

SECTION III – CONTACTING THE MEDIA

MEDIA OUTREACH TOOLS

Media Advisory: A media advisory is a brief notice to the media that lays out the Who, What, Where, When and Why of the event. Think of it as an invitation. It is best to send it out several days before the event and then follow up with a phone call to the reporters. Don't forget to include your contact information.

Press/News Release: A press release is a news story written from your point of view and released to the news media. Releases are used to inform reporters about news or events they might be interested in covering. The press release should be sent out the morning of the event, or the day a report is issued, or statement is made. Press releases should provide a quoted statement from one or more people involved with the event if they provide different perspectives, e.g. local and national or policy and field.

Press Statement: A press statement provides an official comment on a news development or position taken by someone else. It is best issued the day the statement is made. You can think of it as a platform for restating your organization's position on an issue.

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS AND OPINION EDITORIALS

Tips on writing Letters to the Editor:

- Letters to the editor (LTEs) generally respond to something previously published in the paper. Mention the name of the article and the date it was published.
- LTEs should be sent no later than 3 business days after the article they respond to was published.
- They are much shorter than op-eds--less than 250 words but even as little as 150 words. Check word limits with your local paper's website.
- Letter writers often express a personal viewpoint and don't have to be writing as experts or as representatives of institutions.
- Don't shy away from news outlets that don't share your political views. Often, these can be the most likely to print your opinion as a way of balancing their coverage.

Tips on writing Op-Eds:

- Op-eds should always come in at under 750, but check word limits with your local paper.

- Aim to place the op-ed as close as possible to your news event or some notable date, e.g. a holiday that symbolizes your issue, anniversary of an important date, etc.
- Get your op-ed in at least 7 days prior to when you want it published to allow time for the editors to consider it.
- Send the op-ed to only one news outlet at a time. Many news outlets want exclusivity. If they turn you down, you can send it to the next news outlet on your list. This is another reason why it is important to allow enough time to get the op-ed considered by a few outlets.

Tips on both LTEs and Op-Eds:

- Make unusual or original but solid arguments by tying together topics that people don't typically associate, e.g. government surveillance and immigration enforcement both compromise civil liberties.
- See what issues have already been covered – a paper won't print two letters/op-eds on the same issue with the same argument in the same week.
- Use facts and figures to lend credibility to your arguments. It is useful to have a document listing facts that are relevant to your work that you can reference easily when drafting LTEs and Op-Eds.
- Make sure to find the right contact information to email your submission.
- Paste the letter or op-ed submission into the body of the email as well as attaching it.
- Provide your name, full contact information, title, and affiliation and if you're sending it on behalf of the writer, make sure you provide contact info for both of you. Many papers will not accept anonymous contributions.

Sample Published RWG Letter to Editor

THE WASHINGTON POST

Taking Liberties At Homeland Security
Tuesday, August 26, 2008; A12

Regarding the Aug. 20 front-page article "Citizens' U.S. Border Crossings Tracked":

The broad authority given to the Department of Homeland Security to monitor the comings and goings of U.S. citizens is evidence of the Bush administration's ongoing exploitation of the threat of terrorism to encroach on constitutional rights. There is legitimate outrage over such policies, but there should be equal outrage about other DHS policies that violate civil liberties and human rights in the name of national security.

Immigrants, including citizens and legal residents, are bearing the brunt of unnecessarily harsh DHS practices. DHS conducts warrantless, aggressive raids on homes and workplaces, locking up people without giving them an opportunity to make a phone call or see a lawyer. The inhumane conditions at DHS detention facilities, where people are sometimes denied access even to lifesaving medical care, have

resulted in more than 70 deaths in the past few years. In this November's elections, DHS policies will result in the disenfranchisement of at least 300,000 people whose citizenship applications have been long delayed by extra security checks based on their race or religion, not any evidence of criminal activity.

It is time to hold DHS accountable for abusive policies that affect citizens and immigrants alike.

*MARGARET HUANG
Executive Director
Rights Working Group*

Sample Opinion Editorial

In the name of national security, there has been a steady and unapologetic erosion of the constitutional rights of people living in this country. The broad authority given to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by the Bush Administration has enabled the agency to abandon basic American principles of protection for human rights and civil liberties. This can no longer be tolerated. Now we face a major political transition and an opportunity to urge President Obama and members of congress to restore these basic rights.

The erosion of human rights and civil liberties protections has taken many reprehensible forms including the policies carried out in immigration enforcement. DHS' Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) engages in warrantless raids without due process and permits inhumane detention conditions in its facilities.

DHS' raids on homes and workplaces have resulted in hundreds of people being swept into custody without due process. Consider the arrest and detention of nearly 400 workers in Postville, Iowa this summer and the even more recent arrest and detention of nearly 600 workers in Laurel, Mississippi. In Postville, the government made a mockery of due process by failing to ensure that detainees understood the charges against them, assigning detainees an inadequate number of attorneys who were not given enough time to assemble a defense, and then whisking detainees through a kangaroo court en masse for imprisonment and deportation.

Meanwhile, more than 80 people have died in ICE detention facilities since 2003, many of them because they were denied access to the proper medical care, including Jason Ng who died last month. Mr. Ng was a Chinese immigrant and father of two who was denied asylum but had lived without incident in the U.S. for 15 years before he was swept up for deportation. While in detention, Mr. Ng developed severe back pain that made it impossible for him to even stand up, yet he was refused access to medical care. When a federal judge finally ordered ICE to give him an MRI, it was discovered that he had cancer throughout his body and a fractured spine. He died five days later at the age of 34 still in detention. Thousands more are still at risk in these facilities due to inadequate medical care including mental health care and prenatal care. Moreover, these people lack a voice because more than 80% of those in immigration detention don't have access to an attorney.

The United States should be a place that upholds basic human rights such as access to attorneys, fair trials and safe and humane detention conditions. Unfortunately, these fundamental principles are in question as the government denies basic rights to many who live in this country.

Today, the responsibility of such actions has been placed on us. We have a historic opportunity to ask our government to restore these basic rights. Change can only occur through the collective effort of concerned citizens. If we let the government deny the rights of some, it puts all of our freedoms at risk.

AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW DOCUMENT

What is an Available for Interview (AFI) document?

A document issued when news breaks or on the anniversary of an event or major holiday that is relevant to your work. This tool can help you obtain interviews with organizational spokespeople or place quotes in news stories. It should be distributed to television and radio interview bookers, beat reporters and columnists.

When do you issue an AFI?

Significant anniversaries, such as 9/11 or Citizenship Day on September 17 are suitable occasions for issuing an AFI. Similarly, it is appropriate to issue an AFI when there is a news development such as an egregious raid or an exposé of poor conditions at a detention facility or developments in local or national policy or important policy statements by political officials and/or candidates for office.

Who are you offering and why should they be chosen to be interviewed?

Describe why your spokesperson is particularly suited to be a guest to comment on the news of the day. For example, they might be an expert on the issue and have information that can advance the story or provide a fresh analysis or angle. You should also include relevant activities illustrating the work that your group is doing that relates to the story in the news.

What else should go in the AFI?

A brief bio of available spokespeople(s) and a description of your organizations' work may be included in the document. For example if the news is about an ICE raid and you are offering an immigration lawyer, it is important to mention any past work the attorney has done that is relevant to the issue, such as having won an injunction against ICE for rights violations.

SAMPLE Q & A

Q: Who is the Rights Working Group?

A: In the aftermath of 9-11, the Rights Working Group strives to restore the American commitment to protect civil liberties and human rights for all people in the U.S. RWG has grown a strong coalition of civil liberties, human rights, civil rights, national security, and immigrant rights organizations to work hand in hand to restore due process.

Q: What are you trying to hold the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) accountable for?

A: DHS is choosing to enforce immigration laws in ways that target people because of their race, religion, and national origin without providing them the due process protections they are guaranteed by our Constitution.

The *Hold DHS Accountable!* campaign is asking DHS to:

- End immigration raids that lock up people without due process;
- Stop inhumane detention conditions and arbitrary imprisonment without charges.

Q: What is wrong with current policies and laws?

A: Right now policies deny due process protections to people who are swept up in immigration enforcement activities. They are often not allowed to call a lawyer or their family, face terrible conditions in detention, and they're often denied a fair hearing. It's happening not only people who are suspected to be undocumented, but also to those who are awaiting a decision on their immigration status including asylum seekers, people who have filed papers late or incorrectly, and even to some citizens.

After 9/11 the government began sacrificing our basic rights in the name of national security conflating guarding against another terror attack with immigration policy. Most people are not aware that these violations are taking place. When we let the government deny due process and violate human rights for some, all of our freedoms are at risk.

Q: Why should I care about the rights of people who are in this country illegally?

A: This country has strived to uphold the principles of justice, human rights, and due process since its founding. The way that the government is currently enforcing immigration laws these principles are at risk. We must continue to protect basic rights for all people. When we let the government deny due process and violate human rights for some, all of our freedoms are at risk.

We have to decide what kind of country we want to live in. Do we want to live in a country that violates the basic rights people living in its borders or one that protects human rights and civil liberties for all people?

Q: Why shouldn't we just deport the 12 million people in the U.S. illegally?

A: This is not a discussion about who should be allowed to stay in this country or forced to go. The question is should the U.S. be the kind of place that arrests people using warrantless raids or holds people in detention facilities without charges.

The U.S. should live up to its ideals, including upholding human rights such as due process and the right to be free from imprisonment without just cause. If we say that we believe in these human rights for some, but not for a group such as immigrants, we are making exceptions to our ideals. And when we start making exceptions to our ideals, it puts all our freedoms at risk.

Q: Why are you involved with this issue?

A: I do not want to live in a country that violates the basic rights people living in its borders. I want to join the thousands of people around the country who are telling the leaders of this country that we would rather live in a country that protects human rights and civil liberties for all people, citizens and residents alike.

A personal reason: After seeing the devastation created by the (ISSUE IN THEIR STATE) I was compelled to join with others in my community to raise public awareness of DHS abuses in order to prevent further violations of people's rights.

ONLINE ADVOCACY TIPS

What is a blog?

A blog (*we**b** log*) is a website with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Many blogs provide commentary on a particular subject, others break news and others function as personal online diaries.

Many political or common-interest blogs have multiple regular contributors and/or may accept guest bloggers who provide expertise on a particular issue. This information should be available on the website.

How do I post comments to a blog or online article?

If you come across a blog on a topic that you could respond to, check for a "Comments" section at the bottom of the page. Some blogs may require you to create a user account to comment (doing so is usually quick, simple and free).

Online news articles usually have a comments section where you can respond to the article directly or address someone else's comments regarding the article. This also usually requires creating a user account but it is quick, simple and free as well.

Tips for Posting to Blogs or Commenting on Online Articles

- Use numbers and statistics to illustrate the egregious nature of the violations. Figures that show a significant percentage of a population being affected by a practice can be particularly compelling.
- Use an individual's story to put a human face on the violations and illustrate the nature of the problem particularly when discussing inhumane conditions or the abuse of rights caused a particular practice.
- Stay alert to happenings in the news and/or upcoming anniversaries/significant dates that may relate to your topic, which could serve as a timely hook for your posting or comments.
- Choose an effective title for your posting and incorporate any key words that relate to your subject.

- Use bullet points and using **bold**, *italics*, or underlining key words will help draw attention to main points.
- Keep it short but substantive. A target word count should fall between 250-1000 words.
- Have an opinion – people read blogs because they are written by people who have a point of view.
- Link to relevant articles or web pages that pertain to your blog.
- Most blogs allow you to indicate “keywords” that readers would use to search your blog. Use common search words that are pertinent to your topic, like: DHS, civil liberties, immigration, raids, human rights, etc.
- If for whatever reason, you want to protect your identity online, create a username instead of using your real name.

Posting Blogs on the *Hold DHS Accountable!* Campaign

Message Frame:

- Since its founding, the United States has strived to uphold the principles of justice, human rights, and due process.
- Since the tragedy of 9-11, in the name of national security, the Department of Homeland Security has adopted practices that routinely violate the basic rights of people living in this country, including citizens, legal residents, and immigrants.
- With a new political leadership, we have an opportunity now to roll back these misguided policies. We must ask ourselves is this the kind of country we want to live in? Should our country arbitrarily lock up people without giving them access to a lawyer or the courts? Should our government allow overcrowded, inhumane detention conditions where people are forgotten, neglected, abused and denied access to even life saving medical care?
- If we let the government violate the rights of some, it puts all our freedoms at risk.
- The *Hold DHS Accountable!* campaign is asking the Obama Administration to place a moratorium on immigration enforcement activities until a comprehensive review of these policies and practices can be done to ensure they uphold basic human rights.