

# Write a Letter to the Editor

1. Pick which of the key arguments for repeal you want to write about.
2. Fill out the outline below to write your letter to the editor.
3. Email the outline to Helen at [hgriffiths@aclu-co.org](mailto:hgriffiths@aclu-co.org). She will reach out to you about submitting the letter.

## State the problem

For example, if the issue you want to write about is innocence: “It is time to end the broken death penalty in Colorado because of the intolerable risk of executing an innocent person.”

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## Why are you personally concerned?

What makes you care about this issue? What makes it personal? For example, if your issue is cost, “I am a Colorado taxpayer. To me, it is deeply concerning that the death penalty costs our state over \$1.5 million a year when there hasn’t been an execution since 1997.”

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## Describe the problem in a way that makes it more real for the reader.

Use facts and stories. For example, if your issue is race, “We want a fair criminal legal system. Yet, a person of color in Colorado is six times more likely to face the death penalty.”

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## Why does this matter now?

Try to tie the end of the death penalty to a current event. For example, if your issue is lethal injection, “The federal government just announced it will resume executions, ending a moratorium that was put in place due to drug shortages. This is yet another example of the government performing executions using untested, increasingly unavailable drugs.”

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## State the solution.

This is your call to action – you want your representative to end the death penalty. For example, if your issue is deterrence, “My senator must end the broken death penalty in 2020. The millions spent seeking death sentences that will likely never lead to executions should be redirected to proven solutions that deter crime and keep society safe.”

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**Write your full name, title (if relevant), address, phone number, and e-mail address.**

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- **Keep it short** – Most papers have a 150 to 250 word limit and readers are more likely to focus on short, to-the-point letters than long wordy ones.
- **Make it local** – Editors are more likely to print a letter if it has local significance. Send letters to weekly community newspapers. The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the easier it is to get your letter printed.
- **Pick One Issue** – You likely have many reasons for supporting the end of the death penalty, but you only have 250 words to tell your side of the story. Pick just one reason.
- **Name names** – If you are trying to influence a decision maker be sure to include their name in your letter. This will make it more likely that they will read your letter. For example, if you are Senator Joann Ginal's constituent, end your letter by asking her to vote to end the death penalty.
- **Make it real** – Whenever possible, give facts or tell a story rather than using general rhetoric. This will make your case come to life for readers.
- **Sign the letter** – Be sure to write your full name (and title, if relevant) and to include your address, phone number, and e-mail address. Newspapers won't print anonymous letters, though in some cases they may withhold your name on request. They may also call you to confirm that you wrote the letter before they publish it.
- **Send the letter to your legislator** – If your letter is printed, make sure to email a copy of the letter printed online or send a copy of the letter printed in the newspaper to your legislator so they see that you care about this issue and took the time to write in.

**Find your legislator here:** <http://leg.colorado.gov/findmylegislator>