



Guide for Letters, Op-Eds and Press Statements

Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are used to respond to something that appeared in the paper, like correcting an inaccuracy, pointing out a missing fact, commenting about the slant of a story, or responding to criticism.

When writing a letter to the editor, you should refer to a specific news article or editorial that was printed in the newspaper where you are sending your letter.

There are three things to keep in mind:

1. Keep it short –two to three paragraphs, or 100 words
2. Focus on facts, not criticizing the source
3. Send letter quickly –preferably the same day

The more personalized, briefer, and timely the letter, the better chance you have of getting it printed.

Check with your newspaper on the best way to submit letters to the editor. Usually you can submit letters by e-mail, fax or by mail. Many newspapers' e-mail address for letter submissions is: letters@nameofpaper.com. Again, check with your local paper.

This website is a comprehensive list of newspapers by state:
<http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/usstate/usatable.htm>

Sample Letter to the Editor in Riverside, NJ

Re: “A tough line on immigrants”, July 26-

Lee Llambelis of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund mentioned that the proposal in Riverside is “a national movement with copycat legislation.”

This growing trend in cities across Pennsylvania of “copycat” legislation needs to come to a halt. Some of the proposals have not passed the city council, but the fact that they have even a few



Updated 1/3/06

supporters illustrates how some people undervalue the work and lives of immigrants. Both documented and undocumented immigrants are essential part to the workforce and important community members. It is imperative that the public understands the negative impacts of anti-immigration legislation on our friends, co-workers, and neighbors. “Hard line” actions such as the proposal in Riverside only create rifts between groups of people and do not provide solutions to the existing immigration system.

These harsh proposals are not limited to cities in Pennsylvania; similar ones introduced in other states are also creating great controversy and fractious debate. City council members in Avon Park, FL heroically rejected their city’s anti-immigrant proposal on Monday. We need to continue to reject rigorous and unworkable regulations and start recognizing the contributions of the immigrant community through a comprehensive immigration reform.

Sample Letter to the Editor in Beaufort, SC

To the editor

Your recent article (Illegals imperil academy's funding) is inconsistent reasoning that seeks to unfairly blame immigrants for something that isn’t even happening.

The headline isn’t supported by the story. The story details in several places that the staff at the school fear that the increase in immigrants will peril the placement rate. But with 55% of the students now Hispanic, the placement rate last year was an excellent 96%. Since the staff themselves admit they don’t know who is undocumented, is it possible that many of those that got placed are undocumented?

It is misguided reasoning such as this that fuels proposals such as Beaufort County’s Illegal Immigration Relief Ordinance. A town or village has problems with business licenses or with school funds or with crime, and local politicians want to take the easy way out by pointing to the most defenseless population – recent immigrants.

For hundreds of years, immigrants have come to this country in search of the American dream. They seek the dream of fairness, of welcome and the hope that if they work hard they will get a chance at a good life. More than several studies – by non-partisan governmental groups - have shown that immigrants are a positive economic and social force in the communities they live in. They come from countries that value education, that value families and that value democracy.

I am from out of town. But in four days here, I have found that this is the essence of the people I have met in Beaufort County. They are decent, hard working, welcoming people. It seems like the longtime residents of Beaufort County and the recent immigrants to this area are the kind of neighbors who could easily work together to solve any problem.

John Garcia
Coordinator
Latino Justice Project
PRLDEF



Op-Eds

WHAT: Op-eds (or opeds) officially stand for “opposite the editorial page”. That’s where they are placed. Op-eds are commentaries that provide an opportunity to frame an issue from your point of view.

WHY: Op-eds can: influence how an issue is covered; frame the policy dialog around an issue; influence readers and pressure policymakers; and, help position an organization and thereby increase its visibility and effectiveness. Releasing an op-ed in advance of a news event can offer context for the coverage or reframe an issue.

HOW:

Step # 1

Define your audience and goal

Is the audience policy makers, the general public, or your constituents?

Is the goal: to heighten interest in an event you are staging and set the frame for coverage; to have your voice raised in the policy debate; or, to increase coverage for an issue and offer the correct spin?

Step #2

Identify the media outlet that reaches your audience

Is it the major regional newspaper read by both policymakers and local voters?

Is it a national newspaper (the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*) in order to affect the national debate?

Is it a constituent or ally-focused newspaper (for example, African American, Asian, labor, Latino or progressive press)?

Step # 3

Determine your message

Present your organization’s unique contribution to the policy debate. Op-ed page editors seek fresh ways of looking at issues. Therefore you have to offer a new perspective, an original argument about an issue; or, a topic which has not been covered.

It helps to be creative with your timing. For instance, play up information from a newly released report, or introduce a breaking story. (Many newspapers like their front page stories to become the fodder for op-eds in the days following).

Step #4

Read the other op-eds to become familiar with that newspaper’s style and approach.



Step #5

Identify the best author

While the executive director or your board chair might actually write the op-ed, finding the best “name” to “sign” it is critical to maximizing the op-ed’s impact. The media are most receptive to unexpected voices, very prominent people, or experts. While a prominent national figure is attractive, for local newspapers make sure the op-ed is “localized” by having a local slant on the issue, using local experts, or by using local statistics. The author can be a “real person,” someone who is directly impacted by the policy you’re writing about. For example, an op-ed by a University president about the passage importance of the Dream Act offers a credible voice rarely heard in the pages of major newspapers.

Step #6

Test the Waters

If you have a good, personal relationship with the op-ed editor, you can test whether there is interest in an op-ed by emailing a paragraph describing your approach. Any feedback you get allows you to tailor your op-ed in a way that better assures publication.

Step 7

Write the op-ed

- Most op-eds range from 500 to 750 words, depending on the newspaper. A good website to get specifications for placing op-eds at the top 100 daily papers in the country can be found at www.ccmc.org/oped.htm
- The article should include a suggested headline, a by-line (signers’ names), and a two-sentence identification of the author(s). There should be no more than two authors. It is helpful to include any biographical information, including where they live and any relevant experience. For example, you might write, “Mary Jones is a mother of three who lives in Topeka, Kansas who has worked for ten years as the President ofUniversity.”
- Before drafting the op-ed it might be helpful to imagine your audience. If you had a chance to talk with them directly, how would you present your argument?
- Your opening two sentences should grab people. Your opening could:
 - Be a brief story illustrating how the issue affects an individual or a group of people, putting a human face on your topic.
 - Repeat a statement made by a major policymaker you disagree with.
 - Be a statement about a policy under debate or a stunning fact.
- Keep your sentences and paragraphs short.
- Avoid technical phrases or jargon.
- The article should provoke discussion as well as inform.
- Back up assertions with facts.
- Stay focused.



Step # 8

Submit your op-ed

The major national newspapers (*LA Times*, *NY Times*, *Washington Post*) demand exclusivity (meaning that you haven't submitted the same material to other newspapers); and some local newspapers do too – so check. Many newspapers only require exclusivity within a certain distance of their market area. For these, you can sometimes draft one op-ed for many regional dailies; but, for each you should regionalize the “lead” (the opening paragraph) by focusing on a local statistic or situation and sprinkle additional facts and local stories in the op-ed. Be careful about sending an op-ed that may seem to ‘canned’ for fear of Editors from regions close by picking up on it. There is an editor listserv and editors to share op-eds if they think they got something that was massed produced.

The most effective way to submit an op-ed is to deliver it at an editorial board meeting and ask that they consider it. Find out who to follow-up with because op-ed editors get hundreds daily making it is easy for yours to get “lost in the sauce.”

If you submit an op-ed by mail identify who to send it to by calling and asking for the name (and correct spelling) of the op-ed editor. The best method is to email and op-ed.

Follow-up with a call (even if you delivered the op-ed at the editorial board meeting). On the call with the editor make the case for “diversifying the voices in the policy debate” by running your op-ed. (If necessary state your case through voicemail or email.) Sometimes you may have to push a little to get your op-ed published.

Have a back up. If it doesn't get into the major daily, is there an alternative newspaper, a weekly or even newsletter you can publish it in?

Step # 9

Show Off Your op-ed

Remember to save your published op-ed so that you can send it to founders and policymakers, and place it in your press kit.



Press Statements

A press statement is a brief statement from your organization or a spokesperson commenting on a breaking development. You obviously have no what, when, where and why to include but it should indicate what event or statement you are responding to. The statement should be concise, articulate and ideally have some catchy phrasing that is compelling, short and quotable. Make sure your heading doesn't just say Joan Johns, executive director of Partnership for Successful Families responds to President Bush's tax cuts. Unless the media is waiting with bated breath to hear what Johan Johns has to say that will not catch much attention. A better headline might be "Military families decry exclusion from Bush Administration child tax credit" with a subhead that says *Statement by Partnership for Successful Families Executive Director.*

Sample Press Statement for Carpentersville, IL

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

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For Immediate Release - Statement

October 3, 2006

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Statement of Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Opposing Carpentersville Illegal Alien Immigration Relief Act Ordinance

The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, an organization representing more than 100 member organizations throughout our state, strongly urges the Carpentersville Village Board of Trustees to reject this ill-advised and insulting proposal.

People on all sides of the immigration debate agree that immigration should be a safe, orderly, and legal process for people who want to come to the US to rejoin relatives, find work, and seek better futures. Unfortunately, our immigration system is broken, and the federal government has failed to take leadership in solving the problem. Local communities are left to handle the effects of our broken system.

The proposed ordinance, however, is precisely the wrong approach to our immigration problem. This ordinance is based on hatred. It smears all undocumented immigrants as criminals, nuisances, and burdens to society. It is willfully blind to the hard work that undocumented immigrants perform, and the contributions they make to our community when given the opportunity--\$5.45 billion to the Chicago region's economy each year. Instead of welcoming



Updated 1/3/06

these immigrants and their families as neighbors and members of the community, it raises further barriers and pushes them away.

In addition, this ordinance would be costly and unworkable. It would encourage racial profiling, as employers and landlords would indiscriminately turn away Latinos (who make up 40% of Carpentersville residents) and anyone else who looks “foreign,” including many US citizens and legal immigrants. The only way to avoid such wholesale discrimination would be for the village to devote massive resources to educating employers, landlords, police officers, and village offices on the finer points of immigration law so they will all know who is legal and who is not. But immigration law is complex and always changing. Is the village willing to spend this kind of money and effort to keep up with these laws and run such training and outreach? How would landlords, police, and others be expected to handle mixed-status families, in which an undocumented immigrant lives with a US citizen or legal immigrant spouse or children? And wouldn't the ordinance only encourage the undocumented to get fake documents?

The ordinance would also create a climate of fear and distrust among immigrant and Latino communities. Immigrants would become further isolated, afraid to seek help from the police, the fire department, hospitals, and schools for fear of being questioned about their immigration status and reported to immigration authorities. The English-only provisions of the ordinance would raise another barrier, preventing immigrants from effectively communicating with the police and other village offices. (The ordinance, incidentally, makes no provisions for teaching English.) Immigrants would thus become easy targets for all manner of crime and abuse. All of this would be a major blow to public safety.

This ordinance offers no real solutions to our broken immigration system. It will not stop undocumented immigration. It will only drive people away or underground. We need real solutions, solutions that keep families united, that do not instill fear in the community, that bring hardworking individuals into the law rather than pushing them away, and that are based on hard facts and not suppositions of individuals based on where they come from.

We therefore urge the board to reject this ordinance. Defeating this ordinance will send the right message to everyone in the community: a message that newcomers are welcome, should feel safe in our neighborhoods, and should be able to make the most of their talents and energy to build better futures for themselves, their families, and our entire community.

10/03/06 - Statement of Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights Opposing Carpentersville Illegal Alien Immigration Relief Act Ordinance

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