

## CAPP Guidelines for Writing a Letter to the Editor [LTE]\*

### Why Write a Letter to the Editor?

Reason	Background
Reach a large audience effectively and easily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Many news organizations publish LTEs in their online and print editions, generally with their editorials and op-eds, which is one of the most read content sections.</li><li>● Elected officials -- national, state, and local -- keep a close eye on local news media coverage, including LTEs, to keep current on issues of importance to their constituents, such as the Pilgrim pipelines.</li><li>● You can reach both a wide public audience and your elected officials with the same effort.</li></ul>
Educate and persuade editors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Convince editors to dedicate more news article and opinion piece coverage to the Pilgrim pipelines.</li><li>● Express the importance to the community of stopping the Pilgrim pipelines.</li></ul>

### How Do I Write an LTE?

Action	Background
Respond to a published news article, editorial, or op-ed or write about a specific issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The most effective letters are those that respond to a published news article, editorial, or op-ed.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Many papers require that you reference the specific article, so begin your letter by citing the original piece by headline, date, and credited author(s).</li></ul></li><li>● Some news organizations do occasionally publish LTEs that are not in response to a published piece.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ If you are writing about a specific issue, begin by stating your concern that the news organization hasn't focused on this important issue.</li></ul></li></ul>
Follow directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Always first review the news organization's policies related to LTEs in its print or online editions, generally found in the section that features LTEs.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Strictly follow these guidelines (including any word count caps) to increase the likelihood that your LTE will be published.</li></ul></li></ul>

\*Adapted from the Union of Concerned Scientists. **Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor**. Union of Concerned Scientists website. [http://www.ucsusa.org/action/writing-an-lte.html#.WJLL\\_dlrLIU](http://www.ucsusa.org/action/writing-an-lte.html#.WJLL_dlrLIU). Accessed February 1, 2017.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If you can't find that information in print or online, call or email the news organization to ask how to submit an LTE in response to a recently published article, editorial, or op-ed or about a specific issue.</li> </ul>
Be timely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Always strive to respond to a news article, editorial, or op-ed within two or three days of its publication.</li> </ul>
Share what you know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If you are an expert on the topic you're writing about, be sure to mention that in your LTE. For example, share the following information up front:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ You are a doctor when writing about a health issue</li> <li>○ You are a Prius owner when writing about hybrid cars</li> <li>○ You have solar panels on your roof when writing about energy issues</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Refer to the elected official or corporation you are trying to persuade by name	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If you are trying to persuade an elected official or corporation, include the official's or corporation's full name in your LTE.</li> <li>● If your letter includes an elected official's name, in almost all cases his or her staff will give him or her the letter to read personally.</li> <li>● Corporations also monitor the media, especially in areas where they have facilities.</li> </ul>
Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● When the news organization's LTE policies do not provide any word count cap, LTEs generally should be no more than 200 words (150 or less is best) to increase the likelihood that they will be published unedited.</li> <li>● Focus on one (or, at the most, two) main point(s).</li> <li>● Get to the main point in the LTE's first two sentences.</li> <li>● If possible, include interesting facts, relevant personal experience, and any local connections to the issue.</li> </ul>
Write the letter in your own words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Editors at news organizations want the LTEs that they select for publication to be written in the reader's original words, so be sure that you take the time to do so.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note: We have provided you with talking points (<i>What Should I Say</i>, below) to start you off. If you are comfortable writing, use the facts presented in these talking points and rewrite them in your own words. If you are not comfortable writing, insert a short sentence of your own before and/or after the talking points.</b></p>

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<p>Advocate, refute, and wrap-up with a call to action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Open your letter by advocating for your position, including refuting any assertion that you disagree with in the original published news article, editorial, or op-ed.</li> <li>● Use the next few sentences to back up your position.</li> <li>● Focus on the positive. For example: <i>Pilgrim Pipeline is stoppable, with a high level of citizen engagement and commitment to action.</i></li> <li>● Wrap your letter up with a call to action, explaining what you think needs to happen now.</li> </ul>
<p>Include your contact information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Be sure to include your name, address, and daytime phone number with the text of your LTE. The news organization will contact you before publishing your LTE.</li> </ul>
<p>Follow-up with your elected official or the corporation if your LTE is published</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Confirm that the appropriate decision maker sees your LTE by sending them an email with a cover note and a link to the published LTE or by mailing them a cover note with a clipping of the LTE published in the print edition.</li> </ul>

### What Should I Say?

Topic	Talking Point(s) <sup>1</sup>
Bomb trains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pilgrim’s pipelines would <b>add to, not replace</b>, deadly oil “bomb trains.” Oil trains entering Albany <b>would increase fivefold over their mid-2016 level</b>, because Pilgrim would require oil trains to service its pipelines.</li> </ul>
Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● These pipelines would carry <b>climate-damaging</b> Bakken Shale crude and/or tar sands crude. <a href="#">Bakken flaring</a> creates severe climate damage; that <b>flaring is so enormous</b> it can be seen from outer space. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To have any chance of averting catastrophic climate change, we must <b>keep 4/5ths of all the current known oil, coal and gas reserves in the ground</b>, rather than extracting and burning it, according to broad scientific</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> [Talking Points by Protecting Our Waters for CAPPNY](#): Coalition Against Pilgrim Pipelines–New York.

**For more information contact:** [protectingourwaters@gmail.com](mailto:protectingourwaters@gmail.com) or call CAPPNY: (845) 5987770.

**Websites:** [stoppilgrimpipeline.com](http://stoppilgrimpipeline.com) + [citizensforlocalpower.com](http://citizensforlocalpower.com) + [protectingourwaters.com](http://protectingourwaters.com) + [riverkeeper.org](http://riverkeeper.org)

**Social Media Hashtags:** #NoPilgrim #NoPilgrimPipelines.

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	<p>consensus. Read: <a href="#">Bill McKibben: Global Warming's Terrifying New Math (Rolling Stone)</a>.</p>
First responders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>First responders' lives would be put at risk.</b> Pilgrim is proposed as <b>two pipelines, which means double the risk</b> as super-flammable gasoline, jet fuel and other products would flow north while volatile oil flows south.</li> </ul>
Gasoline pipelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Gasoline pipelines</b>, such as the one Pilgrim proposes to build in the same trench as its proposed oil pipeline, are <b>dangerous</b>. Colonial spilled 336,000 gallons of gasoline in Shelby, Alabama in September 2016. Local first responders in New York could be <b>ordered to stay back due to deadly fumes</b>, as happened with Colonial's spill.</li> </ul>
Health impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bakken oil is extracted using fracking: high-volume hydraulic fracturing with horizontal drilling, harming the health, water, air, animals and people of North Dakota. For examples of <b>health harms due to Bakken Shale oil</b> fracking see Concerned Health Professionals of New York, <a href="#">Compendium of Scientific, Medical and Media findings of Demonstrating Risks of Harms of Fracking</a></li> </ul>
Indigenous lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Pilgrim's pipelines would threaten indigenous land.</b> It would ram through Ramapough Lunaape Nation's land, the nation after which the Ramapo River, Ramapo Mountains, town of Ramapo are all named. See: Split Rock Camp.</li> </ul>
Intimidation by pipeline companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pilgrim Pipeline LLC has already sent <b>threatening and intimidating</b> letters to homeowners claiming that Pilgrim has the right to take the homeowners' land by eminent domain if the homeowners don't cooperate. <b>This is not true at this time.</b> Pilgrim is already behaving in a bullying manner and cannot be trusted.</li> </ul>
Pipeline accidents (all)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● According to updated data from the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), <b>the total number of pipeline incidents</b> (explosions, fires, leaks and spills) over 10 years <b>averaged 631 per year (2004-2013). That is 1.7 per day.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "Lack of inspection and monitoring" is cited as a cause in most pipeline ruptures and pipeline accidents of all kinds. There are only <b>137 inspectors for 2.5 million miles of pipeline</b> in the U.S.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Pipeline breaks and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Here is an example of what can happen when a <b>gasoline pipeline ruptures:</b></li> </ul>

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explosions	<p>“An Olympic gasoline pipeline ruptured near Bellingham, Washington, resulting in 3 deaths, a fly fisherman and two 10 year old boys (1999). The cause was a series of errors and malfunctions in relief systems and process control computer systems... resulting in 277,000 gallons of gasoline spilled to Whatcom Creek. The fire burned for five days.” (Wikipedia <a href="#">Ref 26</a>, <a href="#">Ref 27</a>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Thousands of gallons of gasoline can rush out even from a <b>pinhole-sized leak in a half-inch-wide</b> stainless steel tube that’s part of a gasoline pipeline system. For example, on May 24, 2004, a pinhole-sized leak caused by wear unleashed thousands of gallons of gasoline that fueled the BP/Olympic pipeline fire and explosion...The blaze sent three firefighters to the hospital, and a mile-square area... was cordoned off...A metal electrical conduit had rubbed against the stainless steel sampling tube to open the <a href="#">pinhole leak</a>.</li> </ul>
Pipeline breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Newer pipelines rupture and spill</b>; old pipelines are not the only problem. The West Virginia pipeline which ruptured in January 2015 (called the Atex pipeline), creating a fireball, was only 15 months old.</li> <li>● <b>Pipeline breaks cause damage forever</b>. Read the <i>New York Times</i>: "<a href="#">Amid Pipeline Debate, Two Costly Cleanups Forever Change Towns</a>." Small and mid-sized towns may not be able to recover.</li> </ul>
Pipeline explosions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bakken Shale oil has a <b>low flashpoint. It is extremely flammable</b> and when it blows, it has created <a href="#">300-foot-tall fireballs with evacuation zones of five miles</a>. (linked: video from Bakken shale oil train explosion, Casselton 2014.)</li> <li>● <b>Pipelines explode</b>. Oil pipeline explosions happen frequently and can <b>be lethal and devastating</b>. <a href="#">This explosion in 2010 killed 29 people</a> in Puebla and destroyed a 5-kilometer area. <a href="#">Here</a> is a short list of pipeline explosions.</li> </ul>
Public opposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Resistance is growing. Over 72 municipalities</b> in New Jersey and New York have passed resolutions and ordinances opposing Pilgrim Pipelines! Public forums, letters to the editor, petitions, demonstrations, call-ins are increasing. The alliance is broadening.</li> <li>● Do we want to allow a private corporation, <b>which may use one or both Pilgrim pipelines to export crude oil</b>, to harm our climate and public health while risking our waterways, air, land, and safety, <b>for the next 50 years?</b></li> <li>● Pilgrim Pipeline is <b>just a proposal</b>, backed by Koch Industries former executives with Koch Brothers manners. It is not inevitable! Pilgrim has not even applied for the necessary permits, intimidated by the broad-spectrum opposition. <b>Pilgrim Pipeline is stoppable, with a high level of citizen</b></li> </ul>

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	<b>engagement and commitment to action.</b>
Waterways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Pilgrim’s pipelines would cross more than 250 waterways.</b> These two proposed pipelines could cause catastrophic damage to <b>drinking water</b>. For example, when a pipeline carrying Bakken Shale crude oil ruptured in January 2015, it spilled 50,000 gallons into the Yellowstone River, contaminating drinking water with carcinogenic benzene.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Oil pipelines damage waterways:</b> Enbridge oil pipeline released <b>1.1 million gallons</b> when it broke in 2010, sickening and displacing families. The EPA says an <b>80-mile stretch</b> of the Kalamazoo River remains polluted.</li><li>● Even without oil spills, the <b>horizontal drilling for this pipeline under the 257 Hudson Valley waterways would damage them.</b> In September 2014, <a href="#">Sunoco pipeline drilling destroyed historic Little Mingo Creek (video)</a> in Pennsylvania, <a href="#">killing aquatic life</a> for two miles downstream. The industry calls bentonite drilling mud "nontoxic" but its thick gray sludge coats creek bottoms like cement, <b>suffocating fish, amphibians, larvae, insects.</b></li><li>● The linked video shows cleanup crews trying to vacuum out the whole creek. It can't be done.</li></ul></li></ul>
Wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Pipelines harm wildlife.</b> In the California spill on Refugio Beach, sea lions have died after being coated by oil. But it’s not just spills that kill. <b>Pipelines, compressor stations, fracking and flaring</b> all damage habitat and pollute air and water, contributing, cumulatively, to <b>displacing and killing wild animals: mammals, fish and birds.</b></li></ul>

### Do You Have an Example Letter to the Editor?

An example of an LTE written about the Pilgrim Pipeline can be found [here](#).

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