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Lobbying Your Legislative Representatives on Senior Issues

Legislation and the legislators who are responsible for it affect most every facet of our lives. For seniors, as a group, this is especially crucial as we come to depend on government programs more than at earlier stages of our life.

The Senior Caucus has a goal of promoting and protecting the interests of Minnesota seniors. While the Caucus does not have a formal advocacy program at this time, we encourage seniors to act as individuals. One of the most important ways we can do this is by providing input to legislators on matters that affect our lives whether it is on new legislation or protecting and enhancing programs already in place.

The following provides some points to keep in mind as you plan a lobbying effort. To begin, do not underestimate your right to be heard. Elected officials serve the public.

Your effectiveness in lobbying your positions depends on your ability to communicate to a legislator as someone you know and your credibility on the subject you are talking about.

Get to know your legislators. Who are they; how many terms have they served; what are their committee assignments; and what are their voting records? Research is important. Personal one-on-one relationships are the best. Arrange to meet them if possible.

The most effective lobbying method is face-to-face contact with your legislative representatives. A personal phone conversation and personal letter follow in effectiveness. E-mails are next with petitions having a lessor effect. However, any of these methods is better than not making your voice heard.

Make your contacts at the right time - before the vote on an issue. If you are part of an "alert" system, be prepared to respond immediately.

Whichever contact method you use, always keep to the point. Have a personal story if relevant. Be certain of your facts and use the most recent data.

Never threaten; ask for their support; and always say thank you.

For the most part communicate with your representatives. Many legislative offices filter out contacts from voters they do not represent. An exception is communicating with committee chairs. Then, speak as a member of an organization or as a Minnesotan senior citizen and refer to his/her committee.

Building coalitions with organizations with legislative goals similar to yours may be a way to strengthen your message and be more effective. Research the positions groups

may have on your issues and the likelihood a coordinated effort will be effective. If you contact a group, be specific as to the kind of action you are interested in - calling, letter writing or lobbying as a group.

Lobbying

Face-to-face meetings are often the most effective way to present your position and seek support. Always keep in mind that the legislator is a busy person. Schedule first and be on time. Introduce yourself and be courteous to the office. Come prepared to discuss one issue and bring written information to leave behind. Be concise and keep the meeting short; just long enough to voice your concern. Be reasonable, don't argue and be honest. Say thank you. The personal impression you leave behind may be the most important part of your visit.

Telephone - Make notes on what you want to cover; have a script. Rehearse your message before you call. Relax. Identify yourself. Ask to talk to your legislator. You may have to talk to your Legislator's staff. That's okay. Say what you want in three minutes or less. Use bill numbers, if possible. If your legislator favors your position, express appreciation for the support. If not, offer to provide additional information. Be courteous. You should be prepared to leave a short message like "Please support House bill 101, Reauthorize Senior Health Care bill" after you identify yourself.

Write letters - Letters can be more personal than e-mails, especially if they are handwritten. Keep them brief, to the point and on a single subject - avoid form letters. Write at the right time - just before a vote on the issue. While neat, handwritten letters have the most impact, if pen and paper are not your thing, just type it - the idea is to communicate. Check your spelling and syntax. Be sure to include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address on the letter itself.

Send e-mails - E-mails are effective because they are quick and can be sent to more than one legislator almost simultaneously. They can be sent promptly when pending legislation is coming up for a vote and you have to reach your legislator immediately. Keep them brief, to the point and on a single subject - avoid form e-mails. If you are working from an example, personalize it. Again, check your spelling and syntax. Always be sure to include your full name, address and telephone number.

They want to hear from you! Even when you know your legislators support your position on a bill, give them a quick phone call or e-mail to tell them how you feel. Their staff will add your position to the tally of supporters. Senator Amy Klobuchar, Representative Betty McCollum and MN Representative Erin Murphy have said, "Keep the calls coming, we need to be able to say that you support us!"

Information about your legislators and current legislation can be found on the [Your Representatives page](#).