



## MHAction Letter to the Editor Writing Exercise

**Training Piece Time:** 20 Minutes

**Number of Facilitators Required:** 2 (1 Facilitator, 1 Butcher Paper Recorder Person)

**Materials Required:** Butcher Paper and Markers, Printed Out Sample Letters to the Editor, Letter to the Editor Submission Information (Local Papers, Blog Postings, etc.)

### Directions:

1) Review the Purpose of the Training Exercise. (1 Minute)

- Intro: Letters the Editor, commonly referred to as LTEs, are usually submitted to newspapers and news magazines. Sometimes they can be published in other periodicals or read on-the-air by radio and television stations.
- LTEs can also provide us a forum to share our personal story in relation to those important topics. Our personal story, or narrative, can go a long ways in helping to shape public opinion around any given topic.
- Note: Might be helpful to have these points pre-written out on butcher paper.

2) Review Tips of Writing Effective Letters to the Editor (3 Minutes)

- Pose Question to Audience. Has anyone here successfully submitted a Letter to the Editor? What was it about? How did you feel when you saw it published? Did any of your friends, family or colleagues comment on what you wrote?
- Brainstorm Questions to Audience: What would be some thoughts that folks have about what makes up an effective letter to the editor?
- After Brainstorm, List Out Helpful Tips and Tricks to Writing Effective Letters to the Editor (some of this may be review of what the audience mentioned. Note: Might be helpful to have these, only key words, written out on butcher paper.)

#### Do's:

- a) Make it Timely: Respond directly to breaking news or other commentary. Indicate to readers how they can be affected by the issue.
- b) Focal Point: Center on one overall point/argument that you are making. Typical limit on words is 150 or 250.
- c) Share your personal story or experience in regards to your main point/topic.
- d) Point readers to a source to gain more knowledge or participate in an actionable item (for example, contact your elected official, join our movement by going to [www.mhaction.org](http://www.mhaction.org), etc.)
- e) If your letter isn't published (especially for local newspapers), follow up with a phone call to inquire whether or not it was received or considered.
- f) If emailing your letter, make sure the email subject line clearly indicated the main topic

#### Don'ts

- a) Don't overstate/exaggerate your points.
- b) Stay away from personal attacks/personal insults.
- c) Avoid jargon or acronyms.
- d) Never use all capital letters or bold text to emphasize a word. It most likely won't be printed that way and may prevent your letter from being considered.

3) Letter to Editor Exercise Begins (15 Minutes)

- Asks People to split up into teams of 5.
- Pass out pads, pens and sample letters to the editor.
- Explain exercise, "Let's all take the next ten minutes and write out a sample letter to the editor. Your letter can focus on any one of the following: (facilitator should come up with three examples in advance that are timely and relevant to the issues you are discussing, and encourage participants to include their personal stories and how this issue will impact themselves and their families)
- After we take 15 minutes to do so, we'll ask a couple of people to share their draft letters.

a) The Ask/Closing (2 Minutes)

- Ask audience: Can we get a show of hands on how many will work to submit Letters to the Editor over the course of this next week?
- Review Submission information for the local area: (facilitator should look this up in advance)