper can get in touch with you with any questions (they will not print your contact information).

Example LTE:

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to you March 7 article, “Thousands fear losing health care under GOP plan.” I am one of those people.

I am a single mom of two young children. To provide for my family, I run a child care center out of my home. There is never a dull moment with five children running around! Because of Medicaid expansion, last year was the first year of my adult life that I had insurance. It was such a relief to know that if I got sick, I would be able to get the treatment that I needed without going bankrupt. Phasing out Medicaid expansion or switching over to a block grant system would hurt single moms like me.

I am urging Congresswoman Smith to publicly denounce any attack on Medicaid and commit to voting against the GOP’s current health care plan. Until then, I am calling on community members to write or call Congresswoman Smith’s office and tell her why you stand against attacks on Medicaid.

Stand with me.

Thanks,

Kim McMurray

123 Main St.

Springfield, Ill. 97477

773-883-0464

After you write: Organize!

Build on your LTE by organizing folks you know to send in more LTEs. Remember, the more letters submitted about a particular issue, the more likely it is for one of them to be published.

- Activate your Rapid Response team. This is a group of folks who are on call to send in LTEs in response to local news articles. Send out a few articles for folks to respond to with instructions on how to do it. Use this guide!
- Reach out directly to two people affected by this issue and ask them to write a letter. Offer to meet

up for coffee (or stop by their home, cubicle, etc.) and walk them through it.

- Send a copy of your letter to your elected official so they know you are going public with your demand (or praise!).