

LETTER TO THE EDITOR – A BASIC TOOLKIT

Opposing ‘Arizona Type’ Immigration Laws and ‘English Only’ Laws

Adapted from a toolkit prepared by Friends Committee on National Legislation

Additional Information from Media Advocacy 101 by Alison Johnson, Advocates for Human Rights, Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, American Immigrant Law Association, and other organizations.

Influence the debate and your legislators. Writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper helps editors decide which topics to cover in future news stories or editorials. In addition, elected officials carefully monitor this section to gauge local opinion.

Basic Tips - Write when your topic is ‘in the news.’

- Shorter = more likely to be published
- Papers rarely edit your letter- therefore, it must be well-written or it will not be published.
- The paper may shorten your letter- state your most important point in the first paragraph
- 100 to 200 words or less, focus on a single issue
- Basic outline:
 - Paragraph 1 – your main point, why the issue is important to you, your personal investment in the issue
 - Paragraph 2 – facts, quotes, numbers
 - Paragraph 3 – restate your point and declare your recommendation

Get Congress to notice your letter –

- **Mention your senators or representative by name** (congressional offices use clipping services that find all letters that mention the legislator by name)
- **State the specific legislative action you would like them to take,**

Submit letters to your local paper for the best chance of publication – (Don’t forget suburban or neighborhood papers, specialized magazines, ethnic press, religious publications, and college alumni magazines.)

Talking Points - Letters-to-the-Editor Opposing a “Minnesota Arizona” Bill (introduced in the last session as HF 3830) - use one or two of these talking points.

As a member of a faith community committed to welcoming the stranger, I am dismayed and saddened by the failure to find a way forward to craft an immigration system that respects the fundamental rights and dignity of all.

Immigration law is a federal responsibility. I urge congress to enact Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

These laws create a climate of fear for those whose area of residence, line of work, complexion, spoken language or accent is deemed suspicious, even if they are citizens, legal foreign residents, tourists, etc.

Such bills endanger public safety by undermining “community policing.” These bills weaken police-community trust, particularly communities of color as well as in all immigrant communities (documented and undocumented). Some might be afraid to report crimes or serve as witnesses.

Violent perpetrators are emboldened to threaten and act with impunity if they think a victim of domestic or sexual abuse will not call the police out of fear of detention and deportation.

Talking Points - Letters-to-the-Editor Opposing 'English Only' type legislation

It serves everyone's interests that non-English speaking visitors to and residents of our communities be able to interact with local government and that the local government foster that interaction. This is essential for the public safety of everyone.

Such ordinances and laws do not help any immigrant learn the English language. No one should be marginalized or denied services because they do not speak English, are in the process of learning English, or are having difficulty learning English.

Limited-English-proficient adults want to learn English, often work hard to do so, but sometimes the opportunities and classes are not available or there are long waiting lists (one to three years for adult ESL classes in most cities). Immigrants are learning English, just like our grandparents did (fact sheet from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service). These laws make limited-English-proficient adults feel unwelcomed.

55% - 69% of immigrants who live in the United States already speak "good" to "excellent" English. Immigrants are learning English, just like our grandparents did (fact sheet from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service).

Sample Letter to the Editor (adapted from letter at the United Church of Christ website, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/LteUser?lte.user=lte_write_letter<e_id=1)

As a member of a faith community, I am dismayed and saddened by the failure to find a way forward to craft an immigration system that respects the fundamental rights and dignity of all. Inaction at the national level has created a vacuum into which states have stepped to create their own immigration laws, including Minnesota's HF 3830 that was introduced in Minnesota's legislature last spring (though it did not pass, it is being discussed in different campaigns around our state) or the recent Lino Lakes 'English as official language' ordinance (which did pass).

These kinds of unjust laws create a climate of fear for those whose area of residence, line of work, complexion, spoken language or accent is deemed suspicious, even if they are citizens or legal foreign residents or visitors.

I urge our senators and representatives to focus attention and lend their support to efforts to fix the broken immigration system in a humane and practical manner.

A Website where you can find addresses for Minnesota's newspapers:

http://capwiz.com/fcon/dbq/media/?command=state_search&state=mn

Selected Addresses: Duluth News Tribune, Letters to the Editor, 424 West 1st Street Duluth, MN 55802

Minneapolis Star and Tribune, Letters to the Editor, 425 Portland Avenue Minneapolis, MN 55488-0002

St. Paul Pioneer Press, Letters to the Editor, 345 Cedar Street St. Paul, MN 55101

Post Bulletin, Letters to the Editor, 18 1st Avenue SE Rochester, MN 55904

St. Cloud Times, 3000 7th Street North St. Cloud, MN 56302

Your letter is published! – Send us a copy.

- Church World Service, John Guttermann, intpasi@me.com (Send clippings to Church World Service | 122 West Franklin Ave, Suite 214 | Minneapolis | MN | 55404)
- Jewish Community Action, Vic Rosenthal, vic@jewishcommunityaction.org (Send clippings to: Jewish Community Action | 2375 University Ave W, Suite 150 | Saint Paul | MN | 55114)