

# ROGUE ACTION CENTER

## Tools for Organizing: News Releases: Getting Attention, Framing the Story

### KEY PRINCIPLES

1. **Be brief.** Reporters and editors are busy and work on tight deadlines. They are not likely to plow through long documents. Keep it to one page if possible. You can add a separate page of background if needed.
2. **Tell why this makes a good story for the media.** Most reporters and editors are less interested in whether your cause is just than in whether a story will appeal to their audience. They are looking for controversy or unexpected or new developments or information, and in many cases compelling visuals.
3. **Frame the story to show the public interest connection.** The first impression reporters and editors get may influence how they report the story. If our goals are good for the public interest – and not just the special interests of our organization or its members -- we need to reflect that from the first news release in the headline, lead sentences, facts provided, and the choice of who is quoted and what they say.
4. **Make clear that people, not just institutions, are taking action.** “Thousands of \_\_\_\_ in our community” are doing something, not XYZ organization.
5. **Be credible.** Use a factual, and not sarcastic or angry, tone. Give facts that back up key assertions.

### MECHANICS

**Decide whether to do a release at all.** Bombarding reporters with releases can cause them to tune out. Releases are best for news that is likely to be of interest to a broad cross-section of the media. In some situations it may be better to call, email, or schedule lunch with specific journalists who are most likely to be interested, or to schedule a briefing with any interested reporters.

**Provide clear contact information.** List at the top the name of your organization, the date of release, and a person to contact for more information with email and phone numbers.

**Use the headline to show why it's a good story for the media and that our goals are in the public interest.** The headline can be in two parts if needed to accomplish those purposes. Remember that it may be all a reporter or editor reads before deciding whether they are interested in your story. A short quote or soundbite can be one of the two parts of the headline.

**Start with one or two lead sentences that capture the story and the public interest frame.** In the process, you need to provide certain basics: who, what, when, where, why, how.

**Provide a short quote in the second or third paragraph.** Quotes should be 12 to 20 words. They should comment on the situation in a memorable way, rather than restating facts that are better presented in the release's text. They may be conversational and draw on idiomatic expressions, analogies, word plays, or surprising facts or twists.

**Use bold type or bullets to organize the information,** as is done in this tip sheet.

**Describe your organization** as you want reporters to think of it, using short "boilerplate" language at the bottom of every release in italic or smaller type. Over time, this repetition helps establish your organization's identity, as well as avoiding the need for questions about the most basic facts.

**Don't provide the other side's argument.** You can anticipate it and knock it down through the facts, arguments, and quotes you provide, but the release is stating the truth, not taking on the form of a "he said, she said" news story.

**Avoid jargon** or explain it.

**Double-check all facts, names, and numbers** and have more than one person proofread.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

**Give the media plenty of lead time.** That means the advance warning they need to put your story into their plans – not the time they would need to do it if it were already in their plans. You can "embargo" a story until a date and time you name, but recognize that reporters don't have to observe your rules and may use the information to get the story out of someone else. Embargoes work best with one or more reporters you trust.

**Provide it to individuals by name** if possible. If you don't know who the assignment editor is, call and ask.

**Email in a way that gets attention.** Make sure the subject line will be of interest to reporters and not just to us. Attach the release but also paste it into the email itself.

**Call, don't just send.** You can't assume that because you sent a release it was read. Make follow-up calls.

**Send to specialty media** if appropriate, such as ethnic media, weeklies, and online news sources.

# Fix WV Nursing Homes Now

1323 Eighth Ave., Huntington, WV 25701; Tel: 304/522-2871

## For Immediate Release:

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## For More Information:

Dan O'Sullivan, 304-522-2871

Cell: 304-762-8954

## New Data Shows...

# Nursing Home Crisis Deepened in Past Year Despite Funding Increases

## *Staffing Levels Down, Violations Up as Committee Meets to Devise Solutions*

The crisis of care in West Virginia nursing homes has become even worse, according to data released today.

Despite funding increases of about 20 percent from 1999 to 2001, staffing levels actually *decreased* over the same time period. Less staff led to an increase in resident care violations of 43 percent.

“Nursing home companies got more money, but seniors got less care,” said Del. Bobbie Hatfield, sponsor of legislation to raise staffing levels. “We can’t keep giving more taxpayer money to the nursing home industry without real accountability and better results.”

Annual inspections of West Virginia nursing homes in 2001 show:

- 43 percent of facilities with deficiencies in food sanitation;
- 39 percent with quality of care deficiencies;
- 37 percent with infection control violations;
- 36 percent were cited for failure to ensure resident dignity;
- 29 percent were cited for lack of comprehensive care plans.

The 2001 data is from a new report by Charlene Harrington, PhD., the nation’s leading expert on nursing home quality. Harrington presented the results of her latest study at a hearing of the select committee on nursing homes. The committee was created by the Legislature to study the crisis in care and come up with recommendations by the end of the year.

“Increases in minimum staffing levels would help prevent serious quality of care problems including death, hospitalization, and injury,” Harrington said.

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*Fix WV Nursing Homes Now is a coalition of nursing home workers, residents, family members, and community organizations united to ensure that seniors and people with disabilities receive quality care.*

Name, day,  
date,  
contact info



Makes clear  
there is news.  
Frames the  
story.  
Connects to  
current event.  
Factual tone.



Objective  
tone.  
Frames  
story.  
Gives key  
facts.



Quote  
validates  
coalition's  
view. Draws  
conclusion,  
not just  
restating  
facts.



Hard facts.  
Independent  
expert.  
Tied to  
current policy  
debate.



Clear,  
constructive  
solution.



“Boilerplate”  
frames how  
group should  
be seen.

