HOW-TO EFFECTIVELY LOBBY YOUR LEGISLATOR

Effective Individual Communication
Your maximum influence comes in addressing your comments directly to your own legislator.

The Personal Visit
Most effective method of transmitting your message; helps connect names with faces. In communication afterward, you will have established yourself as a known concerned constituent. If your legislator is holding a hearing or workshop, try to attend. It is a good time to meet your legislator informally.

If your representative is not available, ask to meet the legislative assistant. S/he can generally be expected to be at least as well informed as your representative, and may have more influence than you suspect.

The Telephone
The telephone can be an effective tool. Remind the legislator of any previous contact. If the member is not available, speak with the legislative assistant.

The Letter – Snail Mail, E-Mail, Fax
Letters are important for the legislator and/or staff. The amount of mail on a particular piece of legislation frequently helps determine the legislators’ approach to an issue. One well-written letter will often prove weightier than a formal petition with many signatures. For this reason, it is generally considered better to express your opinion as an individual rather than as a member of an organization whose positions may already be well known to legislators.

Timing
Timing is everything. Make your call at a strategic time - just before a vote, for instance, or immediately following action by your legislator in support of your cause. Write when you know a particular piece of legislation is pending before a committee or when a bill is about to come before the full House or Senate.

1. Preparation
   Know what you are lobbying for and why.
   Find out in advance if s/he supports, opposes, or shows neutrality to our issue? Why?

2. Introduction
   Introduce yourself, including giving your full address if you are a constituent. You may also want to give a very brief description of what your job is or what organizations you work with that give you special knowledge on the issue.
   Identify yourself as a constituent, a supporter (if applicable) and a volunteer with the Tennessee Health Care Campaign.
   Explain what you wish to discuss.

3. Make Your Case
   Support your argument with the examples of what the bill strives to do and how and why.
   Connect the legislation either directly or indirectly to the representative’s constituents. Tell a story.
   Ask him or her to ACT by voting in support of the legislation and getting others to support it also.
   Distribute relevant materials before you leave.
   Take notes.
   Follow up with representatives, especially those who were undecided or needed more information.
   Write and mail “thank you” note after the meeting.
How to Lobby Your Legislator – Tips from The League of Women Voters
Lobbying to convince your legislator of the merits of your position requires an understanding of the rationale that supports that belief. Your goal is not to threaten or antagonize, but to influence with your knowledge and understanding of the issues.

Be Prepared - Do Your Homework. Know Yourself. Be aware of your own personal prejudices or biases that may hinder talking with your legislator. Such knowledge will enable you to maintain objectivity by anticipating your own response in a given situation. Example: she is a Democratic and you are a Republican – don’t let partisanship come into play. Stay focused on TREAT as a nonpartisan bill.

Know Your Organization - If you are speaking on its behalf you will want to be a credible representative. Be fully aware of your organization’s positions as well as the relationship it maintains with other organizations and with the legislature.

Know Your Legislator - Try to understand the basis for his/her positions: record on related legislation; tenure in legislative; constituent pressures; general predispositions; what kind of personal interview will be most effective (sensitivity to legislative attitudes about approach is essential). Your appearance as an objective individual, able to deal sympathetically with the concerns of both sides, will play in your favor.

Know Your Issue - Phrase the argument in your own words. But keep in mind that no one can be expected to address every question or matter of concern regarding an issue, however, so don’t hesitate to admit your lack of knowledge on a particular point. Be willing to pursue the answer and report back – this is good because it will give you a reason to make contact again.

Know Your Opposition - Anticipate the opposition and answer their arguments positively before such arguments surface publicly.

Lobbying Do’s and Don’ts

Do:

• Address your Senator or Representative properly.
• Identify yourself immediately at each contact. Public officials meet too many people to remember everyone.
• Know the status of the legislation. Refer to a bill by number whenever possible.
• Use your own words.
• Be brief and explicit, courteous and reasonable.
• Establish your own credentials or expertise on the subject of legislation under consideration.
• Give legislators succinct, easy to read literature; highlight important facts and arguments. Their time is limited.
• Write the chair or members of a committee holding hearings on legislation in which you are interested if you have facts that you think should influence his or her thinking.
• Get to know legislative staff and treat them courteously. Their cooperation can make or break your chances to reach the legislators themselves.
• Always keep off-the-record comments confidential.
• Write to say you approve, not just to criticize or oppose.
• In a letter include your address and sign your name legibly.
• Keep the door open for further discussion in spite of any apparently negative attitudes.

Don’t

• Don't apologize for taking his or her time. If you are brief and to the point s/he will be glad to hear from you.
• Don’t be arrogant, condescending or threatening toward legislators or their staff.
• Don’t argue or back recalcitrant legislators into a corner where they take a definite position against you.
• Don’t make notes of a conversation while talking to a legislator.
• Don’t send copies or form letters unless you have taken the time to include a personal note.

The qualifications for an effective lobbyist include:

• an intelligent command of current issues;
• a commitment to the cause, tempered by a tolerance for the human weaknesses of both colleagues and elected officials;
• enthusiasm and sincerity; and
• a sense of humor, genuine liking of people, and ability to roll with the punches.

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