



Alliance for Gun Responsibility: Letter to the Editor Guide

Despite overwhelming public support, many people still consider gun violence prevention a controversial issue. Highlighting the voices of real Washingtonians goes a long way towards changing hearts and minds and sends a message to our legislators that we are ready for action.

FIRST STEPS

Identify your local outlet and any outlet-specific requirements by calling the paper or doing a web search for letter to the editor requirements. Most publications have a 200 to 400 word limit and require contact information for publication. Be sure to follow all of your paper's guidelines when submitting your letter.

We've included a list of local and regional papers and their specific requirements to get you started at the end of this guide. But this list is not exhaustive, so feel free to contact the local paper of your choice.

WRITING GUIDE

Who you are:

Write from your own perspective. The best LTEs incorporate the unique experience of the writer. Anyone can write a generic letter about gun laws—the best and most printable letters capitalize on what makes the writer unique. Who are you? Where are you from? What is your involvement in your community? How long have you lived there? No matter who you are, you can find a unique viewpoint on this issue. Here are some things to think about. Are you or is anyone you know a:

- Parent or grandparent?
- Gun owner?
- Law enforcement officer?
- Faith leader?
- Student?
- Teacher?
- Lawyer or judge?
- Survivor of gun violence?
- Family member of a survivor?
- NRA member?
- Elected official?
- Health care provider?
- Active Republican or Democrat?
- Hunter?

Draw attention to who you are—it's what makes your letter stand out.



Personal experience:

Why have you personally decided to write this letter? Why does the issue of gun violence prevention matter to you? The best letters offer a unique perspective on a timely topic. Some questions to consider:

- Have you personally experienced the devastating effects of gun violence?
- Are you frustrated with legislative inaction on gun violence prevention?
- Do you believe we should be doing more to keep guns out of dangerous hands and to prevent gun violence in our state?
- Do you work in a field that gives you a unique experience with gun violence?
- Are you a responsible gun owner who believes we need stronger laws to keep guns out of the most dangerous hands?

TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE LTE

1. Follow directions! Papers generally won't print LTEs that don't follow their formatting guidelines. If you have any questions, call the paper and ask.
2. Make it timely—The Washington state legislature will be in session from January 14th, 2019 to March 28th, 2019. Referring to specific bills introduced in the legislature, or calling on your elected officials to take action this session will help make your LTE relevant. Use the Alliance [legislative agenda](#) as a guide.
3. Try to respond to specific articles or topics addressed in your paper of choice. If specific gun responsibility bills are mentioned in a recent article, referencing that in your title or subtitle will increase the likelihood of getting published.
4. Refer to specific bills or issues by name and include a call to action ie: Pass HB 1501 to prevent gun violence!
5. Share your personal expertise and experience; you're the only one who can!



USEFUL INFORMATION ON GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

- In 2017, the most recent year for which data is available, there were 39,773 gun deaths in the US—meaning that nearly [109 people were killed by guns each day](#).
- In Washington, [more people are killed with guns than die in car accidents](#).
- Abused individuals are [five-times more likely to be killed](#) by their abuser if the abuser has access to a firearm.
- Suicides account for [nearly 80 percent](#) of all gun deaths in Washington state.
- In Washington State, an estimated [33,164 firearms were reported stolen](#) between 2012 and 2015 alone (the 10th-highest in the nation).
- When assault weapons or high capacity ammunition magazines are used in mass shootings, [135 percent](#) more people are shot and 57 percent more killed, compared to other mass shootings.
- [Eight children are unintentionally killed](#) or injured by an unsecured firearm in their homes every day.

LTE GUIDELINES BY OUTLET

- **Seattle Times:** <https://www.seattletimes.com/help/#how-to-submit-a-letter-to-the-editor>
- **The Olympian:** <https://www.theolympian.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/submit-letter/>
- **The Columbian:** <http://www.columbian.com/lettertotheeditor/>
- **The Bellingham Herald:**
<https://www.bellinghamherald.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article215652790.html>
- **The Herald:** <https://www.heraldnet.com/contact/>
- **The Spokesman Review:** <http://www.spokesman.com/letters/submit/>
- **The News Tribune:**
<https://www.thenewstribune.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/submit-letter/>
- **The Walla Walla Union-Bulletin:**
https://www.union-bulletin.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/
- **The Yakima Herald:** https://www.yakimaherald.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/
- **The Tri-City Herald:**
<https://www.tri-cityherald.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/#navlink=SecList#navlink=kicker>



SAMPLE LETTERS

In Support of Initiative 1639:

Dear “[Editor]”,

An average of 109 people are killed by guns every day in the United States. In Washington state, someone is killed by a gun every 14 hours.

I believe there is more we can and must do to help put an end to the crisis of gun violence. That is one of the reasons I voted yes on Initiative 1639 this past November. Nearly 60 percent of Washington voters joined me in supporting the comprehensive measure, which takes reasonable steps to help keep guns out of dangerous hands.

Despite such widespread support for the measure, law enforcement officials from around the state have come out recently to voice their personal opposition to the law and claim they will not enforce it. Just one example came from Yakima County Prosecuting Attorney Joe Brusich, who went as far as to [say](#), “We enforce the laws, and if a law is created and we don’t want to enforce it, we don’t have to enforce it.” That makes no sense.

We are a state, and a country, founded on the rule of law. No one--not a sheriff, prosecutor, or regular Washingtonian--gets to pick and choose what laws they follow. I am writing to urge our law enforcement officials to put aside their personal disagreements and uphold their duty to protect the people of our state.

Thank you.

[Name and contact information]



General:

Dear “[Editor]”,

I am a veteran, a gun owner, and a lifelong Washingtonian and I am writing to call on our elected officials to pass responsible gun laws this legislative session.

I grew up in a gun-owning household. The responsibilities that come along with gun ownership were instilled in me from a young age. Those same high standards of safety and training that I learned growing up followed me to the military, where the handling and storage of firearms is taken extremely seriously.

I have seen the devastating power of guns firsthand. That is why I am asking our elected officials to pass responsible gun laws to help protect our communities from gun violence.

In the most recent midterm elections, Washington voters were able to do what our elected representatives could not: pass commonsense, responsible gun laws that will save lives in our state. Nearly 60 percent of Washingtonians from all across the state voted in favor of Initiative 1639, the most comprehensive gun violence prevention measure proposed in our state and the third gun safety ballot initiative to be passed here in just four years.

That should be more than enough evidence to our lawmakers on both sides of the aisle that Washingtonians are demanding action to keep our communities safe from gun violence. Our state has been a leader on this issue, passing life-saving measures to close the background check loophole and establish Extreme Risk Protection Orders, but there is more work to be done.

Our lawmakers should build on our state’s recent progress by limiting access to deadly high-capacity magazines, keeping crime guns from returning to our streets, and ensuring our protection order and surrender laws are working.

Thank you.

[Name and contact information]



Specific Bill:

Dear “[Editor]”,

As a child care provider, my number one responsibility is keeping the children left in my care safe. I take every precaution I can: I cover outlets and lock cabinets, I block the stairwell and document each child’s allergies. But there is one threat I can’t protect against: gun violence.

Right now, we live in a world where every place can be the target of a shooting: a church, a movie theater, a shopping mall, a school. And it is not just mass shootings that threaten the safety of our children. [Eight children are unintentionally killed](#) or injured by an unsecured firearm every day.

No one law will prevent all gun violence. But we know that stronger gun laws can reduce it. Currently, we take steps to try to protect our children from gun violence by making schools gun-free zones. But we don’t take that same precaution at other spaces for children, like childcare and early learning facilities, parks, and libraries.

I am writing to ask our state legislature to pass [BILL NAME] to extend gun-free zones to childcare and early learning facilities. Making sure that all of our children—of all ages and in all places—have the same protections is a crucial step in keeping our communities safe from gun violence.

Thank you.

[Name and contact information]