Student National Medical Association
Health Policy Fact Sheets

Lobbying 101

Last updated: Dec. 2008

Overview

Lobbying is the practice of influencing decisions made by government. It includes all attempts to influence legislators and officials, whether by other legislators, constituents or organized groups. A **lobbyist** is a person who tries to influence legislation on behalf of a special interest or a member of a lobby. Governments often define and regulate organized group lobbying

When Should You Lobby

The desire to lobby is usually stimulated by an interest in a particular issue, such as health care reform, war, or budgetary allocation. When an issue of interest is addressed in Congress, you may lobby your Senator or Representative to persuade them to vote in favor of your desired objective. For example, you can contact your legislator or other legislators to request that they cosponsor an upcoming bill. This is ideal because the more cosponsors on a bill the more likely it is to gain support and move through the legislative process.

Who is my Representative/Senator?

Go to the websites listed below. Enter in your zip code and search to find your congressperson.

House of Representatives:
http://www.house.gov/
Senate:
http://www.senate.gov/

The link to your congressman's website will also be available. Click on that link. Once you have reached their website, you can then write down their contact information as well as read about their positions on many of the current issues.

How to Contact Your Representative

Writing a Letter to your legislator

- It is best to write the address on the envelope by hand.
- The letter should be short and to the point. Try to address only one issue in each letter. Start the letter by stating what you want the legislator to do.
- List the reason(s) that you care about this issue, the more personal the better.
- If the issue will have a special effect on an organization or group of people in that legislator's district, point that out.
- Send the letter to the legislator's home address. The envelope should be addressed

to The Honorable (name of your legislator).
- If you get a response to the letter, share a copy with any organization with which you are affiliated that is interested in the issue.
- If the legislator asks for any information or has a question you can't answer, be sure to find to find an appropriate person to help you respond and be sure someone gets back to the legislator.

Calling your legislator

- Most of the suggestions for writing letters apply to phone calls as well. Make the call short, polite and to the point.
- Always state your home district.
- If you get a machine leave a

References: American League of Lobbyists http://www.alldc.org/publicresources/lobbying.cfm

http://www.ctnonprofits.org/pages/Legislature/HowtoLobby.asp

message as to what you want the legislator to do, e.g. "please vote against House Bill 0000" or "please support legislation that ensures that children on Medicaid get adequate health care."

Visting your Legislator

- Visiting your legislator is probably the most effective way to influence him/her.
- Make an appointment by calling the legislator's office. It is best to arrange it between sessions when you set up the meeting be sure to let the legislator know what issue(s) you want to discuss. Limit it to 1-2 issues.
- Have more than one person at the meeting. Keep the atmosphere of the meeting friendly. You are there to exchange ideas. It is sometimes just as important to know why a legislator opposes your position as it is to know that the legislator supports your position.
- Follow up the visit with a thank you note and perhaps more information on your issue. If the legislator asked for certain information be sure you get back to the legislator with that information

SAMPLE LETTER

Person Doe
12345 Main Street
Anytown, Mystate 99999

January 22, 2004

Representative or Senator
54321 Main Street
Captialtown, MyState 88888

Dear Representative or Senator:

Thank you for the concern you have shown for our community throughout your time in office. I particularly appreciated the position you took on the school funding bill last May.

I am writing to ask for your support of Bill (numbers), regarding violent video games. These bills will go a long way towards protecting our children from exposure to the excessive violence found in Mature and Adults-Only rated video games. Numerous studies have found exposure to violence in the media harmful to children, and I am deeply convinced that we must act soon to avoid irreversible trauma to some of California's children.

I have two children, ages 4 and 6. I cannot even take them to a pizza parlor without walking past at least two or three violent video games. Naturally they are enticed by the guns and shooting, and at their age they can't understand why video game violence is harmful. If this law were passed, the games would have to be placed in a separate room, so our family time at the Pizza place would be a much more wholesome experience for small children.

I thank you for your time and attention to this letter, and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Person Doe