

Writing a letter to the editor (LTE) of your local paper

Letters to the editor of your local newspaper educate the public about mandatory sentencing laws, and also influence the lawmakers responsible for reforming them. Even if your letter is not printed, letters to the editor help educate the editorial board of your local newspaper. Follow these simple tips for effective letters to the editor.

Be timely. Respond to an article, editorial or current event promptly. Three days after the initial publication is usually too late.

Be brief. Many newspapers limit letters to 150-200 words.

Type your letter if possible. Few handwritten letters are printed.

Stick to the point. Refer to the news story or editorial you are responding to, but don't repeat its details. Explain the issue but keep it simple. Support your opinion with facts. State the facts and your views in an orderly way.

Maintain an even tone. Always keep your frustration in check when writing a letter. Powerful, intelligent letters have more impact than tirades. If you're angry or upset, stop and reread your letter after you've cooled down.

Get a second opinion. Let someone else review and comment on your letter and proofread it before it is sent. Sometimes we are too closely involved in our writing to be objective.

Give your full name, address and telephone number. An editor from the newspaper may call to confirm that you wrote the letter and ask your permission to do any editing. Usually newspapers do not publish anonymous letters, though in rare cases they may withhold the writer's name upon request.

Don't get discouraged if your letter isn't printed. Editors receive many more letters than they have space to print. Use another angle (for example, the high cost of mandatory sentences) or respond later to another story or editorial.

Need inspiration? Here are a few examples of letters to the editor penned by FAMM staff members:

- [Julie Stewart: Letter to the Editor in Washington Post](#)
- [Barb Dougan: Letter to the Editor in The Boston Globe](#)
- [Greg Newburn: Letter to the Editor in The Florida Times-Union](#)