

LOBBYING BY TELEPHONE

Making Calls

When the legislature is in session you can call your legislators at their offices in the state Capitol. Lists of members' names, office addresses, and telephone numbers are available from the Capitol, or the internet - often just: [www.\(your state\).gov](http://www.(your state).gov), or [www.state.\(2-letter abbrv\)us](http://www.state.(2-letter abbrv)us).

Here are some tips for making calls to your legislators and/or their aides:

- ◆ Identify yourself by name and address.
- ◆ Identify the bill you wish to talk about, by name and number (if possible).
- ◆ Briefly state your position and how you wish your legislator to vote.
- ◆ Ask for your legislator's stance on the bill or issue; ask for a commitment to vote for your position; don't argue if the legislator has an opposing view or hasn't yet decided.
- ◆ If your legislator needs further information, supply it as fast as possible.
- ◆ Do not be abusive; don't threaten your legislator.
- ◆ Recognize that legislators are often away from the office, at Committee business or on the floor of the chamber, so you may talk instead to an aide. That's great. Use these same basic rules. Staff are very reliable and will pass along what you said.
- ◆ Follow the call with a note restating your position, and thanking them for their time.

Using A Legislative Hotline

Some Legislatures have a **toll-free, Legislative Hotline**. If your state has such a line, it is a fast way for citizens to convey their views on bills. For the time it takes to make a single phone call, you can reach one or all of your legislators, and the Governor! When using a Hotline:

- ⇒ State your name, address, and who should get the message (the name of your legislator(s) and/or Governor - they can tell you who your legislators are);
- ⇒ Identify the specific bill(s) your are calling about; use the bill number if you know it;
- ⇒ Briefly state your position -- either support, opposition, or some combination.
- ⇒ Keep the message simple -- just a sentence or two.

It is important to remember that a Hotline is not an answering service, but only a service for brief messages about specific bills. If you wish to speak directly to a legislator you must call their office.

Whatever system your state has, if the line is busy (it often is), just keep trying. Getting through may take several tries.

Don't forget: 10 - 15 calls or letters is enough to get the attention of a legislator!

LOBBYING BY LETTER.

Letters are an important, even critical, way to influence legislation. Letters to the writer's own Senator and Representative are especially important. Here are some guidelines:

- ⇒ Make clear your position, and exactly what you want your legislator to do.
- ⇒ Write in your own words; tell how the legislation will affect you and others like you.
- ⇒ Be as knowledgeable as you can be, but don't worry if you're not an expert: your personal experience is the best evidence.
- ⇒ Avoid sending form letters, but if you send one, personalize it with a hand-written note.
- ⇒ Don't threaten, browbeat, or get nasty.
- ⇒ Write briefly, on one subject at a time, and if possible, refer to bills by name and number.
- ⇒ Don't try to become a pen pal; if you write too often you become a nuisance.
- ⇒ If you ask a question and don't get a reply, write another letter asking clearly for a response.
- ⇒ When a legislator votes as you asked, send a thank-you note.

NOTE: If you are writing to your *U.S. Senators or Representative*, send the letter either to their office in the state (thanks to the anthrax threat, letters sent to the U.S. Congress go first to a postal facility in Maryland, to be irradiated; that can take 4-6 weeks.). Or, send your message by FAX, or email (see below).

In short, an effective letter would include:

- **Who you are** (*I am a voter in your district, and I belong to the 350-member Association of Pizza-Eating Voters....*)
- **What you want done** (*We are writing to ask your support of House Bill 1234 when it comes before your Committee....*)
- **What the bill does** (*This bill would require all public feeding programs -- e.g., school lunch, senior citizen -- to serve pizza three times a week.*)
- **Who supports it** (*This bill is supported by a broad coalition of pizza makers, tomato growers, sausage producers, and the local Weight Watchers....*)
- **What you want done again, in slightly different words** (*Please make this possible, by voting for HB 1234 in Committee and again later on the House Floor....*)
- **Your name, address, and telephone number** (*Please feel free to contact us; we would be happy to answer any questions or be of other assistance to you in this matter.*)

Email is also effective. Two special rules apply to email:

- ⇒ Be sure to include your real name (fun.gal@aol does not tell them you are a constituent);
- ⇒ Be sure to include your home address – again so they know you are a constituent.

During the legislative session, letters to state legislators should be sent directly to the Capitol, and may be addressed:

Senator (or Representative) _____
State Capitol
Capitol city, state name zip code

MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS at the Capitol

Personal visits are a highly effective way to help legislators understand your position or program. Legislators welcome visits from constituents. They want you involved! However, these are busy people, so time is critical; plan ahead and use the time well.

You have two state legislators: one state senator and one state representative. If you don't know who your legislators are, you can: check the legislature's website, call the local League of Women Voters, or call your County Clerk.

If you make an appointment with your Senator and/or Representative when the legislature is in session, there is no guarantee the legislator will be able to keep it. Legislative schedules change at a moment's notice. Don't take this personally; it is just "how it is." In all of your visits, expect to be brief, specific, and polite.

TIPS for an Effective Meeting:

- Make it easy for your legislator to meet with you: offer several possibilities and do your best to accommodate them.
 - Make an appointment in advance -- expect to get about 15 minutes. You can call the Capitol, or check the website for your legislator's number.
 - Be on time; be prepared; be polite; and be brief.
 - Dress appropriately for an appointment in the legislature (not fancy, but not as you would for going to the store or working in the yard – e.g., wear slacks, not jeans or sweats).
 - Try to learn in advance where your legislator stands on the issue.
 - Don't be surprised if they don't know about your issue -- that's why you are there.
 - Be prepared to explain how the bill (the issue) will affect you and others in the legislators' district.
 - Memorize a 60-second speech to use at the beginning of your meeting. It should include:
 - ✓ Who you are, and
 - ✓ Any group or Coalition you belong to.
 - ✓ The topic you came to talk about (e.g., the name and number of a bill).
 - ✓ What you want them to do (e.g., we want you to vote FOR.... or vote AGAINST).
 - ✓ A Fact Sheet with basic information, plus contact information for you, or your group.
- (This way, if the appointment is interrupted, you'll still have gotten your point across; if the appointment continues, you can elaborate on these points.)
- If you don't know the answer to a question that's o.k; say you will find the answer and get back to them -- and then DO.
 - Before leaving, ask how *you* can be of help to *them* (more information? talking with others?).
 - Follow up with a thank you note and any information that was requested.

PREPARING A GOOD FACT SHEET -- The Basics

What Are Fact Sheets?

Fact Sheets introduce you -- and your issue -- in a format useful to busy people. They come in many styles, shapes, and sizes, but every advocacy group needs at least one.

Good Fact Sheets recognize that busy people need something short and punchy to grab their attention. A good Fact Sheet says: “Read me. I’m a painless way to get acquainted with an issue.” (Anything long and complicated may not just be ignored, it can be counter-productive.)

Fact Sheets can do many things:

- identify your group with a particular issue;
- set out facts -- key statistics relating to a problem, issue, or group;
- provide Answers to commonly-asked Questions (Fact Sheets can use a Q&A format);
- set out information using graphics or charts;
- inform, persuade, educate (e.g., about a legislative proposal or budget request);
- make an argument for a particular course of action.

Good Fact Sheets rely on format...

Nothing over 1 or 2 pages;

No long sentences or wordy paragraphs;

Something easy to read, with sub-heads, “bullets,” and possibly graphics; and

Lay-out that carries the eye from basic facts to logical conclusions or the “pitch,”

As well as content...

Your most compelling, most useful statistics;

Information arrayed to “make an argument,” targeted to a particular audience;

Homey examples, or simple ways to convey complicated points;

Reflecting careful thought about the audience, and what facts will work best with *them*;

Drawing a conclusion or suggesting something the reader can do,

...To make a point.

In Short: good Fact Sheets include most or all of the following:

- Basic definition(s),
- basic statistics, and
- basic information,
- organized to draw a conclusion or invite the reader to take some action, plus...
- the name/address/telephone number and contact person of the group responsible.

Now it’s YOUR turn: “Just Do It!”