

SPEAKING UP:

Write a letter to the editor

Writing a letter to the editor is another way to send candidates a powerful, public message about the importance of protecting the Great Lakes and clean water.

Here are six simple steps for writing your letter and getting it published:

Choose what to write in your letter to the editor (LTE). LTEs should be able to stand on their own and make sense to readers who may not already be familiar with water issues. LTEs that respond to recent articles are most likely to be published, so consider monitoring your local news outlets for the right opportunities, such as articles related to water pollution, invasive species, algal blooms, drinking water, neighborhood flooding, or other Great Lakes and water infrastructure issues. The best LTEs allow you to use your personal experience to offer a new perspective on the newspaper's existing coverage.

Write your LTE. LTEs should be focused and direct. Trying to cover several topics and making too many points reduces a letter's impact, so try to keep to one subject, if possible. Explain the problem that you see, and how you think the next person elected to the office you're writing about can help.

Keep it brief. Newspapers and online outlets have different word count requirements for LTEs, but, in general, it is best to keep them as short and succinct as possible (usually no more than 250 words).

List your info. Always include your credentials and contact information, as most publications will require written verification that you have authored the piece. For example, if you're writing about plastic pollution and you were an Adopt-a-Beach Team Leader, make sure to include that. Similarly, if you're writing about sewage and stormwater infrastructure, and your neighborhood suffers from flooding and basement backups, include that as part of your credentials.

Submit your LTE. Each outlet has different LTE submission guidelines, so be sure to check the outlet's website for specific guidance. Usually, you will need to send an email to an address specifically assigned to letters to the editor at the particular publication, or to the letters/opinion editor directly. When you send in your letter, include a note in the email about why your LTE is timely, interesting, and relevant, connecting it to any recent coverage about the Great Lakes, if possible. Include the text of your letter in your email, not as an attachment.

Follow up after you submit. Most newspapers have areas online where you can post comments to articles. If your LTE does not get placed within 24 hours, give the letters/opinion editor a call and/or consider going online and adding your letter as a comment to a story.

