

Lobbying Made Easy

In order to understand how to lobby, it might make sense to know where lobbying came from. Simply, lobbying came from the UK Parliament when individuals would stand in the lobby of the House of Parliament and meet their legislators before a session commenced. The nickname stuck and since then, those who discuss pieces of legislation with their representatives would now be considered a “lobbyist.”

It’s important to note that there are laws that govern lobbying. Those laws can be read here: (<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/LobbyistPublicSearch/>). Formal lobbyists typically have to register with their state and keep extensive records of any communications, meetings or finances spent in a lobbying effort.

However, as a citizen you are allowed to lobby as much as you’d like and should do just that. Lobbying your legislators is a great way to get them involved in issues that are important to you and your constituency and it really isn’t as hard as you might think.

Lobbying is one of the best ways you can advocate. It’s important to know that you have the power to make a change! A lot more than you realize.

Here is a handy guide for the lobbying process:

Step 1: The Proposed Legislation

- Is there relevant legislation that interests you? Start by checking MaMHCA’s Public Policy Page (<http://www.mamhca.org/public-policy/updates/>) or our national organization, AMHCA’s page (<http://www.amhca.org/?page=advocacy>). You can also go to the states website and find the various committees that oversee and make the first decision on bills brought before them. The website is: (<https://malegislature.gov/Committees/Joint>)
- Learn as much as you can about the proposed legislation. For example: the problem(s) it addresses, its impact, its benefits/risks, etc.
- Make sure you know the basics about the bill when you meet with your legislator.
- Although legislators typically have an idea of what bills they are seeing, never assume they are experts in a given area. Make sure and be ready to explain key points and know what they are yourself.

Step 2: Contact Your Legislator

- Find out who your legislators are by going to www.wheredoivotema.com
- Make an appointment with them. Call their office or email their legislative aide.
- Meeting face to face is the MOST effective way to lobby.
- Meeting with their legislative aide can be just as good as meeting with the legislators. Aides are very important to the legislator and can be a great advocate for you.
- It’s important to note that legislators typically only speak to their constituents. This means that you should use these tips when speaking to YOUR legislator. If you need to speak to a legislator outside of your district, try to bring the legislators constituent with you to speak.

Also, legislators outside of your district sometimes only reply to emails or calls from their constituency, so it might help to have that constituent make the appointment with you.

Step 3: Prepare to Speak with Your Legislator

- Research your legislator:
 - Know where they stand on the issue or their standings on previous similar issues.
 - Know what committees they are on or positions they hold.
 - Know if they are sponsoring the bill you are lobbying for. You don't need to "convince" a legislator to support a bill when they are sponsoring it, but you may need to remind them of the details.
- Many legislators have heard the facts about the issues.
- Make sure you not only bring the facts, but a personal story to show the real world impact of the proposed legislation.
- Never assume that the legislator knows the bill you are referring to. If there is a bill, there should be a "number" assigned to it along with a title. Know what that number and title is and be prepared to let the legislator know, so they can look it up when they do their own research.

Step 4: Meet with Your Legislator

- Be on time!
- Introduce yourself:
 - Shake their hand.
 - Tell them where you are from.
 - Tell them the organization or association you affiliate most with.
- Thank them for taking the time to meet with you.
- Always be polite and honest during your meeting.

Step 5: The Conversation

If You Lobby By Yourself:

- Be brief and to the point.
- Have a list of talking points, don't read directly from it.
- Use a personal story to make your stance human and to show the real world impact of the legislation.
- Be prepared to answer questions. If you don't know the answer, don't worry! They are not expecting you to know everything. If you don't know, tell them you'll get back to them and make sure you do.

If You Lobby in a Group:

- Each person should have a specific role when you meet with your legislator:
 - One person to tell the facts.
 - One to tell the personal story.
 - One to remember key points raised for follow up.
 - One to ask for support.

- People can have multiple roles, but it is important for everyone to know their role before meeting with your legislator.
- Everyone should also take their time and make sure not to speak over one another. That can be confusing. Know your job beforehand and stick with it.

Step 6: Asking for Support

- Ask your legislator if you have their vote on the legislation you are advocating for.
 - Whether they say yes or no, thank them for their time.
 - If they say they are unsure, ask what other information you can provide for them. Legislators who are unsure can be swayed. You can help do that by providing them with more information.
 - Be prepared that they might say no and don't take it personally. It is all part of the process and they can't always say yes. Thank them for being direct and honest with you. Do not argue with them or try to sway them from that point.

Step 7: Following up

- If you told your legislator you would get back to them on something make sure you do.
- Rule of thumb - Send a thank you note within a week, but try for the next day. This ensures that:
 - They know you are serious about your issue.
 - They will be more likely to remember you in the future.

Step 8: Repeat

- Now that you have lobbied, you now know how to do it and your legislator now knows who you are, so continue making contact.
- Calling and emailing are other ways to lobby. If you don't make it to the State House don't let that stop you. Pick up the phone and make the call!
- Most legislators have district offices. You can always make an appointment to meet with them there.
- Lobbying is important to the legislative process and can be very empowering.
- Legislators need to know what issues are important to their constituents and you are the perfect one to let them know

Now that you know the process, go out there and fight for your field. Lobbying can seem intimidating, but it is really easy. Just follow these steps to familiarize yourself with the process and you'll be on your way. If you'd like to know more about the legislative process please follow this link: http://www.house.gov/content/learn/legislative_process/ This will help you on where a bill will be or could go. Federal and State procedures are basically the same, so you won't see much variation with how the process works.

Good luck and thank you for getting involved!