



## Health Care for All Minnesota How to Write a Letter to the Editor (LTE)

Letters to the editor are written to respond to an article or editorial published in a newspaper. LTEs can be an effective advocacy tool when you follow the guidelines of the publication and the tips below. You can use this avenue to express your thoughts, whether positive or negative, to help shape opinions of policymakers and their staff who might read for insight into constituent concerns, and the opinions of readers in the community.

LTEs are worthwhile because the letters section of a newspaper is a frequently read section; you can reach a relatively large audience if it's a major newspaper; they are often monitored by elected officials; they are printed near editorials by the newspaper's editorial staff; can add information not addressed in the article or opinion piece; can help create an impression of support or opposition.

**Make it timely.** You should submit a letter to the editor no later than 24 hours after a story to which you wish to respond was published, for a daily paper, or within a few days for a weekly or monthly neighborhood or community publication. Earlier submissions are most likely to be read. The smaller the paper's circulation, the easier it is to get published.

**Respond to a specific article.** LTEs are written in response to a news article or commentary piece published in the same newspaper. Reference the name of the article, the name of the author, the date published. Examples for introducing your opinions:

- I was disappointed to read the (date) editorial (insert headline) which omits key facts.....
- I strongly disagree with (author's name) narrow view on trade policy (headline, date).....
- Rep XXX sets a wonderful example in championing earned sick time for all workers in Minneapolis (name of article, date)

### Tips:

- **Keep it short and on one subject.** Keeping your letter brief (approximately 100-200 words) will help assure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper. In the first paragraph, state your main point and why the issue is important to you. Provide facts, quotes, and numbers in the second. Use the last paragraph to restate your point and make your recommendation.
- **Be specific.** The letter should focus on a specific issue that was raised in a recent article or opinion piece in the newspaper. Cite the title and date of the article you're responding to.
- **Be sure to include your contact information.** Many newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify his or her identity and address. Newspapers will usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.
- **Demonstrate your reach** If you know that your opinion also represents that of others, be sure to mention it. However, if you want to submit a letter signed from representatives of more than one group, be aware that most newspapers limit signatures to two or three names.
- **Proofread.** Make sure your letter is organized in a logical manner. Check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Avoid personal attacks or clichéd language.
- **Take heart:** even if your letter isn't published, papers are often influenced by letters they receive but don't acknowledge. *A topic raised in an unpublished letter can often wind up being covered by the paper weeks or even months later.*

## Sample Letter

Dear Editor,

Dr. Ronald Housley's [May 6 letter](#) to the Portland Press Herald, warning that the movement to create a single-payer system is a violation of our "strong, individual rights-protecting nation," is a stretch.

Democrats and Republicans supported the creation of a Veterans Affairs single-payer system of health care for our veterans. Medicare was created as a safety net for our elders. If one adds in Medicaid, nearly 60 percent of our population is already covered by one form or another of government health insurance.

Medicare, in particular, has functioned well with cost controls and low administrative expenses. As traditional health insurance and the cost of medications are priced out of an average person's ability to pay, a single-payer system is the only answer. If a single-payer system is good enough for our veterans, our elders and our poor, it is good enough for the average Jane and Joe.

**Charles Radis, D.O.**

*Peaks Island*

StarTribune: visit <https://www.startribune.com/submit-a-letter-or-commentary/115289839/>

Pioneer Press: email [letters@pioneerpress.com](mailto:letters@pioneerpress.com)

Duluth News Tribune: visit <http://www.duluthnewstribune.com/content/letters-editor-823>

Bemidji Pioneer: visit <http://www.bemidjipioneer.com/user/106/contact>

Other Minnesota newspapers: visit <http://mna.org/newspaper-directory/>

Information from guidelines written by TakeActionMinnesota communications director, and the Minnesota Nurses' Association health care reform organizer.