

Steps for Lobbying Your Legislator

*"We, in America, do not have government by the majority.
We have government by the majority who participate."*

Thomas Jefferson

In today's world, due to our lax moral and religious attitudes, our society is much more dependent on human legislation to control behavior than were our forefathers. At times, proposed legislation has the potential to greatly impact our families and our society either for good or bad. We know that it is incumbent upon Christians to influence our society and the culture. One way we can do this is to persuade our representatives to vote in favor of laws that hold to a biblical worldview and to vote against those that are adverse to a biblical worldview.

Our legislators are constantly involved in the process of writing, reading, and determining whether to support or oppose specific legislation. Very few lawmakers read every piece of proposed legislation; rather, they depend on input from their staff and others to help them determine whether to support or oppose specific bills. Legislators are also influenced by the concerns that constituents bring to their attention.

Monitoring proposed legislation is one of the first things a culture impact ministry leader should be doing consistently. This may be done by reading the news on pro-family websites as well as reading their email updates. At times, action should be taken on the information gleaned regarding proposed legislation. This may be done by contacting your legislator by email, phone, letter, or in person.

Many Christians are neither comfortable with, nor confident about, contacting their legislator in person. Holding a "Learn to Lobby your Legislator" training at your church or with a small group in a home will demonstrate to citizens how simple the process of lobbying a legislator can be. With a minimal amount of training, citizens will begin to see that they can influence the outcome of proposed legislation and, through doing so, the course of society.

What does "Lobby" mean?

Lobby (verb): to solicit or try to influence the votes of members of a legislative body.

Most people are comfortable writing, emailing, or calling their legislator's office. Our focus here is only that which seems to be most intimidating - the in-person office visit. We will cover the steps you may wish to follow in order to make a highly effective visit to your legislator's office.

Prepare to Visit Your Legislator's Office

1. Select the legislation about which you wish to speak to your legislator. You may wish to follow the advice of a pro-family organization and make contact with your legislator when the organization has called for action.
2. Read the proposed legislation and study all sides of the issue. Read a description of the legislation you want to speak about with your legislator. The example shown here is

California Assembly Bill (AB) 1266. (See Sample A). A description of the bill you are interested in can be obtained from a pro-family organization or from your state's Official Legislative Information website. Also, contact your state policy council or a national pro-family organization to gain an understanding of the legislation from a biblical point of view.

3. Be aware of the status of the legislation about which you are concerned. Before the entire Senate or Assembly votes on a bill (called a "floor" vote) it is assigned to, and must be processed through, various committees. You should know the current status of the bill. This means that you should know which committee is reviewing the bill at the time you make the office visit. This information can usually be found on your state's legislative website. If it is not available there, this information may be obtained from the office of the bill's author. Do be aware that his/her office is working diligently to pass the proposed legislation. While there is no need to memorize the entire cycle a piece of legislation must follow as it proceeds through the legislature, it is wise to be aware of the process. To read more about how a bill gets passed in your state, visit the Faith and Public Policy website where you will find a link to your state's legislative information website.
4. Schedule your meeting. You may visit a legislator's office unannounced or you may call your legislator's office to make an appointment. Typically, in either case, you will meet with the legislator's liaison and not with the legislator him/herself. If you make an appointment, the receptionist may ask the reason for your visit along with your home address and phone number. The duration of the visit could be as little as 10 minutes.
5. Use notes during your meeting. Be sure to write out the main points you wish to cover. Citizens are not professional lobbyists and are not expected to recite the law nor know every detail of the proposed legislation. Using notes will show that you have invested the time and effort to be prepared for your meeting. Your concern, diligence, and commitment will be evident. The "Notes" page, is for your use only. Do not leave this sheet with your legislator or the legislative liaison.

Visit the Legislator's Office

- Greet the receptionist, identify yourself, and state the reason for your visit.
- If you have made an appointment, the receptionist will inform the legislative liaison that you have arrived for your meeting.
- If you have not made an appointment, explain that you wish to speak with someone about a particular piece of legislation. You may meet with whomever is available—it is fine to simply give your input to the receptionist if no one else is available.
- During your meeting with the legislator or the liaison:
 - Identify the bill by number and author.
 - State your support of or opposition to the bill and ask the legislator to adopt your position.
 - Explain what the bill does.

- Explain the impact the legislation will have upon your community or state.
- If possible, make it personal and tell how it will affect you personally.
- If you've been sharing information with others about this bill, point that out.
- Give a copy of the entire bill to the person with whom you are speaking.
- Provide other pertinent information about the issue from a non-partisan source.
- Be as succinct as possible.
- Focus on one issue and one "ask."
- Always be courteous in order to build a relationship with the legislator's staff.

Ask Questions

The liaison may not tell you how the legislator will vote on the bill. Due to the volume of bills introduced into the legislature, it is possible that the liaison, or even the legislator, may not be aware of the bill's existence.

If the legislator has not taken a position, or if his/her position differs from yours, ask what you can do to encourage the legislator to take your position. End your visit by asking for a written response from the legislator once he or she takes position on the legislation.

Again, remember that the visit is an opportunity to build a relationship with the legislator's staff. Even if the legislator does not vote the way you wish on this legislation, a positive relationship can be beneficial when you deal with other issues in the future.