**Turning Negative Press into an Opportunity to Share Your Story**

This fill-in-the-blank template is designed to help you quickly respond to negative press about nursing homes. Replace the bracketed sections with your own information, add your own voice to the narrative, and submit to your local newspaper’s opinion editor.

**Title**

"The Real Story Behind **[Community Name]**"

*Tip: Keep the title short, clear, and engaging.*

**Opening Hook**

When you read recent headlines about nursing homes, you might think they tell the whole story. They don’t.

OR:

The recent article in **[Newspaper Name]** raised important concerns about nursing homes, but it left out the most important part- what is really happening inside our doors every day.

**Acknowledge the Issue**

We know that long-term care faces challenges, and we take them seriously. At **[Community Name]**, the safety, dignity, and quality of life for our residents is our top priority. We work every day to provide the best care possible, even in the face of staffing shortages, rising costs, and changing regulations.

**Provide Your Perspective**

Our team is made up of **[#]** dedicated professionals who show up every day for one reason: to care for and support the people who call **[Community Name]** home. We have **[briefly mention a few examples: high vaccination rates, safety protocols, specialized programs, or awards]**. These are not just numbers, they represent real lives being enriched and protected.

**Tell a Human Story**

Just last week, **[insert short, specific story about a resident’s milestone, a meaningful event, or staff going above and beyond. Keep it heartfelt and personal.]** This is the reality we see every day, moments of joy, dignity, and connection that can’t be captured by a single headline.

**Call to Action**

We welcome open conversations about how to improve long-term care in Iowa. Let’s work together- families, providers, community members, and policymaker- to ensure older adults receive the respect, resources, and care they deserve. Our doors are always open for anyone who wants to see for themselves the compassion and dedication that define **[Community Name]**.

**Signature Line**

[Your Full Name]
[Your Title]
[Community Name], [City]

**What Not to Do**

When responding to negative press, the tone and approach matter just as much as the facts you share. To make sure your op-ed builds trust instead of attracting more criticism:

* **Don’t attack reporters or the media.** Keep the focus on telling your story, not criticizing theirs.
* **Don’t dismiss concerns.** Acknowledge challenges honestly before sharing how you’re addressing them.
* **Don’t get defensive.** Use “we” statements about your mission and efforts, not “they’re wrong” statements about others.
* **Don’t overload with jargon or statistics.** A few key facts are helpful, but people connect most with human stories and clear language.
* **Don’t exaggerate or make promises you can’t prove.** Stick to real examples and commitments your organization can stand behind.
* **Don’t write in anger.** If emotions are high, draft it, set it aside, and return with a calmer tone.
* **Don’t forget your audience.** Remember you’re writing for families, neighbors, and community members, not regulators or industry insiders.

**Submission Tips**

* Keep it between 500–750 words
* Feel free to send to LeadingAge staff (sheibel@leadingageiowa.org) for editing and feedback
* Make sure to change the words to use your own voice in telling the story of your organization
* Include your contact info when submitting to the paper
* Send it directly to the opinion or editorial email address
* Follow up within a week if you haven’t heard back