

LTE & OP-ED TOOLKIT



WHY WRITE AN OPINION PIECE?

There are a variety of ways to influence legislation or local policy. You can connect directly to discuss a topic, such as meeting with your legislator or community leader, making a phone call, or sending an email.

Another way to educate and engage leaders and the public is by submitting a letter or op-ed to your local paper or other media outlet.

Your voice is important. As a concerned, local resident, your thoughts and opinions carry weight with decision-makers, community leaders, and professionals.

Sharing your thoughts in a public forum (beyond just social media!) gives elected officials direct proof that people in their community care about a particular issue and want to see it addressed.

Just like calling or visiting your legislator is the most efficient and effective way to impact policy, writing an opinion piece for submission is an impactful way to share a concern with a large audience. Legislators and local leaders watch their local newspapers for important issues and messages.

GETTING STARTED

Consider the issue, local policy, or legislation you're concerned about or advocating for. Think about the statement you'd make to sway another individual and the facts you would use to back up your point.

Next, think about what you want the reader to do: cast their vote for a specific position? Contact their legislators to share their concerns about the issue? What will your reader need to be able to complete this action? Provide the necessary information.

Oftentimes an outline can help you gather your thoughts cohesively. Bulleted lists can also be useful. Once you have the key information, it's much easier to fill in the rest!



WRITING TIPS

- DO create a concise argument. State your opinion, share your expertise or reason for caring about the issue, provide supporting points, and close with a call to action.
- DO keep your language simple and action-oriented – this will help keep your argument clear and help with length.
- DO make it as timely as possible. Find a way to connect your submission to something happening now or that happened recently.
- DO be ready to back up your statements with facts if the media outlet requests them.

- DON'T submit your piece to multiple outlets in the same area at the same time. Stagger submissions by a day or two.
- DON'T submit your piece with typos or factual errors. Triple-check and have a friend take a look as well.

IS IT AN OP-ED OR LTE?

Think about the number of words you'll need to make your argument and call to action. Also think about your why – are you responding to an article or letter recently published? Or are you writing about a new topic?

OP-ED OR GUEST COLUMN

- Longer – 400–600 words max depending on the publication.
- Can be written by yourself or with co-authors, such as a professional in the field you're writing about, a colleague, or another interested party.
- Typically scheduled in advance with the opinion editor sometimes several weeks or a month or two in advance – but you can also submit and follow up to discuss a publication date.
- Must provide name, contact information, and links to back up any claims or facts included in the piece. Sometimes a one to two sentence bio and a headshot may be required.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- Shorter – 200–300 words max depending on the publication.
- Typically timelier, written in direct response to an article, editorial, or other item recently printed in a publication.
- Must provide your name, where you live, and a contact email or phone.
- Usually published more quickly.

NEED ASSISTANCE WITH YOUR LTE OR OP-ED? WE'RE HERE TO HELP! CONTACT:

Angelisa Belden, IEC Communications Director, belden@iaenvironment.org

Sarah Howe, IEC Communications and Advocacy Associate, howe@iaenvironment.org

Alicia Vasto, IEC Water Program Director, vasto@iaenvironment.org



LTE TEMPLATES

The following examples of LTEs are based on actual, published letters. They are provided below to give you ideas and templates for your own LTE on Iowa Water Watch-related topics.

When developing an LTE on recreational water quality in Iowa, consider including a call to action such as asking to:

- Pass laws that protect water quality and support recreation opportunities
- Increase funding for conservation and recreation
- Talk to lawmakers about the importance of protecting water quality

EXAMPLE I: TOURISM AND LOCAL ECONOMIES FOCUS

This year, a group of friends and I visited Clear Lake for a relaxing weekend. On the first day, we rented a lily pad to float on the water. However, as we carried the lily pad down the dock, I grew concerned with the color and consistency of the water. Green, streaky goop stretched out from the shoreline.

Thanks to Weekly Water Watch from the Iowa Environmental Council, I knew McIntosh Woods Beach across the lake had an *E. coli* advisory, but there was no advisory for microcystin, a toxin released by a harmful algae bloom. Was the water safe? Or did we risk rashes and flu-like symptoms if we got in?

I found myself very anxious and wanting to call someone for answers. But there is no one to call. The Iowa DNR beach monitoring program can't test all the water in Iowa. Counties and local communities can't afford to test regularly, if at all. It is hard to determine if algae is toxic just by sight. Sometimes it's obvious to avoid, like thick turquoise or green paint. But sometimes it's hard to see at all, let alone know if the algae in the water is indeed toxic.

My friends and I had fun in Clear Lake and enjoyed our time together. We invested a significant amount of money in the local economy – renting a lovely cabin and the lily pad, buying groceries and meals, and visiting local shops. But if the water in Clear Lake, or any other lake or river, is green, people may stay away or choose a different place to visit altogether. Our state leaders must recognize the importance of water quality to our local economies and enact rules that will protect our natural assets and clean water.

EXAMPLE 2: FAMILY SAFETY AND FUNDING SOLUTIONS FOCUS

This summer, I've had the opportunity to take my family to explore our state's water resources, which I so enjoyed doing when I was a child. Now, however, I've never been more concerned about keeping my family safe in those waters.

We all know of the challenges our state faces in cleaning up our water. As I look over the headlines, I'm dismayed at how far we have yet to go. Beach closures, fish kills, manure spills, algae blooms, and on and on.

I'm a paddler, angler, and swimmer, and I'm afraid of our waters. To safely plan a weekend on the water in Iowa, we're forced to research which places won't make us sick. I know we have the tools, technology, research, and methods to make our waters swimmable and fishable. We just can't convince the right people to do so.

Everyone can help and be part of the solution though. Here are two simple actions you can take: 1) Join the Iowa Environmental Council and learn how our collective voices can make a difference, and 2) Talk to your legislators about fully funding water quality programs, like the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund (unfunded since its constitutional formation in 2010).

We simply must do better, for the sake of my family and yours.

EXAMPLE 3: AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY FOCUS

Last week, I made the trek to Brushy Creek Lake. I had never been to Brushy Creek and was delighted to find a beautiful recreation area with horse trails, trap shooting sites, a campground, and what looked like a nice wide beach that I couldn't wait to enjoy.

As I walked onto the beach though, I was dismayed to see signs of a harmful algae bloom (HAB). The water was streaked with a bright green that looked thick like pea soup. I knew I couldn't get in the water but I was shocked to see a family splashing away: several children, including a young baby, with their mother sitting on the sand.

I approached them and pointed out the green muck along the shore and the green streaks in the water. I explained the risks of illness and urged them to wash themselves off as much as they could and bathe fully when they got home. They told me they didn't see any warning or closure signs, so they assumed the water was safe.

I couldn't believe that they didn't look at the water and think it could be dangerous. But it's apparent that many people believe that if the water was unsafe, the beach managers or staff would shut it down. That is simply not the case. If you're planning a visit to an Iowa lake this summer, it's important to stay informed and learn the signs of HABs. It's also important to urge our elected officials to do more to protect water quality and prevent future HABs – we shouldn't have our weekend plans ruined by contaminated beaches because our state leaders have failed to address pollution in our public waters. We all deserve access to clean, safe water.

SUBMISSION RESOURCES

Below is information, links to details, and submission forms for major Iowa newspapers. When submitting your LTE or op-ed, be sure to include your full name, address, and phone number. Looking for information for your local paper? Send us an email at iecmail@iaenvironment.org and we'll be happy to help you track it down.

THE DES MOINES REGISTER - DESMOINESREGISTER.COM

Submit a Guest Column via email: abetteriowa@dmreg.com

- Recommended submissions of 300-500 words

Submit a Letter to the Editor via email, online submission form, or mail.

- Email: letters@dmreg.com
- Submission Form: static.desmoinesregister.com/submit-a-letter
- Mailing Address:
Letters to the Editor
The Des Moines Register
400 Locust Street, Suite 500
Des Moines, IA 50309
- Recommended submissions of 200 words or less

THE GAZETTE - THEGAZETTE.COM

Submit an LTE or Guest Column via email, online submission form, or mail.

- Email: editorial@thegazette.com
- Submission Form: thegazette.com/submit-a-letter-or-commentary/
- Mailing Address:
Letters
The Gazette
116 3rd St SE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401
- Letter to the Editor: up to 250 words
- Guest Column: 400-600 words

QUAD CITY TIMES - QCTIMES.COM

Submit an LTE via email or online submission form.

- Email: opinion@qctimes.com
- Submission Form: [qctimes.com/forms/contact/letter to the editor/](http://qctimes.com/forms/contact/letter_to_the_editor/)
- Up to 250 words

WATERLOO-CEDAR FALLS COURIER - WFCOURIER.COM

Submit an LTE: [wfcourier.com/forms/contact/letter to the editor/](http://wfcourier.com/forms/contact/letter_to_the_editor/)

- Up to 200 words



SUBMISSION RESOURCES (CONT.)

SIoux CITY JOURNAL - SIOUXCITYJOURNAL.COM

Submit an LTE:

siouxcityjournal.com/forms/contact/letter_to_the_editor/

- Up to 250 words

DUBUQUE TELEGRAPH HERALD - TELEGRAPHHERALD.COM

Submit an LTE:

telegraphherald.com/site/forms/online_services/letter/

- Up to 250 words

DAILY NONPAREIL (COUNCIL BLUFFS) - NONPAREILONLINE.COM

Submit an LTE:

nonpareilonline.com/site/forms/online_services/letter/

- Up to 400 words

Email: editorial@nonpareilonline.com

IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN - PRESS-CITIZEN.COM

Email LTEs and Guest Columns: opinion@press-citizen.com

- Recommended LTE submissions of 200 words or less
- Guest columns are limited to 650 words

Information: static.press-citizen.com/submit-letter

CLEAR LAKE MIRROR REPORTER - CLREPORTER.COM

Letter to the Editor

- Information: clreporter.com/content/letter-editor-policy-0
- Up to 300 words
- Mailing Address:

Clear Lake Mirror Reporter
12 N. 4th St.
Clear Lake, IA 50428

iaenvironment.org/iww

GLOBE GAZETTE (MASON CITY) - GLOBEGAZETTE.COM

Submit an LTE:

globegazette.com/forms/contact/letter_to_the_editor/

- Up to 300 words

THE DAILY IOWAN (UNIVERSITY OF IOWA) - DAILYIOWAN.COM

Email LTEs to Executive Editor Sabine Martin -
sabine-martin@uiowa.edu

- Information: dailyiowan.com/editorial-policy/
- Up to 300 words

Guest Columns that exceed 300 words must be arranged with the editor.

LITTLE VILLAGE (IOWA CITY AND DES MOINES) - LITTLEVILLAGEMAG.COM

Email LTEs and Guest Columns:

editor@littlevillagemag.com

- Information:
littlevillagemag.com/freelancing/

Iowa Water Watch is a project of the



**Iowa
Environmental
Council**