



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF NEW JERSEY EDUCATION FUND

“All political power is inherent in the people. Government is instituted for the protection, security, and benefit of the people, and they have the right at all times to alter or reform the same, whenever the public good may require it.”

(New Jersey Constitution Article I Rights and Privileges 2.a).

WHAT IS LOBBYING?

Lobbying is anything we do to convince officials to bring about change. It includes any effort to influence public policy at any level of government – from the individual who petitions her township to install a stop sign on a street in her neighborhood to the National Rifle Association’s well-financed, sophisticated efforts to block gun control legislation. Lobbying also means communicating directly with elected and appointed officials or creating the public climate that will promote a desired change.

Lobbying has become a negative word in our culture – but lobbying is at the very heart of our representative democracy. **The United States Constitution provides every citizen the right to petition his or her own government.**



Anytime you contact an elected official, speak up at a town forum, or even write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about legislation, you are lobbying. Anything we do to try to convince elected officials to bring about change or any effort to influence public policy at any level of government is lobbying.

WHY IS LOBBYING EFFECTIVE?

Legislators can’t take our views into consideration if they don’t know what they are. Most of us would not hesitate to complain to a store from which we had purchased faulty merchandise or to ask for a parent-teacher conference if we felt our child was being treated unfairly in school. We have the same right and responsibility to complain about unworkable or unfair laws.

Constituent reaction is very important to a legislator. These are the people he or she hopes will vote for them in the next election. Sometimes legislation which seems to be moving toward enactment will stop if clear resistance is voiced by enough people. Sometimes amendments are added to dispel or at least

soften the concerns of opponents. Sometimes a legislator who voted on the “wrong” side on one issue will be more willing to compromise on the next.

Communicating with Legislators

(More information about communicating with elected officials is available in the New Jersey Citizen’s Guide to Government.)



By Email

- Identify yourself as a constituent (if you are one).
- State the bill name and number and your position (support, oppose, amend).
- State the background on the issue and reason for position. Use facts and make a clear and concise argument. Keep it brief.
- Remember to be polite and thank them for their time.
- Provide your contact information for follow-up.

By Phone

- Identify yourself as a constituent .
- State the bill name and number and your position (support, oppose, amend).
- Be polite and brief.
- You will not have much time, but try to concisely state one or two talking points to argue your position.
- Ask for their position.
- Thank them for their time.

Lobby In Your District

In Person Meetings on an Issue

In general, New Jersey state legislators do not have offices in Trenton. Instead, they hear from their constituents and organization representatives in their district offices. Constituents meet with their legislators or legislator’s staff in person to discuss a specific issue. It’s a good idea to craft talking points, provide background information, and bring knowledgeable partners with you. These meetings are crucial to both understand the legislator’s position and to convince him or her to support your position on a given piece of legislation.

Lobby in Trenton

There are different lobbying opportunities available in Trenton. Citizens come to Trenton to attend a rally, attend a vote, or lobby legislators in the statehouse hallways. Also, constituents prepare testimony and or come to Trenton to testify.

TIPS FOR IN PERSON VISITS

- Three people are an ideal number for the interview; enough to share the conversation and questions, yet not overwhelm the legislator. You will find it useful for the interviewers to meet beforehand to plan questions and format.
- Immediately after the interview, the participants should review their notes and thoughts on the discussion. This will assure a comprehensive report, agreement by interviewers, and accuracy.
- Find out where the official stands on the legislation. S/he may already support it, oppose it, be totally unfamiliar with it or need additional information to make a decision or to speak in its support without appearing foolish. Prepare your strategy for each of these situations.
- Establish your credibility. Show that you understand the pros and cons and have some understanding of the financial aspects which the legislator must address.



- Listen as well as speak.
- Use carrots and sticks, but very, very gently. Promise that you will be watching for his or her vote on this bill and publishing it in your newsletter.
- Don't be upset if the result is that you and the legislator agree to disagree. Just stick to the facts without getting emotional or raising your voice. Remember, he or she may be with you on the next issue.
- Leave the door open so that you may re-approach the legislator on this or some other matter.
- If the legislator fails to keep the appointment or keeps you waiting a long time, disguise your disappointment. Instead, lobby the legislator's aide who is often very influential.

NJ LEGISLATIVE SCHEDULE

The schedule is determined by the leadership of the two bodies. As a general rule the Legislature meets on Mondays and Thursdays from January until July and from mid-September throughout the fall, although they may be called into session at anytime (and often are). Committee meetings are usually called for the morning and afternoon. Legislative sessions usually begin between 2 pm and 3 pm and can run into the late evening.

TIPS FOR TESTIFYING

- Always prepare written testimony.
- Place the bill number, title, committee name and date at the top of the page. If testifying about regulations or proposed public policy master plans identify the issue (regulation number/title of the plan), the body before which you are testifying, the date and location.
- Identify yourself by name and title in the opening sentence.
- Give the reasons for that position and present data to support your argument.
- If working in coalition, list the coalition members as supporting your position.
- Keep it brief, one page if possible.
- Have copies available for all committee members, staff, and press.
- Be prepared to summarize orally. You should avoid reading your testimony verbatim.

WHERE TO FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- New Jersey Citizen's Guide to Government
- www.njleg.state.nj.us –NJ legislative site with schedules, copies of bills, roll call votes.
- Office of Legislative Services 800-792-8630
- The Citizens Manual www.jointhecampaign.com
- Citizens Guide to OPRA (Open Public Records Act) at www.state.nj.us.grc/public

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