

How to Write to Your Legislators and the Media

Letter to the Editor / Legislator

When writing to the editors of news outlets or other publications, it's important to keep in mind that you might also want to use these letters when communicating with your legislators. To avoid rewriting multiple letters, the following tips can help ensure your message reaches all audiences effectively:

- Personalize for legislators: When writing to a legislator, consider including their name and position rather than simply saying "letter to the legislator." This personal touch makes your message feel more direct and meaningful.
- Letter to the editor: For news outlets and publications, a general "letter to the editor" format works well in all contexts.

By making small adjustments for the audience, you can maximize the impact of your message without spending extra time drafting multiple versions.

Letters should be about 200 words. If you are under 200 words, you will be able to submit to any newspaper. They should never be longer than 300 words.

Tips while writing:

1. Write what you know. A personal touch makes all the difference. Relating how this topic affects or will affect you, the human person, you the student, you the parent etc., makes a much more compelling letter than 'just the facts'.
2. Avoid profanity. While it can be an effective attention grabber, it generally doesn't land well in public. There are very rare, limited exceptions to this, but in general, keep it clean and professional.
3. Stick to the issues. Sometimes a story about an experience can be a compelling way to engage people with your argument, but these letters are ideally about the positive impact. A story about how this benefits your cousin, an avid snowmobiler who would make great use of these lands, is valuable. A tale about that one trip you guys took four winters ago when you got stuck on the trail probably isn't.

4. Be inclusive and non-partisan. The goal of these letters should be to make a compelling argument that will appeal to the broadest group of people. You want to explain why your argument is right, not which side of the political spectrum it comes from.
5. Edit twice. Then edit again. Even though final versions will probably show a few more edits, writing is a process. Nobody spits out their best work on a first draft and once it's in the paper, it's forever.

Example Letter to the Editor / Letter to your Legislators

First and Last Name (Phone Number) Email Address

Address (Optional)

Title: Care for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness LTE:

The Gallatin community sits in a beautiful valley where residents enjoy their winter activities. However, for Bozeman's growing community of folks experiencing homelessness, their only space away from the cold is our warming shelters. According to Montana Free Press, from 2021 to 2022, we saw a 79% increase in the use of our warming shelters. This significant increase brings forth concerns about the health and wellness of individuals experiencing homelessness in Bozeman. In order to address this health crisis, a group of Montana Representatives has created a plan to create better healthcare opportunities for these individuals around Montana. This plan includes House Bill NO. 507, which allocates funding to help individuals who require short-term medical care, and is currently being heard by the Human Services Committee. In order to continue moving towards equal human rights for all Montanans, we as a community need to stand with those who are seeking to change the face of homelessness in Montana. By funding the creation of shelters and adequate healthcare for individuals experiencing homelessness in Montana, we, as a community, can impact the lives of thousands who seek safe, secure housing and fair healthcare. To support these movements, you can reach out to your legislators about the importance of medical care and shelters for those in your community who face homelessness.