



NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

Tips to Get Your Letters to the Editor Ready Today!

Letters to the Editor — also known as LTEs — are an important way for our community to communicate and reinforce positive messages around the California Supreme Court’s decision on marriage.

The LTE section is a popular part of the newspaper. If we let the opposition dominate this section, it could appear that their opinion is the prevailing point-of-view. **Therefore, we need as many people as possible to submit supportive letters to their local newspapers.**

To maximize the likelihood that your letter gets printed, follow these guidelines:

Timing is Everything

It’s important to have your letter ready to send the day of the decision. If you wait to start writing your letter until after the opposition has had their letters published, you are too late.

Therefore, we suggest writing two letters today, while you’re thinking about it: one you can send if we win, and one to send in case of a loss. Then all you’ll have to do is add an opening line that refers to the title and date of the article or editorial you’re responding to.

Short Is Sweet

LTE editors will always choose a short, pithy letter over a lengthy, rambling treatise. So make your letter short, punchy, and to the point. Focus on keeping your letter to 100-150 words, and use the “Word Count” function on your word-processing program to check the length. For example, this paragraph is already 55 words long.

Short Sentences, Short Paragraphs

If you write like a journalist — short sentences and short paragraphs — editors will be more likely to choose your letter. Pick up any newspaper and you’ll notice that most paragraphs are about two sentences long — sometimes only one sentence. Long, wordy sentences send one clear message to the reader’s brain: “Don’t read this, it’s way too long!”

Make It Personal

Personal stories beat out statistics 9 times out of 10. That’s why Americans rush to movie theatres — and not to college statistics courses. Our inclination is to use statistics to support our argument because we assume readers will make decisions based on facts. That is not the case. People form opinions based on emotions and values. And the best way to communicate values and emotions is by telling a (short!) personal story.

Repeat Key Messages

Use every opportunity — meaning every sentence — to communicate your most important message. Ultimately, the LTE editor has final say over which of your sentences stay and which of them go. Don’t risk the chance that your key message will be left on the editing room floor.

Don't Repeat Your Opponent's Message

Use your letter to respond with your key messages rather than to react to the messages of the opposition. If you repeat the language of the opposition, you are giving their voice one more opportunity to be heard. A letter that begins, "The court's decision on marriage is not about special rights," will reinforce the idea that the court decision is *exactly* about special rights. You wouldn't give the opposition money to run a commercial against us; don't give them a voice in your letter, either.

Include Your Full Name, City and Phone Number

Your letter should always include your complete name, phone number, and the city you live in. Your phone number will not be published, but many newspapers will call to verify that you actually wrote the letter.

Send By E-mail, If Possible

Although newspapers usually accept letters by fax and snail mail, many editors prefer email. Why? Because it means the difference between an editor spending five to ten seconds to cut and paste your letter, compared with five to ten minutes to retype it. Email also arrives faster than snail mail. When sending by email, paste your letter into the body of an email. Never send attachments.

Examples

Jessica and Robert have already written their letters to the editor. Their letters can give you some ideas to get you started.

Dear Editor:

Thanks for your coverage of the California Supreme Court decision allowing lesbian and gay couples to marry ["Court grants freedom to marry to gay couples," May 22, 2008].

I can't describe how happy I am. After 7 years as a couple, I can finally marry the man that I love. California's promise of fairness and opportunity now applies to me and my partner!

Robert Pérez
Santa Barbara, CA
805.555.1212

Dear Editor:

I was incredibly moved by your story on the California Supreme Court's decision on marriage ("Title," Date) — particularly because my boyfriend and I have been discussing our future together a lot lately. In fact, just last week, our parents met for the first time.

My family keeps asking if we've decided to get married, which can be stressful. But at least we *get* to decide. I can't imagine how it would feel to be told by the government that we aren't even allowed to consider the option. And yet that's exactly what gay and lesbian couples have faced for years.

[I'm proud that California has finally become a state that gives every person the opportunity to marry the person they love.] **OR** [Despite the court's decision, I believe that I will live to see the day when California will fulfill its promise to treat every person fairly and equally.]

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