

# ACTION TOOLS: Media Outreach

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An important component of lobbying is getting the media tuned into your issues. Gaining media attention helps get your message out to more people and sends an even stronger message to your legislators. Below you will find several tips and samples for how to use the media to your advantage.

Letters to the editor provide citizens the opportunity to comment on articles or editorials appearing in their local papers. Local leaders and politicians read the letters to the editor section to judge community opinion on an issue. Use the following tips and sample letter when drafting your letter.

- Address your letter to the “Letters Editors” and “Dear Editor.”
- Write clearly, concisely, and proofread your work. Limit your letter to 200 words or less.
- Comply with the paper’s formatting rules. If you do not follow the paper’s guidelines, your letter may be disqualified.
- Cite statistics to support your argument, but do not let your message become lost in the numbers.
- Include your name and contact information. Most papers verify this information before printing and will not print anonymous letters.
- Read the letters page daily to ensure your letter is not redundant with other letters.
- If your letter is not published, keep trying. Editors choose stories based on reader interest and if they perceive a strong interest in a topic, they are more likely to run stories on it.

## SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

August 29, 2004

Letters to the Editor  
The Washington Post  
1150 15th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Editor:

The front page article on Sunday, August 27, 2000, entitled “Murder in the Making,” told the compelling story of Janice Lancaster’s life and death at the hands of her husband. Unfortunately, Janice’s experience is not unique - a recent study by the National Institute of Justice and the Center for Disease Prevention and Control found that approximately 1.5 million women are raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the United States. Because more than half of women raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner are victimized multiple times, approximately 4.8 million intimate partner rapes and physical assaults are perpetrated against U.S. women each year.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), landmark bipartisan legislation passed in 1994 and renewed in 2000, is set to expire in September. VAWA has funded police, prosecution and social service efforts to protect domestic violence victims and their children. It has helped judges and law enforcement officials recognize and prevent domestic violence. It has encouraged the arrest of violent abusers and has given prosecutors the tools they need to put batterers behind bars. If Congress does not renew funding for VAWA by the end of this year, we will be turning back the clocks and turning our backs on victims of domestic violence.

Congress only has a few weeks left in which to pass VAWA reauthorization. Sponsorship is not enough. Only passage of VAWA reauthorization can save the lives of women like Janice. On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of families victimized by domestic violence and sexual assault every year in this country, we call on Congress to pass VAWA reauthorization as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Sandy Murphy  
Victim Advocate  
Madeira House of Hope

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## PRESS RELEASE

The purpose of a press release is to present a summarized version of a story for the media. Any time you have news to report, such as a bill being passed through Congress, you can send out a press release to give reporters an idea for a possible story along with background information.

Follow the tips below when writing a press release:

- Write a concise summary of the story you want covered. Write in journalistic style; use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Try to write objectively and be sure that your facts are completely accurate.
- Include direct quotes from legislators and advocates in your press release.
- When using abbreviations, make sure to indicate what they stand for. Assume that your audience is not familiar with your issue.
- Format: Type on 8-1/2 x 11 letterhead.
- Include a brief heading describing the story, the release date, your contact information, and a blurb on your organization.
- Identify the end of the press release with “###” (a symbol used by the press to indicate the end of a document).
- Be brief – keep it to one page or less.

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



November 7, 2001

Contact: Jill Morris

(202) 745-1211

### Campbell Stamps Out Domestic Violence

**Washington** - An amendment to the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act, 2002, will create a direct avenue for the public to financially contribute to the more than 2000 domestic violence shelters in the United States.

U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell offered an amendment to Treasury Postal Service & General Government Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2590) titled the “Stamp out Domestic Violence Act of 2001.” It calls for the creation of a postal stamp to raise awareness about domestic violence. The proposed domestic violence stamp, similar to the breast cancer stamp, will cost slightly more than the value of the stamp. The amendment was added during conferencing of the bill. The Senate voted 83-15 in favor of the final conference report and the House voted 339-85. The bill is now headed to President Bush’s desk for his signature.

“Domestic violence continues to curse far too many families in America,” said Campbell. “While it is often easier to ignore the pain family members inflict upon each other, all Americans can make an investment in the safety of those who most need assistance by purchasing this new stamp. I can’t think of an easier way to assist more than 2,000 domestic violence shelters, nationwide.”

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence endorsed Campbell’s proposal for this stamp. NCADV Public Policy Director Jill Morris explained that, “Domestic violence shelters in America are constantly struggling for funding. This stamp can provide assistance towards the financial stability of these essential shelters and services.”

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