

Writing a Letter to the Editor (LTE) on the Troy Davis Supreme Court decision

On Tuesday, September 23, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered a temporary stay of execution for Troy Davis, effective until they have had a chance to consider his appeal to the Court. On October 14, the Court declined to consider his petition, and Troy Davis could be re-scheduled for execution in the next few weeks. Our goal is to discourage Georgia officials from continuing to pursue this execution, and to encourage the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles to reconsider its previous decision and grant clemency to Troy Davis.

This case will continue to generate significant media coverage. This is where you come in. The opinion page is one of the most widely read pages in the newspaper. Because so many people, elected and appointed officials included, read the opinion section of their local newspaper, letters to the editor (LTEs) are an excellent way to get your voice heard.

Tips for Writing an LTE:

- **Make it your own** – if you're using the sample below, be sure to change or add to it so it's YOUR letter. Papers are not likely to publish a letter that has been sent in by multiple people.
- **Keep it short** – Most papers have a 150 to 250 word limit and readers are more likely to focus on short, to-the-point LTEs than long wordy ones.
- **Pick one angle** – You likely have many reasons for believing what you are advocating for, but you only have 250 words to tell your side of the story. Pick just one reason and tailor the LTE to fit that choice.

How to Submit an LTE:

Send the LTE to the email address listed on the website or in the opinion section of your local newspaper. Be sure to include your full name, address, and phone number. But don't stop there... follow up. Make one phone call to the LTE editor and ask if they plan to print your letter.

Possible LTE points (no need to use them all):

1. Name the article that you are responding to by title, author and date. If there has not been a recent article on Troy Davis in your local paper, introduce his case in the first sentence.
2. Emphasize that, with the Supreme Court's declining to hear his case, Troy Davis may be executed despite that fact that his strong claims of innocence will never be heard in court.
3. Note that a major problem with the death penalty is that important evidence sometimes never gets heard, despite years of appeals.
4. Emphasize that executing Troy Davis while doubts about his guilt remain will undermine public confidence in Georgia's justice system.
5. Emphasize that this execution would solve nothing and would only add to the pain of all involved.
6. Call on Georgia officials to prevent the execution of Troy Davis from proceeding.

Sample Letter to the Editor (LTE):

On Tuesday, October 14, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear Troy Davis' appeal for a court, any court, to hold a hearing on compelling evidence that he may be innocent. He was convicted of shooting police officer Mark Allen MacPhail, but only on the basis of witness testimony. Most of the witnesses have since recanted, many alleging that police coerced them into making false statements.

This serious evidence of his innocence will now never be heard in a court of law.

This is what is wrong with the death penalty. Despite years of appeals, important evidence sometimes never gets a hearing. Mistakes go uncorrected, and doubts about guilt are not addressed. Executing someone where such doubts about his guilt remain unresolved undermines public confidence in our justice system. Responsible public officials should not allow that.

In the end, the execution of Troy Davis would solve nothing. It would only add to the pain of everyone involved, and destroy public faith in Georgia's ability to administer justice fairly. Georgia officials should do the right thing and make sure the execution of Troy Davis does not proceed.