



Abortion is Healthcare – It Should be Covered: Letters to the Editor Toolkit

The opinion page of the newspaper is one of the most widely read and also a section that is easiest for an advocate or organization to express their views. It is what some people call the debate society that never adjourns, which is why many lawmakers pay close attention to what people are saying in their local papers. The letter to the editor format is short, but it allows you have to an impact on the big discussions of the day in your community and to reach and influence a diverse group of people.

Tips for Writing a Strong Letter:

- Know the rules and where to send it. Many newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters due to their limited space to publish them, so make sure you know the rules and keep to the limit.
- Be sure to include your contact information. Many newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify his or her identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information and usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.
- Make sure you have a good hook to garner attention from editors reviewing the letter and also the audience who is reading it. Just like a good headline, you want an interesting subject or title for your letter. Many papers will include them when they publish it.
- Open your letter with a strong statement. You can point out an error or misrepresentation in an article, disagree or agree with an editorial position, or add to the discussion by pointing out something readers need to know or make it personal with a story.
- Focus on one subject. Keeping your letter brief will help assure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper and ensure that people understand what you are trying to get across.
- Think about referencing the newspaper. While some papers print general commentary, many are more likely to print letters that refer to a specific article. You can refer to an article on a related topic or a current issue in the news in the first part of your letter or in your submission.
- Be accurate and compelling. If you have facts or statistics to back up your point, include them but make sure they are factual and do not just rely on numbers. Make sure people understand why the numbers matter and what they mean to real people.
- Include a call to action. What is the point of writing this letter? What do you want people to know or do or understand? Include an ask or action.
- Send letters to variety of papers. The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the more likely it is that your letter will be printed. Get to know the different papers in your community and submit letters to multiple outlets. Just don't send the exact same letter to more than one paper. Change up the hook or the closing.
- Follow Up and Make Your Case. Some papers get hundreds of letters per day and many of them may be on the same topic. Call the newspaper and ask for the opinion editor. Make sure they received your letter and make a quick pitch on why yours should be published.

TALKING POINTS AND TEMPLATES – “Equality in Abortion Coverage Act”: *Currently, state laws are taking away health coverage for abortion for people who used Medicaid and state employees. This bill would change that by getting rid of these bans.*

Stats:

- Our state employee health plans cover about 32,000 Rhode Islanders – at least half of whom could become pregnant.
- The state Medicaid program covers close to 20,000 women of child-bearing age. We have policies in place that deny these folks benefits if they need an abortion.
- Restrictions on access to reproductive health care are not only at odds with stated values, such as equity and inclusion, but they also affect the ability to ensure equal participation for women and cost billions of dollars across the country every year by reducing labor force participation and earnings levels and increasing turnover and time off from work among women ages 15-44.
- [Recent research](#) shows that if all state-level abortion restrictions were eliminated an additional 505,000 women would enter the labor force and earn about \$3.0 billion dollars annually. In Rhode Island, an estimated 1,548 more women would be able to maintain employment and better meet the needs of their families.

Talking Points:

- Decisions about whether to choose adoption, seek abortion or become a parent are better left to each person in consultation with those they trust, but the fact is that when we take away health coverage we take away that decision for people who can't afford to pay for health care out of pocket.
- Public and private insurance programs should cover the full range of legal medical procedures, including abortion, so each person can make the best decision for their circumstances.
- I'm not comfortable deciding for someone else whether to seek an abortion or not. It's not our place to take away that decision by withholding health coverage. Sadly, that is what we are doing right here in Rhode Island.
- We trust women to make their own decisions about their bodies and about when they become a parent or add to their families. This is not something the government should meddle with.
- We know due to financial obstacles, systemic barriers like transportation and a lack of paid time off to see a health provider and a lack of access to insurance that a larger number of women of color face unintended pregnancy.
- We should make sure people have access to health information, services and supports they need to manage their reproductive health rather than interfering with personal health decisions by putting up more barriers.

Template #1: Abortion Coverage Integral to Health Equity (Word Count: 194)

Dear Editor,

As the public health and financial crisis continues, many people are having a difficult time getting the services they need. Rhode Island has made strides in helping more people access to health care, but too many of our neighbors, especially Black and Latinx people, young people, and low-income folks,

struggle with access to abortion care. We believe that ALL people deserve compassion and access to care, no matter who they are, how much money they have or the type of insurance they use.

Right now, there are policies on our books that take away health coverage for abortion for people who use Medicaid and state employees. We should be doing more to eliminate the barriers that people face. As a state we affirmed the right to abortion, but we need to make it real by getting rid of bans on health coverage for abortion that do nothing to improve health outcomes and in fact cause real harm.

We had a chance to take bold action. I am urging lawmakers to pass the “Equality in Abortion Coverage Act”. This bill has broad support and is an important step forward to close the gaps in access.

Sincerely,

Name, Address

Template #2: Health Access Should Not Depend on Income (Word Count: 248)

Dear Editor,

As we work to end systemic racism, we must end disparities in access to healthcare – including laws that deny people control over decisions about their bodies and future. Whether it is limits on access to contraception or the policies that take away health coverage for abortion, these are barriers that need to be addressed if we are to ensure not only bodily autonomy, but also health equity.

The first person to die of an unsafe illegal abortion after *Roe* was a Latina. Rosie Jimenez could not afford care from a safe, licensed provider. She was refused coverage from Medicaid because of a federal policy called the Hyde Amendment, which withholds health benefits for abortion. Rhode Island has a similar policy on our books. The aim is to make services unaffordable and it has worked to the detriment and danger of women and families.

When someone needs healthcare should they have to scramble to find the money? No. Should we put people in a position where they would decide between paying rent or buying groceries and getting a service that they need? No. But that is what is happening.

We need to pass the “Equality in Abortion Coverage Act”, which eliminates these harmful bans on coverage. Whether it is a public or private program, health insurance should cover the full range of care that we need to prevent unintended pregnancy, to build our families and have a healthy pregnancy, and to seek safe abortion care when we need to.

Sincerely,

Name, Address

Template #3: Make the Right to Abortion a Reality (Word Count: 250)

Dear Editor,

Rhode Island activists spoke up and lawmakers took action to protect the right to abortion with the passage of the Reproductive Privacy Act. This was an important step, the fact remains that the right is being denied to women of color, to low-income people, to young people, to immigrant women and to people on the margins who do not have the same access to care.

The Hyde Amendment withholds federal health benefits for abortion. Rhode Island has a similar policy on our books. The goal of these policies is to make it so that people cannot afford to get an abortion. It has worked. It has pushed care out of reach for many people, especially low-income women and women of color.

Regardless of how much money someone makes or the source of their insurance benefits, they should have coverage for the care they need. That has to include contraception, prenatal and maternity care, fertility services and abortion. We should all be able to afford the health services to manage our health and to plan and care for our families.

We should speak out and make sure that lawmakers know that we support the “Equality in Abortion Coverage Act”, which gets rid of state laws that take that right away from people because of their income or their insurance type. We need to make the right to abortion a reality and ensure we all get the chance to make decisions for our own bodies and plan our own families and futures!

Sincerely,

Name, Address

Template #4: Denying Abortion Coverage Denies Bodily Autonomy (Word Count: 244)

Dear Editor,

In recent days, we have seen a long overdue reckoning on white supremacy and the way that our systems are stacked against, Black people. As people continue to speak up for racial justice all over the country, we must come together to build a future that includes the ability to control our own bodies, to safely care for our families, and to live free from violence.

A critical step to achieving this goal is to close gaps in access to the full range of care we need to plan our families and futures. Right now, there are state policies in place that take away health insurance benefits for abortion for people who make less money or happen to use a public insurance program.

We need to make it clear to the people who represent us – to the lawmakers who are supposed to work on behalf of the best interest of their constituents – that we do not think that access to a healthcare service should depend on income or insurance type and that we oppose efforts to withhold benefits from someone based on personal beliefs or political agendas.

I support the “Equality in Abortion Coverage Act”, which gets rid of the state bans on coverage. This bill makes it clear that decisions around pregnancy, parenting and abortion are personal and that we should not have the decision made for us because our insurance coverage is taken away and we can’t afford the care we need.

Sincerely,

Name, Address

**Make it Timely. Follows the Rules. Make your Voice Heard. –
Use the templates, make it sound like you and then LET’S GET THOSE LETTERS IN!**

- Letters in the *Providence Journal* just be 150 words LTE and guest commentary 675 words or less. Submit here: letters@providencejournal.com.
- *Westerly Sun* limit is 250. Submission form: https://www.thewesterlysun.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/.
- Southern RI newspapers (Kent County, Chariho, Coventry, East Greenwich, Narragansett, NK Standard) - word limit is 300. https://www.ricentral.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/.
- *Pawtucket Times* submission form: https://www.pawtuckettimes.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/.
- *Woonsocket Call* submission form: https://www.woonsocketcall.com/site/forms/online_services/letter_editor/.
- *The Independent* (Narragansett, North Kingstown, and South Kingstown) - Send a letter to the editor to: editorial@independentri.com.
- Letters to the Valley Breeze may be sent to: news@valleybreeze.com.
- Currently, the *Newport Daily News* does not have an online submission process, so you may send letters directly to the editor and co-editor: falbert@newportri.com and jcathers@newportri.com
- Letters in the East Bay Newspapers are limited to 500 words. For the *Barrington Patch Editor*, send to william.rupp@patch.com and for the *Barrington Times* contact Josh Bickford (jbickford@eastbaynewspapers.com), for *Bristol Phoenix* contact Scott Pickering (spickering@eastbaynewspapers.com), for *East Providence Post* talk to Mike Rego (mrego@eastbaynewspapers.com), for the *Portsmouth Times* talk to Jim McGaw (jmcgaw@eastgaynewspapers.com), for the *Sakonnet Times & Westport Shorelines* reach out to Ted Hayes (thayes@eastbaynewspapers.com), and for the *Warren Times-Gazette* connect with Ethan Hartley (ehartley@eastbaymediagroup.com).

Do you need talking points or information about a bill? Do not hesitate to reach out to *The Womxn Project* (info@thewomanproject.org) to discuss resources or seek assistance in submitting a letter. We also want to hear from you when your letter is printed!