

HOW TO LOBBY

The Connecticut General Assembly

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(this is a sample of how one might conduct lobbying; names and dates reflect facts of 2000-2001)

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that can. -- Margaret Mead

Why Do I Think You Can Lobby?

Because we all lobby all the time. Whether it is lobbying to convince a friend to see a certain movie, a child to clean their room, the boss for a raise, a co-worker to help out on a project--we all lobby to get things we want. We list the arguments for our position, we point out the problems with the other side's arguments, we enlist the help of those who are more powerful in the situation and we use our own position of power in the situation to get our way. All of this is lobbying. All are techniques we use to lobby the Connecticut General Assembly.

A Few Facts About The Connecticut General Assembly (GA)

Schedule: The GA is part time. It is in session for five months in the odd numbered years and three months in even numbered years. The schedule is set by the State Constitution. In 2001, the GA will go into session January 3rd, 2001 and will adjourn on June 6th, 2001.

Membership:

There are 151 House of Representative Members and 36 Senators in the GA. Democrats currently control the House (97-54) and the Senate (19-17). The Governor, John Rowland, is a Republican. The Lt. Governor, Jodi Rell, is also a Republican. The Lt. Governor serves as the President of the Senate meaning she presides over the Senate, but she only votes if there is a tie. The highest ranking member of the Senate is the President Pro Tempore, Kevin Sullivan, a Democrat. He is elected by the membership of the Senate. The House of Representatives is presided over by the Speaker of the House, who is Moira Lyons, a Democrat. She is a member of the House and elected by the House members.

Committees

The GA has joint committees with members from both the House and the Senate. Each Committee has a House and a Senate Chair. The number of Senators and Representatives assigned to each Committee is proportional by party and by house.

Unlike Congress, members of the GA do not have a lot of staff. They also do not receive a lot of phone calls or mail on most issues. Legislators acknowledge that they are impressed and give special attention to an issue if they receive even 10 letters or phone calls about a particular subject.

How To Write A Letter To Your Legislator

First, you should remember that we have a small state and a large GA. These legislators are your neighbors. Once you have met your representatives, you will likely run into them in the supermarket and at the post office. They also want and expect to receive letters and phone calls on issues and use these as an important source of information when they decide how to vote. SO, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU WRITE THAT LETTER - IT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

The letter should be short and to the point. Try to address only one issue in each letter. Start the letter by stating what it is you want the legislator to do, e.g. "Please vote in favor of House Bill 000" or "I would like you to work to maintain standards for the quality of health care provided to children on Medicaid" This could be the only part of the letter read by a busy legislator.

List the reason(s) that you care about this issue - "I am a nurse who has cared for sick children" or "I have young children of my own and cannot imagine what it would feel like to have a sick child and not be able to afford care." The more personal the note the better.

If this bill will have a special effect on an organization or group of people in that legislator's district, point that out. A local angle is always good.

Be polite and do not threaten the legislator. You are working to build a long-term relationship with this legislator. The truth is that even if a legislator is not with you on this issue s/he may be with you on the next issue you care about. It is important not to burn any bridges.

If you get a response to the letter, share a copy with any organization with which you are affiliated that is interested in the issue. This is especially important if the legislator say how she/he is going to vote on an issue or expresses a particular concern about the legislation.

If the legislator asks for any information or has a question you can't answer, be sure to find to find an appropriate person to help you respond and be sure someone gets back to the legislator.

Use your letter to your State Representative more than once. Also send your letter to your State Senator and the Governor. You can also send it to your local newspaper as a Letter to the Editor. Letters to the Editor in local papers are read by legislators.

Don't worry about the form of the letter. ANY LETTER IS BETTER THAN NO LETTER. Pen, pencil, typewriter, or even a postcard is O.K. Just be sure it is legible.

Send the letter to the legislator's home address. The envelope should be addressed to The Honorable (name of your legislator). It is best to write the address on the envelope by hand. If you don't know who your legislators are, one easy way to find out is to phone the Town Clerk at your town hall.

Of course, you could e-mail your letter. However, not all legislators are "on-line" and those who are on-line may have just started using e-mail. It remains to be seen how often they will check e-mail so it is best to send them a hard copy of your letter, too.

Follow up a reply to your letter with another letter on an issue that concerns you. Keep up the contact.

Be sure to find out what happened on the issue you wrote about and let your legislators know that you are following their action on this issue. It is great to write a "thank you" note if they voted the way you wanted on an issue. Send a note of regret if they voted against your wishes. Again be polite, but let the legislator know you are disappointed in the way he/she voted on this issue and why. **LEGISLATORS REALLY DO LISTEN TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS. LET THEM KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!**

Making A Phone Call

Some people may think it is easier to communicate by phone than to try to find the time to write a letter. Any type of contact is important!

Most of the suggestions for writing letters apply to phone calls as well. Make the call short, polite and to the point.

I would suggest you call the legislator at home. Leave a message if you don't reach him/her. But try back if you don't get to talk to your legislator. Don't call too early in the morning or too late at night.

If you get a machine leave a message as to what you want the legislator to do, e.g. "please vote against House Bill 0000" or "please support legislation that ensures that children on Medicaid get adequate health care." If a child answers the phone, ask if you can call back and leave a message on the machine.

Don't worry if you don't know the answer to a legislator's question. Promise to get back to him/her with an answer and DO.

Again, follow-up on the call. Be sure to call back and thank the legislator for their support or very politely express regret at their vote.

Visiting With Your Legislator

Visiting your legislator is probably the most effective way to influence him/her. The best time for these meetings is between sessions because that is when the legislator is likely to have the most time. But it is fine to try and schedule the meeting during the session. Remember that legislators are really busy, so you'll need to be flexible and try and schedule the meeting at their convenience. It is good to have the meeting in the legislator's home district to emphasize that the issue is a concern of her/his constituents.

Make an appointment by calling the legislator's home or legislative office. When you set up the meeting be sure to let the legislator know what issue(s) you want to discuss. You should limit the meeting to a discussion of one or two issues.

It is a good idea to have more than one person at the meeting. Keep the atmosphere of the meeting friendly. You are there to exchange ideas. It is sometimes just as important to know why a legislator opposes your position as it is to know that the legislator supports your position.

Leave literature for the legislator (either on the issue or general information on any organization with which you are working on the issue). This will serve as a reminder of your visit and the issue.

Follow up the visit with a thank you note and perhaps more information on your issue. If the legislator asked for certain information be sure you get back to the legislator with that information. Remember that the main objective of your contact is to establish an ongoing relationship with your legislator and establish yourself (and any organization with which you are affiliated) as a reliable source of information.

Be sure to take notes on the main points covered in the meeting. Keep a copy for your records and be sure to send a copy to any organization with which you are affiliated that is lobbying the issue.

Let's Write A Letter

First find out the name of your legislators. If you can't figure out which House or Senate member for your town represents you, write them all. You can send them all (and also your local paper) the same letter. But be sure to personally sign each letter.

How To Find your State Senate and House district and the names and addresses and phone numbers of your representatives

- Call your registrar of voters or town hall (the number is in the blue pages of your phone book) and ask for your House and Senate district.
- Then you can look in the phone book's blue pages to find the name, address and phone number of your Representative and Senator.

Here's an example:

Dear Representative _____; (or)

Dear Senator _____; (or)

To the Editor:

I live in your district (town) and would like you to support legislation (to urge our legislators to support legislation) that maintains the eligibility and standards of care for all children and youth who are on Medicaid. Services for children on Medicaid should continue to meet the standards of care established by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Society of Adolescent Medicine. I care deeply about health care for children.....(this is where you should insert a few sentences about why you are personally interested.- It does not have to be long and could be that you have children or grandchildren).

I would greatly appreciate it if you would keep me informed about any legislation on this issue this session. I would be glad to provide you with additional information about health care for children.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

(Sign each copy of the letter)

If you want to e-mail the message, you can.

That's it. It's not so hard.