



Letters to Editor

Guidelines

In writing a letter to the editor, you have a unique opportunity to discuss issues or frame the debate on an issue in your own words. For every comment a news outlet receives, they assume there are hundreds, if not thousands of readers, who feel the same way. A few quality letters can carry real weight and make a critical difference. Readers of newspaper editorials and opinion pieces tend to be decision makers sensitive to public opinion. Presenting information and ideas to them in a coherent written form helps reach important and influential audiences.

- Go to your local newspaper's web site (see below for some contact info for several Illinois papers) or call for information on how and where to submit a letter to the editor. Most letters can be emailed.
- Be sure to include your name, email and phone number with the letter to allow the editorial staff to contact you if they have questions.
- Do not exceed your newspaper's word count. Most letters to the editor are about 200 words, but can vary. Edit the provided template as necessary.

Without exceeding the word count, **try to personalize the attached sample letter with a particular comment based upon your area of expertise or personal experience.** Make sure that any additions to the provided template are specific, concise, and to the point.

Sample Letter For SB 1007

As the Illinois legislative session comes to a close and our policymakers negotiate a budget in this final stretch, let's hope our legislators use these additional weeks to pass an important bill that will help save lives. SB 1007 would ban large capacity ammunition magazines which feed ammunition automatically into the chamber of a firearm. In some cases, large capacity magazines can hold up to 100 rounds of ammunition.

Earlier this spring, Seung-Hui Cho, a college student, shot and killed 32 people, and himself, using semi-automatic handguns in Blacksburg. SB 1007 will ban large capacity ammunition magazines that enable the user to fire many times without reloading, as Cho did in Virginia.

The vast majority of voters are supportive of reasonable gun regulations, including NRA members, FOID card holders and hunters. Polling demonstrates that nearly in 9 in 10 voters say that a candidate's position on these issues is important to them in how they vote on Election Day. The small, vocal minority represented by the gun lobby does not speak for the voters.

Our legislators should not go home without voting for this bill which will make our streets and communities safer.

Sample Letter For Support on Policies

Intro Paragraph

As a concerned member of my community, I see the devastating results of gun violence that could have been prevented by common sense laws. (Make specific to your position/perspective, e.g., I have seen what bullets do to a body, family and community, my friend/neighbor is a victim of gun violence, etc.)

Our representatives must do their part in ending this surge of gun violence and support...

(insert line or two about a pending bill – e.g. legislation that will require background checks for all private transfer of handguns, so that they would be subject to the same requirements whether they buy from a licensed gun shop, at a gun show, or from a private seller.)

This is one of several common sense violence prevention policies pending in the state legislature. Its time our representatives took action before more lives, families and communities are shattered.

Version 1 - Highlight 1 specific bill

Our representatives must do their part in ending this surge of gun violence and support...

HB758 (Osterman) - This bill would require background checks on private handgun transfers. Closing the "private sale loophole" for handgun sales would mean that all handgun buyers are treated equally and help ensure that persons buying handguns are legally eligible to do so, and it would also help law enforcement track the owners of weapons used in crimes.

HB 1696 (Molaro) – This bill would require FOID card holders to report the loss or theft of their firearms to law enforcement. Stolen firearms are often used in crimes and are a major source of firearms recovered in illegal gun trafficking investigations.

SB1007 (Kotowski) – This bill would prohibit the manufacture, sale, purchase, and possession of any large capacity ammunition feeding device, like the one purportedly used in the Virginia Tech shootings.

SB940 (Kotowski) – This bill would require all public and private hospitals and mental health institutions to provide mental health records to the Department of State Police. Furthermore, this bill would require the state to report the information of any person prohibited from having a FOID card to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System.

Version 2 - Highlight numerous policies

Gun owners need to take responsibility. To help stop illegal gun trafficking, law enforcement officials need to know if a firearm has been lost or stolen. Background checks for all private handgun transactions should be required. These are policies that will make our communities safer.

Version 2 - Alternate paragraph

We need safeguards that will: ensure that everyone who sells and buys handguns are cleared by law enforcement, ban lethal large capacity ammunition magazines, and help law enforcement track lost and stolen firearms to prevent illegal gun trafficking.

Closing Paragraph

Our representatives must do their part in ending this surge of gun violence and support the common sense violence prevention policies pending in the state legislature before more lives, families and communities are shattered.

Sample letter to editor referencing the 2007 Voter Survey on Gun Regulations (to review the poll, click www.icpgv.org/icpgv_polling.html):

As a __ (job title) __, I see the devastating results of gun violence in my community that could have been prevented by common sense laws. (Make specific to your position/perspective, e.g., as a trauma surgeon, I have seen what bullets do to a body, family and community, as a religious leader, I have counseled families who have lost their loved ones, etc.)

A statewide poll was released last week by the Illinois Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence that shows overwhelming support for common sense gun laws, even among gun owners and NRA members.

ADD 1-2 points about the laws:

- Law enforcement should know when gun dealers transfer firearms and when a firearm has been lost or stolen.
- The average citizen does not need a large capacity ammunition magazine capable of holding more than 10 rounds of ammunition.
- All handgun buyers should have to pass a background check to help law enforcement track the owners of weapons used in crimes.
- All hospitals and mental health facilities should submit mental health records to law enforcement for screening and the state should also submit all relevant mental health records to the FBI National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS).

Closing Paragraph

Our legislators must do their part in ending gun violence and support the common sense gun violence prevention policies pending in the state legislature before more lives, families and communities are shattered.

Illinois Newspapers

Chicago Area:

Chicago Tribune
www.chicagotribune.com
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To find the local Chicago Suburban News source for your community, go to:
www.chicagosuburbannews.com

Daily Herald
www.dailyherald.com
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Please limit letters to 300 words. Letters must be signed and include the writer's town, and day and evening phone numbers. No letters will be published anonymously. Letters are subject to editing.

The Beacon News
www.suburbanchicagonews.com/beaconnews/
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Southern Illinois:

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Letters policy: All letters to the editor must include the author's name, address and telephone number for verification. Those without telephone numbers will not be used. Letters must be no longer than 250 words. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity. We will not publish anything that we consider libelous or that does not meet our requirements, and we do not guarantee when, where, or even if letters will appear in The Southern Illinoian or its accompanying Web site(s), signed or otherwise.

For an extensive list of Illinois newspapers, go to www.icpgv.org/newspapers.html