

Don't Get Mad, Get Writing!

Writing "Letters to the Editor" is an effective way to engage in important advocacy work from the comfort of your home—especially for League members who may have trouble getting out to meetings.

Most print publications provide guidance on how to submit a letter to the editor. You will increase your chances of getting a letter published if you reference something that the paper published and submit the letter as soon as possible. Once a letter is printed, the publication will probably not publish another one for a certain period of time.

Here is the guidance provided by some local publications on submitting letters.

The Washington Post: "We prefer letters that are fewer than 200 words and take as their starting point an article or other item appearing in The Post. They may not have been submitted to, posted to or published by any other media. They must include the writer's full name -- anonymous letters and letters written under pseudonyms will not be considered. For verification purposes, they must also include the writer's home address, e-mail address and telephone numbers. Writers should disclose any personal or financial interest in the subject matter of their letters." Letters can be submitted online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/letter-to-the-editor/?utm_term=.14fbe98fa9e1

Falls Church News-Press: "The News-Press welcomes readers to send in submissions in the form of Letters to the Editor & Guest Commentaries. Letters to the Editor should be no more than 350 words and writers are limited to one appearance in the News-Press every four weeks. Guest Commentaries should be no more than 800 words and are writers are limited to one appearance every four months. Because of space constraints, not all submissions will be published. All submissions to the News-Press should be original, unpublished content. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, grammar and accuracy. All submissions should include writer's name, address, phone and e-mail address if available. Anonymous submissions will not be published." Letters can be submitted online at <https://fcnp.com/write-to-the-falls-church-news-press/>.

The Post also publishes "Local Opinion" essays of 500 to 700 words. Here are guidelines and a link to the online submission form. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/local-opinion-essay/?utm_term=.ad2b679b7a37. In January 2016, we succeeded in placing an essay on redistricting reform, under the signatures of the co-presidents of the Virginia and Maryland Leagues, in this section.

As newspapers move online, it is also easier to follow other newspapers and submit letters to papers in other communities. While many papers may give priority to letters from local residents, they may still publish letters from out-of-town readers, particularly when a story is cited.

The League of Women Voters of the United States has created template letters for a number of issues that members can use as starting points for their own letters. However, letters citing personal experience or offering a unique perspective will likely win out over more generic ones.

--Sara Fitzgerald