

Write a Letter to the Editor for the Vote Out Poverty Campaign

The “Letters to the Editor” section of a newspaper is the second-most read part of the paper after the front page. Publishing a letter to the editor not only informs your neighbors about what you think—it also informs politicians, who keep track of the letters being written in their local papers. In short, writing a letter to the editor is a fantastic way to lift your prophetic voice for the people in poverty locally and globally, as well as to lift up your work with the Vote Out Poverty campaign.

Start by crafting what you want your main message to be. Newspapers look for clear, concise, and passionate opinions. Combine your personal stories with tangible facts on how you have seen a particular issue affect the community. Identify who you are, why you are writing, what the issue is, how it affects the community, and what others can do about it.

Find out what your local media outlets are saying about domestic and global poverty, particularly on current political issues that impact the vulnerable in our society. A quick and easy way to find lists of media outlets in your city is to go to congress.org and type in your zip code under “Browse Media Guide.”

After you have identified which outlets you are interested in contacting, go to their Web sites and find out what they have been writing about these issues. How have the issues been covered recently? Responding to a particular news article often increases the chances that a letter to the editor will be published.

Helpful Hints

- The letter should not exceed 200 words.
- The letter should include your name, telephone number, and street address (the information will not be published, but they require it for verification purposes).
- The letter should be concise, thoughtful, and address a topic that is timely.
- The letter should not reiterate the article or issue that you are responding to, but rather challenge, support, or offer an alternative view/solution.
- Make sure the information in the letter is accurate.
- Make sure the letter contains your own thoughts. In other words, **do not cut and paste writing from something else and send it as your own!** Editors pick up on this quickly and these letters are discarded.
- Write the letter in the e-mail itself; do not send as an attachment, and try to avoid sending them by fax or ground mail.
- Be aware that newspapers reserve the right to edit letters.

Sample Letter

Dear Editor,

In just two weeks, voters will make choices that will affect the future of Ohio and the nation. The current financial crisis is a key concern in this election, with the past weeks of economic turmoil causing more and more people to feel squeezed. Lines at [local ministry] soup kitchen are getting longer and families are struggling to find money to pay next month’s rent.

People of faith across our city are attentive to the stories of these struggling families and are committing to do something about it, through direct-service ministries as well as working to increase political will among Ohio’s congressional candidates to reduce poverty nationally and globally.

This fall, [#] churches in Columbus—including [# of individuals] of faithful activists—held Poverty Sunday events. At these gatherings, church members encouraged fellow believers to vote, educate themselves on the issues, and make personal commitments on the issue of poverty. Pastors and teams of laypeople are now sharing their commitment to “vote through the lens of the poor” with state and national congressional candidates. Candidates for political office are being asked by thousands of Ohioans of faith to commit to cutting the number of Americans living in poverty by half in 10 years, and to provide leadership to reduce global poverty through achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Nationwide, one in six children live in poverty. Globally, 30,000 children die from preventable causes each day. There is something we can do about it. We must engage in personal service, community transformation, and political and structural advocacy. This can begin through individual voter and congressional candidate commitments to Vote Out Poverty.

Thank you,

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VOP Talking Points

- The recent article, titled [“ ”], calls Ohioans’ attention to the [important local poverty issue]. People of faith from around [city] are concerned about these issues and are uniting to call for justice for the most vulnerable in our community, and to heighten the political will to respond to these issues among local and national congressional candidates.
- We believe the current economic crisis intensifies the need for our elected officials to focus on how our national policies impact our friends and neighbors who live on the margins of our economy and who are most likely to slip into poverty during an economic recession.
- Between [dates], [#] churches from around [city], with a combined total membership of [#], participated in a Poverty Sunday event, in which church members encouraged fellow believers to vote, educate themselves on the issues, and make personal commitments on the issue of poverty. Pastors and teams shared these commitments with congressional candidates and ask them to do the same.
- Participants are asking their congressional candidates to commit to cutting the number of Americans living in poverty by half and to provide leadership to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

- While most elected officials say they want to reduce poverty, few have provided leadership on the issue. Why? Most Americans are disengaged from the lives of the poor *and* the political process, so poverty reduction is pushed to the end of the priority list. To reduce the number of children who go to bed hungry each night, we must engage in personal service, community transformation, and political and structural advocacy.