

# 3 WAYS TO ADVOCATE

WHEN YOU FEEL PASSIONATELY ABOUT SOMETHING, DON'T JUST KEEP IT TO YOURSELF.

## START WRITING

### WHAT SHOULD I BE LOOKING FOR?

Since judges are charged with an important check on a legislature and executive's power, some of their decisions may not be well-received — such as upholding marriage rights for same-sex couples. Even though these potentially unpopular decisions adhere to the federal and state constitutions, many voters who misunderstand the proper role of the courts can get angry. In this anger, some might form or join groups that seek to unjustly criticize the courts, their rulings or the judges themselves. They might seek to remove the judges who ruled in favor of equal protections and levy a campaign against them. When you see this happening, it's time to respond!

### WHY SHOULD I WRITE TO A NEWSPAPER?

Newspapers and other local publications frequently cover judicial decisions and elections, including legislative attacks on the courts. If you hear of an unfair attack, you should write a letter to the editor in response. It is an effective way to voice your opinion about keeping our courts fair. Newspapers and magazines are likely to print pieces about

timely issues like upcoming judicial elections or a controversial decision by a court.

### WHEN SHOULD I RESPOND?

- A.** When the criticism of the court or a judge is patently false or inaccurate.
- B.** When the criticism lacks a basic understanding of the legal system or the role of the judge.

Consider timing, geographic location of the criticism (whether it is local, state or national), whether the criticism is actually unfair or merely something with which you disagree on a few points, whether your response appears self-serving or whether the criticism focuses merely on one judge or the judicial system as a whole.

### HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

#### PRINT MEDIA: MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

Newspapers and magazines are great mass media, carry prestige and are accessible to most. Since attacks on the judiciary are often leveled at state or local judges, local newspapers are also a great avenue. In addition, millions of people read publications like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *The Advocate* regularly, making these outlets a more national platform for writing about fair courts. Print publications are a great way to reach a large audience, many of whom might share in your unique perspective on issues. Op-eds and letters to the editors are great venues for

communicating your message. There are informal guidelines to keep in mind before you start writing (Look at the DOs and DON'Ts on this sheet).

#### ONLINE MEDIA: NEWSPAPERS

**ONLINE** Newspapers and magazines often print their stories online and invite readers to make comments about the articles. If there is an attack on a judge or on the judicial system in the article or in the comments from other readers, you should write your own response.

#### PRINT MEDIA: CAMPUS NEWSPAPERS

If you're in school, campus newspapers are great vehicles for communication. The audience tends to be students, faculty and active community members. Although the audience is smaller, they often invite diverse points of view — not to mention provide exposure of the issue to campus organizations potentially sympathetic to your perspective.

#### PRINT MEDIA: LGBT NEWSPAPERS

There are a number of local LGBT newspapers in print around the United States. This is another great place to showcase the importance of fair courts.

#### ONLINE MEDIA: THE BLOGOSPHERE

There are many blogs — often with huge readerships — related to political issues, current events, what's happening in the government and judicial decisions. Just like online news articles, there are often places you can respond in a comment section.

# DOs &



# DON'Ts

**FOLLOW THE RULES** Newspapers and magazines often print guidelines for letters to the editor and op-ed sections in the publication or on their website. Be sure you follow them, including those on length and proper submission.

**KEEP IT SHORT AND SIMPLE** Editors of newspapers, magazines and journals have limited space to print readers' letters. Keep a firm grasp on the issue you are talking about and try to grab the reader's attention with a strong first sentence that states your point clearly.

**MAKE IT INTERESTING** Remember your audience and use your writing to show them why your issue is so important. If you feel personally connected to the issue, don't be afraid to use an anecdote to convey what you're feeling. Engage your readers so that they relate to your response and listen to what you have to say.

**BE CONSIDERATE** Keep in mind that other readers may not feel the same way as you do. If you speak too harshly, they may stop listening. In issues involving judicial decisions and candidates, it's advantageous to remind your audience that keeping courts free of political and other outside influences is in everyone's best interest.

**USE OUR RESOURCES** Lambda Legal's Fair Courts Project provides you with understandable information that can form the basis for some of the points you may want to make in your letter. [www.lambdalegal.org/fair-courts-project](http://www.lambdalegal.org/fair-courts-project)

**PROOFREAD!** What you have to say is very important — that's why you want to say it right. Proofread your letter multiple times before submitting it or give it a friend to make sure your message is error-free.

**MAKE IT RELEVANT** Letters to the editor should be in reaction to an article that appeared in that particular newspaper or magazine or a topic that was widely covered by that publication.

**STRAY FROM THE FACTS** You want to be a trustworthy advocate for fair courts — changing the facts around to suit your viewpoint only demeans the validity of what you have to say. If you offer your genuine reaction to the situation, the sincerity of your voice will provide stronger support than any fact or statistic.

**USE COMPLICATED TERMINOLOGY OR JARGON** While you may be familiar with words that are closely associated with LGBT rights or the judicial process, remember that not everybody else is. Make sure to use words and terms that everyone will know so that you don't alienate any of your readers.

**GET OVER-EMOTIONAL** A letter to the editor is not your time to vent. While some emotion is appropriate and often serves to make your point even stronger, too much can cause your audience to think you're irrational.

**GET DISCOURAGED** If your letter doesn't get published, it doesn't mean you did a poor job. Keep writing. Remember that your voice is important and your community deserves to learn from what you have to say.

*Go to Lambda Legal's website for more suggestions about how to write for the press: [www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/campaigns/fair-courts-project/start-writing.html](http://www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/campaigns/fair-courts-project/start-writing.html)*





# STAY INFORMED

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO KEEP CURRENT  
AND BE THE BEST ADVOCATE YOU CAN BE.

## GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE JUDICIAL PROCESS

This toolkit provides a great foundation for learning more about our courts. But there is a wealth of information online at your disposal. Use the resources guide in this toolkit to lead you in the right direction.

## READ ABOUT CURRENT JUDICIAL ISSUES

Most news organizations report on recent opinions issued from all levels of the U.S. courts and many follow local courts as well. In fact, most courts in the United States have their own websites where they publish their decisions, their docket (the calendar of cases they are going to hear) and an archive of their decisions.

**ASK THE EXPERTS** If you are in school, find out more about fair courts by visiting some of the professors and advocates on campus who can provide you with the information you need. This toolkit is a starting point — and a great ice breaker. Many professors would be happy to take the time to talk about these issues with you and help you plan a training for your fellow students.

**TAKE A DEEP BREATH** The best advocates are informed advocates: they read up on current events and browse the web regularly for up-to-date analysis on the issues. But don't get overwhelmed! You can't know everything about this constantly changing subject, and there are always resources at your disposal to help you in the fight to keep our courts fair and impartial.

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Groups of like-minded people more often make greater gains in the political process than any one individual — but it may take an individual to organize groups. Knowing who to talk to, where to find them and what to say are all important to bear in mind when you start the conversation about fair courts. Here are a few ideas that should help:

## WRITE AN ACTION PLAN

An action plan provides the best way to organize a succinct message. When you are writing an action plan, be sure to keep the following things in mind:

- The audience (who) you are addressing
- The message (what and why) you want to communicate
- The location (where) of the message
- The timing (when) of the message
- The delivery (how) of the message

Although these are basic ideas of communication, they are indispensable to your success. Let's delve more deeply into each.

**AUDIENCE** Deciding whom you are addressing is critical. For example, if you are speaking to close friends, a more informal, less technical feel to the points you want to make might prove more effective. If speaking to groups on college campuses, colleagues or even mutual acquaintances, you might use a more formal tone. Try to assess how much your audience already knows, so you don't waste time explaining things that they already understand.

**MESSAGE** The actual information you are communicating will depend on a host of variables. It is not enough to understand the importance of fair courts in America in recruiting like-minded people; you must convey that importance effectively — answering why it matters to the people to whom you are speaking. Gauge the interest levels of those with whom you are communicating. Your target audience may not be interested in the structure of American government, so you may be more effective if you communicate how an unfair court system affects them directly. If you are speaking to a group of people who care about LGBT rights, tailor your message accordingly: How do unfair courts affect their community? This toolkit conveniently addresses this issue.

**GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY IS ALL ABOUT COMMUNICATION: WITH YOUR FRIENDS, YOUR COLLEAGUES AND THOSE WHO YOU KNOW MIGHT SUPPORT YOU.**

## LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!

Sometimes, the right location is in the living room of your home. At other times, a meeting room is more appropriate. It all depends on the audience and what you are trying to say. Try to make sure the location of your communication reflects its content.

**TIMING** Demonstrating to a group or other individuals that you have passion for and knowledge of fair courts may not be effective at 8 AM — even if you are a morning person. Pick the right time during the day or evening, week or weekend, to discuss the importance of fair courts.

**DELIVERY** Note cards and a PowerPoint presentation might not be the best tools to use in a conversation with your parents or friends on a Tuesday night. But these same tools may be absolutely appropriate if you are speaking to a group at a meeting room or classroom. The important thing is to remain calm and go over the talking points you have tailored for that group. And remember: Enthusiasm is contagious.

# ACTION PLAN

Here's an example of an action plan for speaking with some community members. Yours doesn't have to look anything like this, but it should be visually uncomplicated and accessible. Be sure to mark off the items you have completed or the people with whom you have already spoken.

*Scenario: You've been reading up on a recent impeachment threat to a judge who ruled in favor of gay adoption. You're planning a training for about 10 people at a local space. You're putting together talking points from several sources and creating handouts. A list of actionable items is helping you stay organized.*

Contact List	Venues	To Do	Talking Points
<p><i>LGBT Community Center members</i></p> <p><i>Name, email</i></p> <p><i>Name, email</i></p> <p><i>Name, email</i></p>	<p><i>LGBT Community Center Library</i>  <i>Contact: Liz Peters</i>  <i>555-345-6789</i>  <i>Available on Mondays</i></p> <p><i>Corner Cafe</i>  <i>Contact: Arlene</i>  <i>555-345-6789</i>  <i>Away until next week</i></p> <p><i>Public Library</i>  <i>Contact: Ed Sampras</i>  <i>555-345-6789</i>  <i>Call before 3pm</i></p> <p><i>Peggy's house</i></p>	<p><i>Print flyers</i></p> <p><i>Call Liz</i></p> <p><i>Request pamphlets</i></p> <p><i>Finalize list</i></p> <p><i>Send an email to Lambda Legal</i></p> <p><i>Find out about getting coffee</i></p>	<p><i>Courts are accountable! There are several levels of review and judicial accountability. If one side doesn't like a decision, an appeal can always be taken to the next highest court.</i></p> <p><i>A judge should never be targeted for impeachment just because one side or group doesn't like a single decision.</i></p> <p><i>Judges need to be protected from attempts to strong arm the judiciary, so that they can continue to make unbiased and fair decisions.</i></p> <p><i>Let's mount a campaign in our community encouraging people to write letters to the editor and talk with family members about how unjust it is that this judge is being targeted.</i></p> <p><i>Let's check with the local bar association to see if they have any action ideas.</i></p>