



Readers' letters and comments are often the most read sections of newspapers and news websites. They are great tools for building awareness about National Crime Victims' Rights Week. By writing a letter to the editor, you can link National Crime Victims' Rights Week or one of your organization's programs to a current local, state, or national issue by showing why readers should care about the rights and concerns of crime victims. Ideally, you would cite a reliable recent study, quote statistics about the crime or issue, or stress the need for more research about crimes that are often hidden or underreported.

Consider asking local law enforcement officers or other organizations to partner with you or write their own letters to highlight the needs of crime victims and how the public can help. Letters that are endorsed by multiple community groups will receive more attention. When you submit the letter to the editor, include your contact information so that the newspaper can reach you if it decides to print your letter. If the newspaper does not publish your letter, consider submitting it to a local organization that publishes a newsletter, post it on your website, or share it on social media.

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## » 5 Elements of an Attention-Grabbing Letter

- Respond to an article or commentary recently published. Begin your letter by citing this article.
- Keep it brief: no more than 250 to 300 words.
- Include a call to action.
- Use verified facts and reference the original source.
- Include information on where people can learn more about the issue.



## Sample **Letter to the Editor**

### **The Word “Stalking” Should Not be Used Lightly**

Romantic comedies often have story lines with similar tropes: a young man meets a young woman who initially scorns his advances. But he won't take no for an answer. When he shows up at her house or workplace uninvited, he is charming and persistent, and eventually wins her heart. While these movies may appear endearing and harmless, they portray stalking behaviors as acceptable and even necessary components of romantic relationships, and shape or reinforce dangerous cultural norms.

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, over 7.5 million people are stalked in the United States each year. Stalking behaviors can range from repeated, unwanted text messages, phone calls, and emails, to threats of physical violence, to the offender showing up uninvited at the victim's workplace, school, or home.

To outside observers, repeated text messages and phone calls may appear annoying rather than dangerous or threatening. Yet these behaviors may indicate a larger, more insidious pattern of ignoring boundaries in order to impose control that can end in fear, harm, or death. While stalking is defined as a crime under the law in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. territories, and the federal government, it is rarely reported and seldom prosecuted.

We must change the narrative surrounding seemingly benign but unwanted behaviors, and acknowledge them for what they are: a crime. By recognizing and raising awareness of dangerous actions we can help keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable before they escalate to physical violence.

[Name]

[Organization]

[City, State]

