

Talk Back: Write and Submit a Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor is one of the best ways to respond to articles, editorials, or op-eds published in your local paper. And, you can use these letters to advance Plan A campaign issues. A letter to the editor might amplify an editorial with which you agree, limit the damage caused by an op-ed that is harmful to your cause, or highlight key information left out of an article.

But remember to choose your battles wisely — even though a letter is a more personal message, stick to the facts, keep emotions in check, and never disparage other individuals or organizations.

RESPOND QUICKLY. Timeliness is key. After you identify a story or editorial that needs a response, draft and submit your letter as soon as possible.

READ THE LETTERS SECTION. Read letters to the editor published recently and mirror their format.

FOLLOW THE RULES. Look for guidelines about format, length, and other submission requirements on the paper's website or in the paper near the letters section. If you can't find them, call the newspaper and ask.

BE BRIEF. Keep your letter short and to the point. Focus on making one key point in two or three paragraphs and use just a couple of key facts or statistics, or a very brief story, to support your argument. Aim for about 150 words — never more than 200.

INCLUDE NCJW'S PLAN A CAMPAIGN. You can enhance the credibility of your letter by including information about NCJW and the Plan A campaign, either in the body of the letter or when you identify yourself as the letter writer. If you are writing on behalf of NCJW, clear your letter in advance with the NCJW Washington office or your NCJW section leaders.

EDIT. Proofread carefully to eliminate typos and grammatical errors. And be sure to avoid jargon and acronyms.

GO FURTHER. Distribute copies of the letter-to-the-editor, especially if it is printed, to any interested individuals — potential members, supporters, donors, and coalition partners. Send a copy to your decision-makers, such as local, state, or federal legislators, whether it is printed or not. They will be interested to know that you are contacting the media about this issue.