

EFFECTIVE DIRECT LOBBYING TIPS AT THE STATE LEVEL

Lobbying is persuading political decision makers who have the power to take a course of action that NASW-PA supports. You are attempting to persuade a decision maker that our position has more value than an opposing position or other positions and, if chosen, the overall benefits for the community will be greatest.

So, what makes an impact with state legislators?

BREVITY – To be effective, your presentations must be short. Whether your presentation is simply an informal conversation with an elected official in the hallway, or a very structured presentation before an appropriations committee, it should be emphatic and to the point.

You should always, of course, introduce yourself and state whom you represent (number of NASW-PA members in the legislator's district), the extent of your interest and involvement with a particular issue and why you believe there is a need for some specific legislation to address the problem.

ACCURACY – Always give accurate information. The credibility of your testimony depends on its accuracy. If you cannot supply documentation to support your claim, don't make the statement. Since most of the issues you will be supporting will require repeated interaction with legislators, administrators, or staff in their offices; it is best to start with a correct base of information. Never lie! If you don't know an answer, always respond "I don't know but I will find that information for you" (and then find it: chapter staff is available for assistance if needed) rather than guessing.

PREPARATION – Be prepared. Review the bill thoroughly along with the main support materials so you can talk knowledgably about the bill.

Anticipate questions. Before you meet with any elected official or community leader, have your thoughts organized. Remember that the burden of proof is on you. You must establish your position with clear and convincing evidence.

COURTESY – Be polite, not demanding. Too often, advocates alienate entire legislative committees even though some of the members may have agreed with the position originally. This change in attitude often occurs because the advocate was rude, hostile, or combative.

PROTOCOL – Address the elected official using a salutation, e.g. Senator Harris. Attire is business. Always carry your business card and any other pin or badge that identifies you as a social worker.

APPRECIATION – Thank the elected official. Too often, we ask elected officials to act in our interest but we then fail to express our appreciation. When your legislator does something for you, respond accordingly with a note of gratitude recapping what she or he has agreed to do. When drafting your letter or email, keep in mind that your letter or parts of it may show up in future campaign literature.

HOW DOES ALL THIS ACTIVITY APPEAR TO LEGISLATORS?

Lobbying is fair persuasion, responsible action, desired input, and mutually useful. Legislators *expect* to be contacted, and *need* to be contacted to do their job well. They may be helping you; but you are also helping them. In addition, because you are a volunteer or constituent, your opinion is more valued because you represent what you believe.

Effective Direct Lobbying Checklist

Before you lobby:

- You are versed on NASW-PA's messages on the issue.
- You know who the decision makers are for the issue.
- You are aware of the status of any relevant/related legislation.
- You know how to contact legislators and/or staff.
- If applicable, you have reviewed the bill thoroughly.
- You have verified all supporting documents and/or information.

While you lobby:

- You state your name, contact information, organization affiliation, and number of constituents you represent.
- You keep your presentation brief.
- The reason for your contact is clear.
- You state the specific action you want the official to take.
- The reason for taking the action is clear.
- You are polite and not demanding.
- You thank the official.

Following these steps can help ensure your position is brief, clear, and concise. It can aid in the lawmaker's decision-making process.