



# ADVOCACY TOOLBOX

## Op-Eds & Letters to the Editor

Op-eds and letters-to-the-editor (LTE) can be powerful forms of advocacy with the potential to sway public opinion, bring broad awareness to an issue, refute a published or aired viewpoint you find to be inaccurate, urge action by a member of Congress (MOC) or to publicly praise or express displeasure with an MOC's action (of lack thereof).

### Why the Power of the Press Still Matters

- MOCs read the opinion pieces in newspapers and online publications regularly as a way to keep a finger on the pulse of their district and constituent sentiment.
- It is a free and relatively simple way to address a large portion of the general public.
- You control the message. There is no chance that a reporter will misquote you, miss your point or come up with his or her own slant for the piece.
- It is an excellent way to address and explain a complex issue that may not be getting traction elsewhere.
- If your issue is not getting any press, an article written by you can revive it in the public's eye.
- While getting published in a large newspaper can be difficult, many smaller papers are generally eager to accept an opinion piece by local citizens and businesses.

### Preparing

- **Message.** Choose your message (just one) and then plan carefully and thoroughly what you want to say and how you want to say it. Don't try to cram too much information in; make it readable, understandable, relatable and crystal clear.
- **Target.** Who is it that you are trying to reach? Is it the general public? Then choose the paper with the largest circulation. Is it a specific MOC? Choose his or her hometown paper or a paper that you *know* he or she reads.
- **Research.** Go online or call the paper to learn about how to submit an opinion piece, including:
  - How do they take submissions? By e-mail, fax, hardcopy, etc.?
  - What is the turnaround time? When should you submit your article and how long will it take until it's published?
  - What is the maximum wordcount? Stick to their number!

## Tips for Writing the Article

- **Be short.** Get right to the point. When publications give a word limit, they 100% mean it.
- **Be clear.** Big words and lots of statistics do not and will not impress the reader, you will only lose them. Keep your writing at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, keep your sentences short and don't try to make too many arguments.
- **Be direct.** Get right to the subject and stick to it. Sarcasm, hyperbole and hypothetical questions don't translate well into print and generally confuse readers so don't use them in your article. You don't want readers confused about the point you are trying to make.
- **Be real.** Real life stories are what grasp readers and change opinions because they are engaging and relatable.
- **Be careful.** Choose your words wisely and don't offend anyone or personally attack anyone. Additionally, don't add anything that detracts or distracts readers from your main point.
- **Be honest.** If you have a vested interest in what you are writing about, be up front and direct about it.
- **Be right and prove wrong** (if possible). Sometimes your opponent being wrong is all you need to win. If you can solidly disprove your opposition, do it. If you cannot, **DO NOT BRING IT UP.**
- **Be actionable.** If there is something that the reader can do or some way they can get involved, add actionable items into your article. If you are urging the public to take action, let them know exactly what it is they can do and how to do it.
- **Include your name and information on how you can be reached.** If you are writing on behalf of an organization, include the organization's name and a one sentence description of the organization's mission.
- **Be sure.** Double and triple check your facts. Read and re-read your article checking for grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. Have a friend or colleague read over your article to check it for readability, clarity and errors. Ask if they were engaged by the article.