League of Oregon Cities

Media Tools

Op-Ed / LTE Template

Before you start

- Pick your format and know your word count: a letter to the editor runs about 150–200 words; an op-ed runs 400–600 words for most local and regional papers. Check your target paper's submission page for its specific limit.
- Tie it to something happening now. Op-eds and letters are more likely to be published when they're anchored to recent news: a council budget vote, a service cut just announced, a local news story on the topic. If one applies, name it directly in your opening or problem section.
- Adapt the template below, swapping out the words in [blue] for details about your community.

Opening [fill in — 1 to 2 sentences]

- Name something distinctive about your community: a landmark, a tradition, a bit of local color.
- Pivot to the issue in the same sentence or the next one. Don't spend more than two sentences here before you get to the point.

Example approach: "Ask anyone in [your city] what they love about living here, and you'll probably hear about [specific: the Saturday farmers market, the pool at the community center, a particular park]. It's the kind of thing you don't much think about until it's gone."

The problem [fill in — 2 to 3 sentences, one local example]

- Choose ONE specific, concrete example: a closed program, an unfilled position, a delayed repair, a service cut. One clear example is more persuasive than a list.
- Make it factual and specific. Use a number, a date, or a name if you have one (a position, a program, a street).
- State your main point here. Don't bury it further down. Readers (and editors) decide whether to keep reading based on your first paragraph or two.

Example: "Last year, [your city] eliminated its only code enforcement position and put off a $2 million repair to the water treatment plant. Residents are already feeling it."

State context [boilerplate — use as written, or adapt lightly]

"This isn't unique to [your city]. Oregon's property tax system is built on rules written more than thirty years ago, rules that cap how much revenue cities can raise regardless of how fast costs or populations grow. The result is a structural gap between what our communities need and what the system can provide, and it's playing out in cities of every size, in every part of the state."

The ask [boilerplate — use as written, or adapt lightly]

Tweaks to the property tax rules alone won't be enough to create a fair tax system that delivers for our communities.

That's why it is so important that Oregon's leaders take a comprehensive approach to tax reform.

Right now, it's important that we learn more about how our tax system works in Oregon so we can begin to have conversations about how to fix it.

Closing line [fill in or boilerplate — 1 sentence]

- Restate your main point in one sentence. Don't introduce a new idea here.

"Oregon's tax system is broken. It's time to fix it."
OR
"Oregonians deserve a fair tax system that delivers for our communities."

Call to action [boilerplate — use as written, or adapt lightly]

"Learn more about the need to modernize Oregon's property tax system at BrokenTaxSystem.org."

Sign-off [fill in]

[Name, title, city]

- Include your full name, official title, and a phone number the editor can use to verify your submission.

Before you submit

- Check your word count against your target paper's limit.
- Include your full name, title, city, and a phone number.
- Find the correct submission address. Most papers list it on their opinion or editorial page, often as "submit a letter" or "submit an op-ed."
- Submit to one outlet at a time. Papers generally expect exclusivity until they've made a decision.
- If you haven't heard back in a week, it's fine to follow up once, or submit to a different outlet.

Media Pitch Guide

Why pitch local media

- Local coverage is one of the most credible ways to reach residents and build momentum toward the statewide narrative.
- A story in your local paper or a segment on a regional news broadcast carries more trust with local audiences than anything from a statewide organization.
- It gives legislators visible evidence that this issue matters in their own district.

Before you pitch

- Find the right reporter. Look for a byline that covers local government, budgets, or city hall, not the general newsroom inbox.
- Read one or two of their recent stories so you can reference their beat and show you're not sending a form email.
- Line up your local example and a spokesperson (yourself or someone else) before you send the pitch, so you can respond quickly if they're interested.

League of Oregon Cities

Finding your local angle

Reporters want a local story, not a policy briefing. Identify a recent, verifiable example. The stronger and more specific it is, the more likely it is to result in coverage.

- A recent or upcoming service cut (staffing, hours, closures)
- A comparison of similar properties with very different tax bills
- A budget vote or council discussion tied to revenue constraints
- A city leader or resident willing to speak to their own experience

Writing your subject line

- Keep it short, ideally under 10 words, and specific enough that the reporter knows the story at a glance.
- Name your city. A local reporter is scanning for local relevance first.
- Save campaign language like "revenue reform" for the body of the email, not the subject line.

Examples:

- "[Your city] cuts library hours as budget rules squeeze services"
- "Local angle: [your city]'s budget squeeze is part of a statewide pattern"
- "Story idea: why [your city] can't keep up with rising costs"

Sample pitch email

Subject: [Your city] cuts library hours as budget rules squeeze services

Hi [Reporter name],

I've been following your coverage of [reference a recent story or beat, e.g., "city budget decisions this year"]. Thought this might be a fit.

[Your city] recently [describe local example, e.g., "left two fire department positions unfilled for over a year"]. It's part of a pattern playing out across Oregon:

- Property tax rules written more than thirty years ago cap city revenue growth well below the rising cost of services.
- [Optional second data point or local statistic, if you have one.]

I'd be glad to connect you with [name/title] to talk about what this looks like locally, and share data on how it's affecting communities statewide.

You can also reach out to Nicole Stingh with the League of Oregon Cities at nstingh@orcities.org for information about how our property tax system is holding back cities across the state.

Regards,
[Your name and title]

Tips

- Lead with one data point or example, not the whole campaign narrative.
- Keep the whole email under 150 to 200 words. A reporter should be able to see the story in three sentences.
- Offer a specific local spokesperson, yourself or someone else, and say you can make them available quickly.
- Once you make a connection, share materials from BrokenTaxSystem.org as background.
- If you don't hear back, wait 3 to 5 business days before a single follow-up. More than one follow-up tends to hurt more than it helps.
- Thank the reporter whether or not they cover the story. You're building a relationship for next time, not just pitching once.