

Basic Tools for Lobbying the Montana Legislature

Important Resources

Legislative Services web site: <https://leg.mt.gov>

Legislative Message Center (**ONLY GOOD DURING LEGISLATURE**): (406) 444-4600

Governor's Telephone: **(406) 444-3111**

Website of an organization that works on issues you care about

What It Takes To Be An Effective Citizen Lobbyist

- An intelligent command of current issues
- The ability to be clear and concise
- Tolerance for the human weaknesses of both colleagues and elected officials
- Enthusiasm and sincerity
- A sense of humor, genuine liking of people, and ability to roll with the punches

How to Lobby

Before You Talk to a Legislator

- Be informed on the issues you want to talk about
- Find out who is making a decision (Committee Members, Senate, House, Governor)
- Find out what motivates the legislator – appeal to self-interest (where are they from, what do they do, what are their interests)
- Know your opposition: who, what, why
- Know their schedule

When You Talk to a Legislator

- Address them respectfully as Senator so-in-so or Representative so-in-so
- Say your name and where you are from
- Don't say you are with an organization unless you are authorized to speak for that organization
- Provide a bill number and a brief description
- Be polite
- Be specific
- Be brief
- If you have a personal story on how you are impacted, please share it
- Be prepared. Listen. Have a brief handout if possible
- Walk and talk – be respectful of their time
- Be brief, honest, explicit and courteous
- Try to provide a personal perspective
- Try and get a commitment (but don't be pushy). **ASK THEM WHAT THEY THINK**
- Don't overstate your case and always admit if you don't know an answer
- Thank them for their time
- Follow-up with any information you promise to provide

Testifying at hearings:

- Arrive at hearing early to get a seat and sign in in the back of the room
- If you have written testimony to hand in, DO NOT read it to legislators
- Begin testimony by saying “Mr./Madam Chair, members of the committee, my name is ...”
- Don't say you are with an organization unless you are authorized to speak for that organization.
- Look at committee members while testifying
- Testimony should be specific.
- Use personal stories if possible
- Don't repeat what someone has already said
- Keep it short
- Be respectful – don't preach or lecture
- Stay until hearing is over in case you get asked questions
- If you get asked a question always respond by addressing the committee chairman/woman first and then the committee member who asked the question (i.e., “Mr. Chair, Senator XXXX, thank you for your question....”)
- Never stretch the truth

Lobbying from Outside Helena

- Follow the rules above for “Before You Talk to a Legislator”
- If someone you know personally knows a legislator, talk to them and see if they are willing to talk to the legislator
- Contact legislators and the Governor: Phone, mail, email
- Submit letters to the editor/Op-eds
- Get on action alert lists of organizations you support – ACT on that information
- Participate in blogs or newspaper comments