

Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition – Education Committee

Grassroots Advocacy Tools

Letter to the Editor Guide

Sample Letter to the Editor talking points (use these as a framework to create your own letter, and please highlight particular issues that are important to you or your organization):

- There is an important election coming up in November, but I am not hearing much from the candidates about an issue I care deeply about: behavioral health treatment.
- Behavioral health is the term that covers both mental health and substance use disorders.
- Maryland is in the middle of an opioid crisis
- Mental health is a critical part of health care but often doesn't get the same attention as physical health care issues
- If people can't get the care they need, they often end up in an emergency room, which is a costly and often inappropriate level of care
- I want to hear from my candidates: what are they going to do to meet the need for quality mental health and substance use treatment?

Here is an EXAMPLE of what a letter might look like. IMPORTANT: Please do not copy and paste from this letter – all letters must be unique and written by the author. Keep your letter to 250 words or less, if possible. The shorter the letter, the more likely it is to be published!

As we approach the November election, I have been bombarded with information (positive and negative) about various candidates and their platforms. Candidates are quick to tell us what they think about taxes, school funding or President Trump. Unfortunately, there is an important issue that matters to me and many Marylanders that we aren't hearing much about: behavioral health treatment.

Behavioral health is the term that covers both mental health and substance use disorders. We know Maryland is in an opioid crisis. We also know that mental health is a critical component of health care coverage. What are our candidates going to do to help ensure that we can provide quality treatment to those who need it? Ignoring the problem isn't going to make it go away. I'd like to see more leadership on this issue from our future leaders.

Most local papers accept letters to the editor. Look for instructions on the editorial page of the paper, or google "submit letter to the editor for [insert name of paper]" to see how to submit a letter.

Sample Candidate Forum questions

Leading up to the election, there are usually opportunities to engage candidates directly, at forums, town hall meetings or "meet 'n greet" events. If you are able to attend any such events, use the occasion to call attention to behavioral health issues. Here are a few suggested questions you could ask, but please feel free to personalize them:

"Data shows that one in five Marylanders will show signs of a behavioral health disorder in any given year. That's a lot of people and I'm concerned that we don't have the capacity to treat all of them. How will you

ensure that we adequately fund our behavioral health workforce and that Marylanders have access to quality treatment for mental health and substance use disorders?"

"In 2017, the state legislature passed the Keep the Door Open Act, to increase funding for behavioral health providers who treat mental health and substance use disorders. Last year, the Governor cut the funding and the General Assembly had to restore it. We can't afford to skimp on these critical services – will you commit to the level of funding stipulated in Keep the Door Open?"

"Given the opioid crisis and the increased awareness that we must treat drug use with public health approaches, I'm convinced we need to expand access to evidence-based treatments. What will you do, if elected, to make sure all Marylanders have access to all three forms of approved medication - methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone - where and when they need it, including in their community, in emergency departments, and in prisons?"

"I'm concerned about making sure our children have access to mental health services. Kids spend half their day in school, so I think it makes sense to provide mental health services IN the school system. What will you do to help Maryland students get access to critical mental health services?"