

Writing a Letter to The Editor, 090222

Letters to the editor are an effective way to get your message to a large number of people. The Letters to the Editor page is one the most widely read sections in a newspaper. If many letters on a specific issue are published it can indicate there is broad support or concern for that issue. While an individual should write whenever they have a concern, it is valuable to get friends and relatives to write their personal letter on the same issue. That is why the Senior Caucus provides Alerts to trigger as many letters as possible from our community.

When should you write a letter to the editor? In addition to when you receive an Alert you should write:

- Anytime you have strong feelings about an issue
- When you have a personal story on an issue that you would like to share with others
- As a way of influencing legislators other than your own

How should you write the letter?

- Letters to the editor should be short and to the point - 100-250 words at most.
- Think - What is the message you want people to hear.
- Plan - What is the best way to get readers to be influenced by your message.
- Mention your reason for writing in the first sentence. Be as specific about the issue as you can.
- Limit the content of your letter to one issue and one or two key points in that issue. Keep in mind, you want to make a concise statement on one subject. This should not be an in-depth analysis.
- Stay positive. Do not write an angry letter in response to something you've read. Readers respond better to a more positive approach. Instead of saying that the governor's plan to cut the renter's credit makes you mad, say, "I expect the governor and legislature to realize the disproportionate harm that this action would take on low income Minnesotans least able to absorb a cut in their finances."
- Always present your position as forceful as possible without alienating readers. Always be honest in your opinions and facts. Be creative. Some humor is okay if it doesn't detract from your message.
- Remember that you are advocating for an issue, not preaching to the choir.

To **increase the chances** of getting a letter published:

- Respond quickly to stories in the media. Try to e-mail your letter by the next day at the latest.
- Always include your name, address, e-mail and telephone. Only your name and city will be published. newspapers may want additional information or verify that you sent the letter.
- Make sure your letters are addressed correctly. Call your paper or go online to find the correct contact information.
- Letters signed by one person have the best chance of being accepted for publication.

It's a good idea to practice and have a general letter style ready -- It helps to practice writing a few letters to develop an effective style to use when the need arises. Look at today's newspaper, pick a subject or letter to the editor that you have strong feelings on and start writing and rewriting. If you think it is a winner, send it in.

If you have questions, e-mail them to dflsenors@gmail.com.