



ICPGV Toolkit

Tactics, Tips, and Tools

Overview

Letters to Editor

- Guidelines
- Sample letter
- Contact info for major papers

Contact Your State Legislators

- Guidelines
- Sample letter/email
- Sample phone script

Overview

Please take action to help support the policy goals of Illinois Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and to reduce gun violence in the state. Here are a few easy ways that you can voice your support:

- 1) Write a letter to the editor
- 2) Write or call your state representative or senator and urge them to vote for common sense gun policies
- 3) Join our email list to be part of a “rapid response” network at www.icpgv.org/getinvolved.html

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 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 in Response to Anniversary of Northern Illinois University Shooting

This February 14th, instead of giving and receiving valentines, candy, and flowers, students and families across Illinois will spend the day remembering the lives of the five college students who were shot and killed when Steven Kazmierczak opened fire in Cole Hall at Northern Illinois University.

Just as the victims of the NIU massacre showed enormous courage on that terrible day, our state policymakers should show the same courage and do their part to prevent more gun violence and deaths. No one law will prevent every single tragedy involving a gun, but that is no excuse to throw our hands up in the air and do nothing.

It is way too easy to get a gun in Illinois. That's why we need background checks for all private handgun sales. 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. Our lawmakers should join the majority of Illinois voters and support closing this loophole.

Sample Letter for Requiring Universal Background Checks (HB 48)

Every year, thousands of guns are sold by unlicensed sellers without background checks on the purchasers. This "private sale loophole" results in guns getting into the hands of criminals who would otherwise not be able to buy firearms. Nationwide, 40 percent of gun transactions occur through unlicensed sellers and no-questions-asked private deals that require no background checks. Roughly 20 percent of gun

trafficking investigations involve transfers by unlicensed sellers who are not required to conduct a background check.

Requiring background checks for all private handgun sales will reduce this illegal trafficking and allow for reporting and record-keeping similar to the required reporting of gun shops. 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.

Eight in 10 Illinois voters strongly support requiring private background checks before the sale of guns to private individuals. Sixty percent of all voters who are gun owners, NRA members, hunters, and FOID card holders also support this common sense requirement.

Illinois Newspapers

Chicago Area:

Chicago Tribune
www.chicagotribune.com
Email: ctc-TribLetter@Tribune.com
Fax: 312-222-2598
Mail: Voice of the People, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611.

Chicago Sun Times
www.suntimes.com
Email: letters@suntimes.com

Chicago Defender
www.chicagodefender.com
Email: editorial@chicagodefender.com

Chicago Suburbs:

To find the local Sun-Times news source for your community, go to:
www.suntimes.com

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

Daily Herald
www.dailyherald.com
Email: fencepost@dailyherald.com
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/
Email: BeaconViewpoint@scn1.com

The Herald News
www.suburbanchicagonews.com/heraldnews/
Email: HeraldNews@scn1.com

The Daily Southtown

www.dailysouthtown.com

Email: Ed Koziarski, Director of Editorial and Commentary,
ekoziarski@dailysouthtown.com

Call: 708-633-6788

Email: John Hector, Director of Editorial and Commentary,
jhector@dailysouthtown.com

Call: 708-633-5944

Springfield:

The State Journal Register

www.sj-r.com

For letters to the Editor, use form: www.sj-r.com/forms/letters.asp

Northern Illinois:

Rockford Register Star

www.rrstar.com

Email: opinions@rrstar.com

Call: 815-987-1359

Fax: 815-987-1365

The Rock Island Argus/The Dispatch/The Leader

qconline.com

Email: letters@qconline.com

Call: 309-757-4990

Southern Illinois:

The Southern Illinoisan

www.thesouthern.com/

Email: letters@TheSouthern.com

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 Illinoisan or its accompanying Web site(s), signed or otherwise.

For an extensive list of Illinois newspapers, go to

www.icpgv.org/newspapers.html

Contacting your State Representative or State Senator

How to find your State Legislators

To find out what district you're in, who your elected officials are and how you can contact them, go to:

<http://www.elections.il.gov/DistrictLocator/SelectSearchType.aspx>

Write or call the Springfield Office (State Capitol) between now and June 2009.

Guidelines

Writing a letter or calling your representatives is an important way to tell them how the voters feel about certain issues. Constituent views are often factored into votes.

- Keep your comments brief. Try to limit your letter to one page and one issue, your call to one minute.
- Identify yourself and the issue. In the beginning of your letter or call, say who you are and what issue you are concerned about. If you are referring to a specific bill, identify it by number (e.g., HB 48). Reference your home address in your call or letter so the representative knows you are from their district.
- Focus on your key points. Choose the three strongest points that support your position and state them clearly and succinctly.

Know your facts. Inaccurate or misleading information will hurt your credibility. *A sampling of facts on gun violence in Illinois to reference can be found at www.icpgv.org/icpgv_facts.html*

- Make it personal. Tell your representative why the issue matters to you and how it affects you and your community. Make a connection to the representative – mention if you voted for him/her or if you contributed to his/her campaign.
- Tell your representative how you want him/her to vote and ask for a response. Be sure to include your name and address on both your letter and envelope

A Note About E-mail

In general, the same guidelines apply to e-mail as to written letters or calls. E-mail communications draw mixed reactions from public officials. Many representatives delete broadcast e-mails that clog their mailboxes. Others may not check their incoming messages themselves. Before sending an e-mail, call and ask the staff in your elected official's office whether they use e-mail and whether a letter sent via e-mail would be effective and appreciated.

- E-mail your representative only. Do not copy other representatives or send a mass e-mail.
- Send a brief message, with no special layouts or graphics. Do not include attachments.
- Include your full name and address so it is clear that you are a constituent, and ask for a response. You might want to follow up with a hard copy of your e-mail.

- Follow the same guidelines in writing an e-mail message that you would for a hand-written or typed letter.

Sample Letter to State Legislators

(Month) (Day), 2009

The Honorable (First) (Last)
(Room Number), State Capitol
Springfield, IL 62706

RE: Gun Violence Prevention Policies

Dear (Representative/Senator) (Last),

As a constituent and (job title) with (employer/organization) in (city), Illinois, I am writing to express my fear of the levels of gun violence throughout Illinois and nationwide and to urge you to support several important common sense bills designed to prevent gun violence and death.

It is not safe to go shopping, get in your car, or attend a civic meeting as long these guns are on the streets. (Add a personal anecdote about the recent gun violence or how gun violence has affected you, your family, friends, or community.)

It is too easy for criminals to buy guns on the streets from straw purchasers or from rogue gun dealers. It frightens me to know that Illinois has the second highest concentration of crime gun dealers in the U.S. From 1999 to 2005 guns killed 8,018 Illinois residents. In cities across the country, homicides and aggravated assault with a firearm both increased by 10 percent from 2004 to 2006.

There may be no moral explanation for the senseless, brutal shootings in Illinois this past year - in Chicago, at Northern Illinois University, in Tinley Park, and elsewhere - but that doesn't mean we are powerless to prevent gun violence.

We need to ensure that everyone who buys a handgun is cleared by law enforcement, even if the gun is exchanged through a private transfer. Nationwide, 40 percent of gun transactions occur through unlicensed sellers and no-questions-asked private deals that require no background checks. This loophole allows criminals with felony or domestic violence convictions and persons with mental illness to purchase firearms without a background check. By law Illinois requires thorough background checks for firearm purchases at gun stores and at gun shows. Why shouldn't private purchasers be held to that same standard?

I hope that you will not underestimate the gravity of the issue at hand. We now have the opportunity to help prevent thousands more from being wounded or killed by guns in Illinois in years to come. Please support common sense gun polices.

Sincerely,

(First) (Last)

(Title)

Sample Phone Script For Calls to Legislators about Universal Background Checks

Hello, my name is (First, Last) and I am a constituent of Senator/Representative (Last).

I am calling today to express my concern about gun violence in Illinois and to urge Senator/Representative (Last) to support a proposed new law which can prevent further gun violence and death.

This is a common sense measure that I believe will reduce criminal's ability to purchase firearms on our streets.

End call with key messaging points:

- **Nationwide, 40% of gun transactions occur through unlicensed sellers and no-questions-asked private deals that require no background checks.**
- **Roughly 20% of gun trafficking investigations involve transfers by unlicensed sellers who are not required to conduct a background check.**
- **Eight in 10 Illinois voters strongly support requiring private background checks before the sale of guns to private individuals. 60% of all voters who are gun owners, NRA members, hunters, and FOID card holders also support this common sense requirement.**
- **Our lawmakers should join the majority of Illinois voters and support closing this loophole.**

(Thank the staff person and leave your name, title and phone number.)