

Advice for Lobbying Your Legislators

(Source: Oklahoma Legislature Website, Information Section, www.lsb.state.ok.us/)

Lobbying in Person

Meet in the legislator's office or somewhere in the member's home district. If possible, introduce yourself and your organization immediately after the legislator's election. This would probably be done in the home district before the Legislature convenes. Explain your group's legislative interests. Interview your legislator or her/his positions. Try to have a person living in the legislator's district be present or, better yet, have that person conduct the interview. Succeeding contacts may be made in the home district again or at the Legislature.

- Make appointments, if possible. Keep them. Be prompt. Some legislators prefer that you drop in on their Capitol office rather than make appointments. If such is the case and you drop in and cannot make contact with your legislator, deliver your message to the secretary or research assistant assigned to her/him.
- Go in groups of two or three. You can give each other support.
 1. At the interview:
 2. Identify yourself and your organization.
 3. Explain briefly why you are there.
 4. Be sure to have a hand-out to leave behind—research on the issue and on a one- or two-page summary of your position and reasons why.
- Be brief and to the point as you outline your position. Considerations that led to your group's position add a great deal to your rationale because they let legislators know what people are thinking and how. If you are representing a group, don't give personal opinions which might be misunderstood as that of your organization.
- Listen to your legislator's views - not only so that you can politely combat the arguments, but just as important, so that you and your group can develop insight into the rationale of your opposition? Know where the opposition is.
- Be friendly, earnest and down to earth. Oklahoma legislators seem to like a low-key approach. If a legislator disagrees with you, don't become aggressive, defensive, or over-intellectual. The legislator is listening to constituents too, and the lobbyist should respect that. You may have to agree to disagree on a certain bill, but keep your friendliness intact so that you can start fresh on another bill on another day!

- If you don't know, say so. You can find out answers to questions asked of you and get them to the legislator later. Be sure to follow up.
- Leave the way open for further conversations on the issue. Even if you never agree on the issue under the discussion, you may want this person's support on other legislation.
- Follow up your visit with a letter. Thank the legislator for support if support was indicated or for the opportunity to present your views. Also, send any additional information which may have been requested about your issue or your organization. If you had been unable to answer a question during the visit, look up the answer and include it in your letter.
- Thank you's. Thank you's are important at all states of lobbying. Groups often take their supporters for granted and woo the "undecided" or "opposition." Supporters need strokes, too. Don't wait until an issue is settled before you say thank you.

How to Write to Legislators:

- Spell the legislator's name correctly, with proper address. All correspondence with legislators should be sent to their address at the Capitol. If the Legislature is not in session, their mail will be forwarded to them at their home address.
- Describe the bill by popular name and by number.
- Know if your legislator is one of the authors and acknowledge it.
- Be brief and clear. In your first sentence, state the issue and how you want your elected official to vote. Give a short, well-prepared statement of your reasons. Longer letters are appreciated if you have some new information on a subject.
- Do not express anger; you will want to have future contact with the legislator.
- Be polite in your requests for support and give reasons why. Never demand. Never threaten defeat at the next election.
- Use your own words. Do not use form letters or postcards.
- Write about only one issue in a letter.
- Be constructive. Explain an alternative or better solution to the problem.
- Write legibly or type.
- Send a note of appreciation when your elected official supports your issue.
- When you sign your name, make sure your officials can tell how you wish to be addressed if they should reply.