

## Writing Effective Letters to the Editor

By working together, we can get our message out to the public. One way to achieve this is by writing and submitting letters to the editor of your local newspaper. Below you will find some suggestions and a sample letter.

### Letter Writing Tips

- **Be Specific**  
First define the problem in a brief paragraph, then define the solution in the second paragraph. In the third paragraph, tell people what they can do to bring about the solution.
- **Be Brief**  
Most newspapers have editorial rules regarding the length of letters to the editor, as well as requirements for listing your name -- and possibly your address -- for verification purposes. Make sure you find out what the rules are and follow them, or your letter won't be printed. Many newspapers accept letters by way of e-mail or a web-form. You should still follow up with a call after submitting by e-mail.
- **Follow Up**  
Call the newspaper and confirm that your letter was received. After your letter is published, clip and save it (or print it from the paper's web site); it may come in handy later.
- **Send [ICAN](#) A Copy**  
Unless our members mail us a copy of their letters to the editor (or email us a link) on the issues that concern them, there is no way for us to track them -- or the responses they generate. One way for us to know the word is getting out is for you to let us know about your activity! It is helpful for us to have any letters that you send whether they are published or not. If they are published, please tell us so that we can continue to help build state wide momentum. Photocopies of (or links to) both your printed letter and printed responses to your letter are very helpful.

### Sample Letter To The Editor

1. *Include your name, address, and date your letter....*

Ms. Jane Q. Public  
1 Main Street Anywhere, IA 55555

January 1, 1998

2. *Address the letter properly....*

Letters to the Editor  
Opinion Page

Your Local Newspaper  
Your Town, IA Local-Zip

(or find the online form or email address at your paper's web site – most can be found through the following site:

<http://www.inanews.com/about/findaniowanewspaper.php> )

3. *An appropriate opening....*

To the Editor:

4. *Define the problem....*

Antiquated Iowa state law requires people to register 10 days before an election. Just when a race gets interesting, it's too late. Over half of eligible voters did not come out to vote on Election Day 2006 in Iowa. It's time for Iowa to take away the barriers and allow citizens to register to vote on Election Day.

5. *Define the solution....*

Election Day Registration (EDR), also known as "same-day voter registration," permits eligible citizens to register and vote on Election Day. EDR significantly increases the opportunity for all citizens to cast a vote and participate in our democracy. Making voter registration easy and convenient is an effective way to increase civic participation. In fact, voter turnout in the seven states that allow Election Day Registration (including our neighbors Minnesota and Wisconsin) is consistently 10% higher or more than in states that don't permit it. Allowing registration on Election Day brings people into the electoral process that are often excluded, like students, renters, low-income people, and those who have recently moved.

6. *Get people involved....*

Opponents of EDR, who oppose taking down barriers to participation, will argue that this legislation would lead to voter fraud. DO NOT be fooled – this is a red herring! There is solid documentation that there is no increase in voter fraud in the several states that already allow Election Day Registration. In order to prevent just such accusations Iowa's EDR legislation has very stringent requirements to prevent fraud as well as strict penalties were fraud to be proven. The people who are opposed to this legislation don't want increased civic participation and they are honing in on the fraud argument as an excuse for their opposition. You can help make EDR the law in Iowa by contacting your legislators and telling them that EDR will not lead to an increase in voting fraud. This bill will be taken up on the floor of the House and Senate in the coming weeks and our elected officials need to know that the people of Iowa want this change. We want to make the

most fundamental right we have in our democracy – voting – accessible to anyone who is eligible to participate.

7. *Sign your name....*

Sincerely,

Jane Public

**Other ideas that work:**

- **Personal stories:** Briefly share a personal story to make your point. For example: Have you or someone you know voted in a state that allows EDR? Had difficulties voting in Iowa? Worked to mobilize Iowa voters?
- **Charged or emotional comments:** “It’s heartbreaking for civic engagement workers to have to turn other-wise eligible voters away when the arbitrary voter registration deadline is reached – and tell them that they have been effectively disenfranchised by our electoral law.”
- **Shocking facts:** “EDR would actually make things easier for poll workers and county auditors by eliminating much of the need for provisional balloting. In the 2004 Presidential Election, there were 15,454 provisional ballots cast. Of those, 13,980 voters were either not registered at all, or their registration had to be verified after the election through the DOT. EDR would have eliminated 90.4% of the provisional ballots cast at the 2004 election.” Or “Under current Iowa law, election fraud is a class D felony, punishable with 5 years in prison and a \$7500 fine. This is a strong deterrent to using EDR as a means to commit fraud.”

**For more information** on Election Day Registration, visit ICAN on the web at [www.iowacan.org](http://www.iowacan.org) or see the website of Demos: <http://www.demos.org/page18.cfm>.