

Volunteer Letters to the Editor Guide American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network



Letter to the Editor Writing Guide for Volunteers

To further leverage the efforts to reach out directly to your lawmaker's office with your staff partner, it's important to also increase our presence in your local papers through targeted letters to the editor (LTEs). We'll provide you with a few template LTEs to use as guides, but it may be even more impactful if you write your own. Your voice is a powerful one, so if you would like to write your own, we have also included a few letter writing tips and talking points for you to keep in mind when drafting. Before submitting your LTE to your local paper, please share your letter with your staff partner so it can be run through the quick review process. As always, remember to share the good news with ACS CAN staff when your letter runs. We love to see your work in print!

Tips for Drafting LTEs:

- **Watch length:** Consider your word count – newspapers typically hold LTEs to a 150-250 word maximum, so be sure to check with the paper you're submitting the letter to ahead of time to make sure you're within the allowable word count.
- **Be you:** What you bring to the discussion that no one else can is your personal story and how passing legislation like the bills you're asking your lawmaker to support can impact real people. Briefly explain why the legislation you're focusing on in your letter matters to you.
- **Get local:** Remember to localize your letter. Editors are looking to show how bigger issues impact your local area. Consider sharing the number of people in your state that are diagnosed with cancer each year, or other local statistics. Your staff partners may be able to help.
- **Keep it simple:** The person reading your letter once it's published may have never heard of this issue before, so write your letter as if you're explaining it to your neighbor for the first time. Avoid acronyms or "inside ballgame" type of language like bill numbers. (Bill numbers are important for lawmakers but not to the average newspaper reader.)
- **Pick one fact:** Try to stick to one key fact. Because we're so passionate about these issues, we have a lot of information on them. But if you give too many stats and facts, they won't stick with your reader. Pick the one or two you think are the most powerful, and make your case with those.
- **Make the ask:** Always include a call to action. Remember to let readers know what you're asking your lawmaker to support and why.
- **Submit once:** Don't submit the same letter to multiple newspapers in the same market – editors don't like to see something from their paper printed in a competing paper and it may hurt your chances of getting published now and in the future.