

ACR Advocacy: How to Write a Letter to the Editor

A published letter to the editor of your hometown paper can be an extremely effective way to grab the attention of your Member of Congress (MoC) and influence him or her to take action on a particular policy issue.

WHY YOUR MOC CARES ABOUT LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- **Your letter will likely be included in your MoC's morning "clips."** Every morning, Representatives, Senators and members of their staff begin their day reading "the clips," an email with links to all of the stories that mention the MoC by name. In most offices, these include Letters to the Editor, and a letter that's about an MoC will definitely be noticed and discussed.
- **Newspaper editors see your letter, and your MoC cares what they think.** Editorial boards are important local institutions for your MoC. They interview and endorse candidates during campaign season, and their opinions carry weight all through the year.
- **Seniors see your letter, and your MoC cares what they think.** Seniors are seen as one of the big audiences for letters to the editor. They also vote in big numbers, something MoCs are also very aware of.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR LETTER

1. Find your local newspaper's Letters to the Editor submission instructions on their website.
2. Be sure to check that you are obeying your newspaper's word limit, sometimes as low as 150-200 words.
3. Write your letter! See below for tips on how to make your letter more compelling.
4. Paste your letter into the body of an email or use the submission form on the newspaper's website. **Do not send the letter as an email attachment**—editors will typically disregard emails that contain attachments.
5. Note that many newspapers require submitting writers to include contact information (such as home address and phone number) with their letter. This personal information won't be published; it is just to verify your identity.
6. Consider submitting to a smaller local paper, not just the nearest big city paper. You'll have a better chance of getting published.

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR LETTER

- Focus on one topic. If you have two, write a second letter.
- Obey the word limit. If your letter gets long, write a second letter.
- Be clear and concise—you only have around 200 words or less to make your point.
- Be yourself. You don't need to talk like an academic or a policy expert.
- Be sure to include the full name of your MoC to ensure your letter is included in their morning clips if published.
- Stuck? The ACR's [Legislative Action Center](#) often includes letters to the editor as part of our advocacy campaigns. Feel free to borrow sample text from there and make it your own. The tool will also automatically send your edited letter to your local papers.

WHAT SHOULD GO INTO A LETTER TO THE EDITOR?

- Focus on a single policy issue – provide a brief overview and talk about why it is important to you as a constituent and healthcare provider.
- Include a “call to action.” This could be to: 1) thank the MoC for his/her support on the issue; 2) urge the MoC to act on the issue; and/or 3) encourage fellow constituents to contact the legislator about the issue.
- Try to include a couple of key points, a statistic and a personal note.

HAPPY LETTER WRITING!