

GUIDELINES FOR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

This is the most widely read section of the newspaper. Use it!!!

To increase the chances of your letter getting published follow these rules:

- If possible, write about something that recently ran in the publication. No matter how well-written, if the letter does not pertain to an earlier letter, story or editorial item, it may be rejected.
- Shoot for 200 words or less. Stop at 225. Longer letters will not be published or will be severely edited.
- Use short sentences and short paragraphs (two to three short sentences).
- Include your name, home address, and phone numbers. Editors will contact you to verify that you sent the letter.
- Stick to the issue. Personal attacks do more harm than good.
- Letters should be connected to a recent story, if possible. Exceptions exist, but are not common.
- Try sending the letter to different papers but be sure to reformat it, because papers will not publish the same materials.
- Many newspapers have links on their web pages to submit letters to the editor directly. So if you have access to a computer, you may go to your local paper and submit electronically.

You may want to write a letter to the editor in the event the reporter does not contact you or other appropriate persons as a source for a story related to community-based treatment for persons with serious mental illnesses. Keep the letter short and accentuate the positive. You may also write a letter to the editor if you believe a story did not reflect the key points you wanted to make or to clarify your position.

Know the Classic Form for a Letter to the Editor:

1. The first paragraph refers to the article and states the reaction to it.
2. The second paragraph expounds on the article and why you agree or disagree. (Here you can inject anecdotes, quotes, statistics, and any other backup that supports the point.)
3. The third paragraph is for wrap-up and to restate the major point.

NOTE: Most newspapers provide guidelines for their letters to the editor. Many publish them, or provide an e-mail or telephone contact. Use them!!!