

## Lobbying the Legislature

Political action can take many forms. Contact with elected and appointed officials is one of the most effective ways citizens can influence policy and legislation. A personal visit with a public official is often the most effective kind of political action. The expressed wishes and desires of the electorate ultimately influence most governmental decisions. Direct, personal lobbying can make a significant difference in an official's vote or in an executive's action. The discussion provides an opportunity for exchange of information and clarification of complex or difficult points.

Although every public official is an individual with differing background and interest, there are some common guidelines for any lobbying effort. Three factors will determine effectiveness:

- Procedure used to approach the public official
- Knowledge of the issue
- Manner in which the issue is discussed

The procedure for contacting officials can be letters, telephone calls, emails, and personal visits. For talking with public officials there are some important guidelines. Knowledge about the issue, knowing your public official and the way you approach your public officials are as important as the content of your message.

You can be most effective by:

- Being familiar with your elected official's position, including the powers, limitations, and their areas of interest.
- Being informed, knowing your facts thoroughly and presenting your case succinctly. Officials appreciate relevant facts and research on the issues.
- Being brief. Since officials are busy, try to get your point across in 5 to 10 minutes.
- Being friendly, sincere and respectful.
- Being willing to admit it if you don't know an answer and finding the answer as soon as possible.
- Being a good listener. If the official is strongly opposed to your position, hear the other viewpoint and state your criticism in a positive way.
- Being direct. Tell the person exactly what action you wish taken on the issue.
- Being brief with your message and following up periodically. A large amount of written material can be overwhelming.
- Being aware of your official's position on the issue. Your approach can be adjusted accordingly.
- Being aware of arguments used by opponents. Prepare responses with counterpoints.
- Being familiar with the title, the number or the provisions of any specific bill you are discussing.
- Being confidential about what an official said during an off-the-record interview.
- Being prompt in following up on your visit with a thank you note of the time and attention given to your view point. A summary of your position and any new information that supports your position are very helpful.
- Being aware of how the official acted on the issue. If the individual votes the way you wish, send the person a thank you note. It will be appreciated and remembered.

Remember your communications with elected officials help to create a government that is truly of the people, by the people, and for the people.

## LOBBY TIPS

### **DO...**

#### **Be Timely**

But don't expect your legislators to be on time. Often they have hearings or meetings they cannot anticipate or leave.

#### **Be Brief**

Before the appointment, practice a three-minute statement of the information you want to present. This will force you to think about what you want and why you want it.

#### **Be Clear**

Identify the issue or bill you are concerned about and what you would like your legislator to do.

#### **Be Civil**

To both the legislator and staff.

#### **Be Grateful**

Thank the legislator when the meeting is finished and follow up in the next week with a thank you note.

#### **Be Accurate**

#### **Be Persuasive**

#### **Be Persistent**

### **USE YOUR COMMON SENSE**

The impression you make with legislators will influence their opinions of our organization.