Talk Back: Write and Submit a Letter-to-the-Editor

Today, abortion rights are under attack. Congress and state legislatures across the US are redoubling their efforts to prevent women from accessing safe and legal abortion services.

As an NCJW advocate for women’s reproductive rights, you are in a powerful position to influence your community — and the decision-makers who represent it. The following message ideas are designed to help you craft a relevant and timely letter to the editor to be submitted to your area newspaper.

Talking Points:
Drawing on these ideas, write a brief letter-to-the-Editor sharing your thoughts on why preserving women’s rights is so critical! On the back of this page find tips for placing a letter-to-the-Editor.

1. Connect your message to current events. Reminding readers that you are writing because reproductive rights are under attack today will make your message timely.

2. Express your concerns about the current threats to reproductive choices and the rights affirmed by Roe v. Wade.
   - **HR 3, the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act**, would limit women’s access to safe abortion care by reducing the availability of abortion-inclusive health insurance coverage. Without insurance coverage, many women struggle to access safe, legal abortion. Those who succeed in finding funds for safe care often do so at great personal cost, foregoing other basic necessities like food, or paying rent or other bills. Those who lack funds often turn to dangerous alternatives.
   - **HR 217, the Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act**, would limit women’s access to comprehensive reproductive health services, including family planning, by slashing funding for Title X federal family planning providers who offer abortion. Title X providers who offer abortion are barred from using Title X dollars to do so, but this bill would cut off their ability to offer family planning and preventive services. And, because Title X providers offer low- and no-cost care, this bill discriminates against low-income women and those in underserved communities. HR 217 would defund Planned Parenthood, which provides critical health care services like cancer screening and STI testing and treatment, and is often the only accessible health care for women and men.
   - **HR 358, the “Protect Life” Act**, would deny women access to abortion-inclusive insurance plans in the new health care system and threaten women’s health by making permanent and expanding current policies that allow health workers the “right to refuse” to provide and refer for abortion care and even permit hospitals to deny emergency abortion care to women in life-threatening situations.

3. Share your thoughts on reproductive choices as a person of faith. As an NCJW activist, you have a unique message. Remind decision-makers in your community that people of faith care about abortion rights, and that the ability to make reproductive choices based on one’s personal religious beliefs is a matter of religious liberty.

4. Include an action step. Add urgency to your letter with a call to action encouraging readers to speak out in opposition to HR 3, HR 217, and/or HR 358, bills that would erode access to the full range of reproductive choices.
Writing and Submitting a Letter-to-the-Editor

Writing a letter-to-the-Editor is one of the best ways to respond to articles, editorials, or op-eds published in your local paper. And, you can use these letters to protect women’s access to reproductive choices. A letter-to-the-Editor might amplify an editorial with which you agree, limit the damage caused by an op-ed that is harmful to your cause, or highlight key information left out of an article.

But remember to choose your battles wisely — even though a letter is a more personal message, stick to the facts, keep emotions in check, and never disparage other individuals or organizations. These tips are intended to help you effectively write and place a letter-to-the-Editor.

- **Respond quickly.** Timeliness is key. After you identify a story or editorial that needs a response, draft and submit your letter as soon as possible.

- **Read the letters section.** Read letters-to-the-Editor published recently and mirror their format.

- **Follow the rules.** Look for guidelines about format, length, and other submission requirements on the paper’s website or in the paper near the letters section. If you can’t find them, call the newspaper and ask.

- **Be brief.** Keep your letter short and to the point. Focus on making one key point in two or three paragraphs and use just a couple of key facts or statistics, or a very brief story, to support your argument. Aim for about 150 words — never more than 200.

- **Include NCJW’s Voices for Reproductive Choices campaign.** You can enhance the credibility of your letter by including information about NCJW, either in the body of the letter or when you identify yourself as the letter writer. If you are writing on behalf of NCJW, clear your letter in advance with the NCJW Washington office or your NCJW section leaders.

- **Edit.** Proofread carefully to eliminate typos and grammatical errors. And be sure to avoid jargon and acronyms.

- **Go further.** Distribute copies of the letter-to-the-Editor, especially if it is printed, to any interested individuals — potential members, supporters, donors, and coalition partners. Send a copy to your legislators, whether it is printed or not. They will be interested to know that you are contacting the media about this issue.

- **Share your submission with NCJW!** Send a copy of your letter, indicating whether and when it was printed, to the NCJW Washington Office (action@ncjw.org).