



Lobby Meeting with an Elected Representative

Visiting the General Assembly or your county or city hall to lobby an elected representative can be an exciting entry into the world of influence and advocacy. The intent is typically to present your personal, or organizations view or position on a specific issue, a piece of proposed legislation or to recommend changes to existing legislation. Actually visiting the representative at their legislative office is quite common, either by appointment, or as a walk-in, although the expectations one would have on a walk-in visit must be different.

Know the Legislative Process

Lobby visits are typically driven by proposed legislation or bill, and the need to provide the legislator with your personal or organizations position on that proposed bill. All legislative levels of government, state, county and city, have a prescribed process for the introduction of new legislation, so you need to know what those processes are. Draft legislation typically takes months to be passed into law and many draft bills never make it through the process, or are changed considerably from the original draft, so establishing the most appropriate point of intervention of your lobbying initiative is important. Keeping track of the proposed draft can be done through State, County and City websites.

Individual lobby initiative

As an individual voting citizen or property taxpayer, you have the right to address your concerns or proposals with your elected representative at any time. You can do this by sending an email or writing a letter. Doing this gives the elected representative notice of your concern, and typically you may get a response in writing. **Read the paper on “Building a Relationship with your Elected Representative”.**

You have the right to request a meeting to present your concern or proposal, and this should be done by requesting an appointment, which typically will only be granted if your concern is of such import as to warrant it, so you need to have your proposal written up in good detail. Sending that prior to any meeting is a good idea so that it can be studied. You may end up meeting a legislative assistant who will pass your information on, and this is normal so don't feel aggrieved if you have not met the elected representative personally. Be assured your concern has been noted. **Some tips if you get an audience at all.....**

- Be on time, and respect the legislator's time. Make sure your presentation fits the time you have been allotted.
- Know your facts, like which existing legislation covers your issue, relevant data surrounding the issue and so on. Don't presume the legislator is not aware of the issues.
- Dress conservatively and do not wear clothing that has a political slogan as this will be a distraction, even if the representative is likely to support your cause.
- Provide a one page summary of your request that should contain the details of the request, the background information and research that supports your request, and the consequences you feel will be positive not only for yourself but the community at large. You can provide documented background research as well, but focus on the one page summary.
- Stay on topic and avoid a complaining demeanor.
- If you oppose the legislator's position, make it clear that you take an opposing view, and explain why, show the negative consequences of the legislators vote, and explain your organization's mandate and level of support and influence.
- Listen to the legislator's responses, particularly those which describe the process that will be followed to deal with your issue. Avoid trying to pressure the legislator to speed things up, sometimes they have no control over the timeline. Thank the legislator and their staff for their time and consideration.
- Write a thank you note after your meeting. Make your own notes of the meeting for follow up use.

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This series provides congregations and individuals the skills to build and deploy justice ministries and advocacy methods. Other methods in this series include:

**Building a relationship with your elected representative*

**Writing a letter or email to your elected representative*

**Writing a letter to the press, blog or website*

**Organizing a rally or protest meeting*

**Building a congregational justice ministry*

**Proposing legislation*

**Parish based Community Organizing*

**Creating a Conference Resolution*

**Asset Based Community Development*

**Challenging legislators*

**Community Listening*

The Board of Church and Society provides advocacy and justice programs for congregations.

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General Group Lobby Initiative

A popular lobbying activity for an organized group or organization is to spend a full day lobbying elected representatives on a variety of issues close to their organizational mission. The UMW in several conferences use this method to address a number of important public policy issues like health care, education and women's issues. Typically a large group receive a full briefing close to the beginning of a legislative session on what the session is likely to deal with. Members are briefed on the potential direction of the state legislative assembly, the legislative process, and they build a set of positions on issues germane to the organization's interests. The larger group is split into small groups of 3 or 4 and then sent to legislators offices on a single day. This way many legislators are visited in a short time. Typically the legislator's legislative staff are the persons being seen. A short meeting with a single sheet profile of the organization's positions plus any other relevant information is given to the legislator's staff following a short presentation.

It is important for the organization to ensure that the legislator is aware of the level of influence and mandate it has with and from its members. This provides the organization with some power to influence the legislator. Other important factors to remember like time, dress, focus, information and so on are important. Each small groups must be serious, look and sound professional, give a quality presentation, and focus on topics that are important to its own agenda. This means a lot of preparation work to ensure that the organization's membership is behind the positions adopted.

These "Lobby Day" experiences are great to provide the average member with an opportunity to experience dealing with government and the learning that occurs is very useful to build organizational capacity to affect public policy. This is a great congregational activity.

Focused Group Lobby Initiative

A more effective approach for an organization to affect the legislative process is to focus on specific issues that impact on the organization's and the public's interests. This typically means focusing on a single issue at a time. It also suggests a longer term process of lobbying, with not just one lobby visit, but an ongoing series of multiple approaches that inform elected legislators with the organizations positions. It includes building a longer term relationship with legislators who sympathize with the organization who can act as legislative sponsors in the legislative assembly.

The advocating organization should have as one of its core missions the issue it will advocate for, or if the organization takes an opposing position to what is being proposed as a bill, then it will advocate to oppose the measure.

A long term approach would be to build a continuing set of public utterances and proclamations, constantly feeding the general public with its view on the topic, its support or opposition arguments, based on facts and the impact of the proposed legislation. This would include using public seminars, press articles, regular visits with elected representatives, letters to the press, petitions from supporters, coaching supporters to write to elected officials, and regular lobbying visits to elected representatives. Such visits should follow the visit guidelines above. Leaving a one page position paper with a clear supportive set of arguments is critical.

The key is to remain focused. It is sometimes more effective to narrow down one's support for or opposition to a particular elements of a legislative proposal, as this can sometimes result in the draft being accepted or rejected.... Pick the most advantageous or most heinous element only, as this attracts the most attention.

It is important to build a continuing relationship with elected representatives so that over time they will recognize your organization's role in society, and its power to influence communities. This enables you to use the organization's power and relationship with the public at large. So the influence is both at the elected representative, and the public, who constantly need to be informed, educated and persuaded.

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