

Contact Your Legislator - Tools

How to Lobby Your Legislators

Effective Individual Communication

Your maximum influence comes in addressing your comments directly to your own legislator.

The Personal Visit

Most effective method of transmitting your message; helps connect names with faces. In communication afterward, you will have established yourself as a known concerned constituent. If your legislator is holding a hearing or workshop, try to attend. It is a good time to meet your legislator informally.

If your representative is not available, ask to meet the legislative assistant. S/he can generally be expected to be at least as well informed as your representative, and may have more influence than you suspect.

The Telephone

The telephone can be an effective tool. Remind the legislator of any previous contact. If the member is not available, speak with the legislative assistant.

The Letter – Snail Mail, E-Mail, Fax

Letters are important for the legislator and/or staff. The amount of mail on a particular piece of legislation frequently helps determine the legislators' approach to an issue. One well-written letter will often prove weightier than a formal petition with many signatures. For this reason, it is generally considered better to express your opinion as an individual rather than as a member of an organization whose positions may already be well known to legislators.

Timing

Timing is everything. Make your call at a strategic time - just before a vote, for instance, or immediately following action by your legislator in support of your cause. Write when you know a particular piece of legislation is pending before a committee or when a bill is about to come before the full House or Senate.

1. Preparation

- a. Know what you are lobbying for and why.
- b. Find out about your legislator in advance. Does s/he: Support, oppose, or show neutrality to TREAT, our stance on TennCare, and other related legislation; support or oppose Governor's TennCare cuts and why.

2. Introduction

- a. **Introduce** yourself, including giving your full address if you are a constituent. You may also want to give a very brief description of what your job is or what organizations you work with that give you special knowledge on the issue.
- b. **Identify** yourself, as a constituents and, if applicable, with the TennCare Saves Lives Campaign or name of your local TennCare citizens' group or other group.
- c. **Explain** that you are there to talk about the *TennCare Reform, Ethics, Accountability, and Transparency (TREAT) bill*.

3. **Support** your argument with the examples of what the bill strives to do and how and why.
4. **Connect** the legislation either directly or indirectly to the representative's constituents.
5. **Ask** him or her to **ACT** by voting in support of the legislation in committee and getting others to support it also. Once the bill is out of committee, request their support when the bill is voted by the Legislature.
6. **Distribute** relevant materials, including the **TREAT Fact Sheet**, before you leave.
7. **Use** the Record Sheet to make notes.
8. **Follow up** with representatives, especially those who were undecided or needed more information. Write and mail "thank you" note after the meeting.

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How to Lobby Your Legislator – Tips from The League of Women Voters

Lobbying to convince your legislator of the merits of your position requires an understanding of the rationale that supports that belief. Your goal is not to threaten or antagonize, but to influence with your knowledge and understanding of the issues.

Be Prepared - Do Your Homework. Know Yourself. Be aware of your own personal prejudices or biases that may hinder talking with your legislator. Such knowledge will enable you to maintain objectivity by anticipating your own response in a given situation. *Example: she is a Democrat and you are a Republican – don't let partisanship come into play. Stay focused on TREAT as a nonpartisan bill.*

Know Your Organization - If you are speaking on its behalf you will want to be a credible representative. Be fully aware of your organization's positions as well as the relationship it maintains with other organizations and with the legislature.

Know Your Legislator - Try to understand the basis for his/her positions: record on related legislation; tenure in legislative; constituent pressures; general predispositions; what kind of personal interview will be most effective (sensitivity to legislative attitudes about approach is essential). Your appearance as an objective individual, able to deal sympathetically with the concerns of both sides, will play in your favor.

Know Your Issue - Phrase the argument in your own words. But keep in mind that no one can be expected to address every question or matter of concern regarding an issue, however, so don't hesitate to admit your lack of knowledge on a particular point. **Be willing to pursue the answer and report back – this is good because it will give you a reason to make contact again.**

Know Your Opposition - Anticipate the opposition and answer their arguments positively before such arguments surface publicly.

Do's and Don't's

Do:

Address your Senator or Representative properly.

- Identify yourself immediately at each contact. Public officials meet too many people to remember everyone.
- Know the status of the legislation. Refer to a bill by number whenever possible.
- Use your own words.
- Be brief and explicit, courteous and reasonable.
- Establish your own credentials or expertise on the subject of legislation under consideration.
- Give legislators succinct, easy to read literature; highlight important facts and arguments. Their time is limited.
- Write the chair or members of a committee holding hearings on legislation in which you are interested if you have facts that you think should influence his or her thinking.
- Get to know legislative staff and treat them courteously. Their cooperation can make or break your chances to reach the legislators themselves.
- Always keep off-the-record comments confidential.
- Write to say you approve, not just to criticize or oppose.
- In a letter include your address and sign your name legibly.
- Keep the door open for further discussion in spite of any apparently negative attitudes.

Don't

- Don't apologize for taking his or her time. If you are brief and to the point s/he will be glad to hear from you.
- Don't be arrogant, condescending or threatening toward legislators or their staff.
- Don't argue or back recalcitrant legislators into a corner where they take a definite position against you.
- Don't make notes of a conversation while talking to a legislator.
- Don't send copies or form letters unless you have taken the time to include a personal note.

The qualifications for an effective lobbyist include:

- an intelligent command of current issues;
- a commitment to the cause, tempered by a tolerance for the human weaknesses of both colleagues and elected officials;
- enthusiasm and sincerity; and
- a sense of humor, genuine liking of people, and ability to roll with the punches.

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Making Contact – Sample Letters

Following are sample letters to get you started. Definitely alter to fit your own personal style and anything that reflects relationship or previous contact you have with that you have with your legislator.

Writing on Behalf a Group

Date

Sen./Rep NAME

Address *(District Office or Legislative Plaza Address, depending on where you want meeting to take place)*
City, ST ZIP

Dear Sen./Rep LAST NAME:

I am writing on behalf of other constituents and myself, who would like to meet with you to discuss concerns about the current TennCare policy. We believe strongly that the cuts have been harmful to Tennesseans and that there are better ways to manage and reform TennCare. We offer a solution through the TennCare Reform, Ethics, Accountability, and Transparency (TREAT) bill SBXXXX/HBXXXX, which we want to share with you.

I will contact your office next week to see when you will able to meet with us in your district.

OR

We will be in Nashville on DATE and would like to schedule a meeting to discuss our concerns and solutions provided in the TREAT bill. I will contact your office soon to make arrangements.

Thank you for time and consideration. We look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

City, ZIP

Writing on Behalf of Yourself

Same format as above, with just a few alterations.

Dear Sen./Rep LAST NAME:

I would like to meet with you to discuss my concerns about the current TennCare policy. I believe strongly that the cuts have been harmful to Tennesseans and that there are ways to manage and reform TennCare that are both ethically and fiscally responsible. Such solutions are part of the TennCare Reform, Ethics, Accountability, and Transparency (TREAT) bill SBXXXX/HBXXXX, which we want to share with you.

I will contact your office next week to see when you will able to meet with me in your district.

OR

I will be in Nashville on DATE and would like to schedule a meeting to discuss my concerns and solutions provided in the TREAT bill. I will contact your office soon to make arrangements.

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Making the Call – Sample Telephone Scripts

Calling District Office to SET UP DISTRICT MEETING:

(Calling on behalf of a group)

Hello, my name is _____ I'm calling on behalf of several constituents from Sen./Rep. _____'s district. We want to set up a meeting with Sen./Rep. _____ at her/his district office to discuss our concerns about what has happened with TennCare. We want to talk about a bill that we support and want her/him to consider supporting called the TennCare Reform, Ethics, Accountability, and Transparency bill or TREAT bill. When will s/he be available to meet with us?

The staff person may likely say they have to check with the legislator and get back with you.

Tell them that you understand, but need an answer as soon as possible to make arrangements with all members of your group. *Legislators are usually available for in-district meetings Friday, Saturday, and Monday during session, with Saturday being the optimal day.*

Calling Nashville (LP) Office to SET UP MEETING:

(Calling on behalf of self)

Hello, my name is _____. I'm calling from _____ (CITY). I am going to be in Nashville on _____ and would like to meet with Sen./Rep. _____ to discuss my concern about what has happened with TennCare and to talk about a bill that I support and want her/him to consider supporting called TennCare Reform, Ethics, Accountability, and Transparency bill or TREAT bill. When will s/he be available for a meeting?

Important to call as far in advance as possible to make an appointment. Legislator will have already have booked for committee meetings, Senate/House Chamber session, and other constituent meetings.

SEE NEXT PAGE for SCRIPTS

for

CONTITUENTS to CONTACT LEGISLATORS on TREAT

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Calling LP or Dist. Office to Voice Support and Ask Legislator to Consider TREAT

Generic To ANY LEGISLATOR:

Hello, my name is _____ I'm calling as a constituent of
Sen./Rep. _____. Is s/he in?

(Asst. will likely ask why you are calling and/or say s/he is unavailable. Script is written as your message to the legislator through the staff—if you get the Sen./Rep., adjust to whom you are addressing accordingly (e.g., "I want to let YOU know..." rather than "I want to let Sen./Rep know...")

I am concerned about what has happened with TennCare. I think the State was wrong to cut nearly 200,000 people with physical and mental health conditions—especially before trying to implement measures to curb costs that would not have harmed sick people ... like implementing Therapeutic Drug Substitution for real reductions in pharmacy costs and requiring the state to maximize federal matching funds. *(Give one or two examples, See TREAT talking points for other examples.)*

I want to let Sen./Rep. _____ know that there is a bill up for consideration that offers real solutions, and would like her/him to look it over and consider supporting it. It's called the TennCare Reform, Ethics, Accountability, and Transparency bill or TREAT bill, SB2862/HB2536.

I will be glad to send you highlights of the bill, if it would be helpful. *(This is another way to continue to lobby and build the relationship. Send a TREAT synopsis along with a handwritten letter within a few days of the call.)*

When do you think Sen./Rep. _____ might be able to look over TREAT and get back with me on what s/he thinks? I would appreciate it if s/he would contact me with her/his position on this bill as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time.

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Calling LP or District Office to Ask Legislator to Review TREAT

SPECIFIC to a COMMITTEE or SUB COMMITTEE:

Hello, my name is _____. I'm calling as a constituent of Sen./Rep. _____. Is s/he available?

I am concerned about what has happened with TennCare. I think the State was wrong to cut nearly 200,000 people with physical and mental health conditions—especially before trying to implement measures to curb costs that didn't harm people. The Governor and General Assembly made a mistake, but it is not too late to come up with REAL Solutions that will save money and will not harm the disadvantaged.

I want to let Sen./Rep. _____ know that there is a bill up for consideration in the _____ (Sub) Committee, which s/he sits on, and would like her/him to look it over and consider supporting it. It's called the TennCare Reform, Ethics, Accountability, and Transparency bill or TREAT bill, SB2862/HB2536.

TREAT restores care to those who really need it and cuts costs through a combination of smart reforms—it all adds up to a solution that makes economic and ethical sense for Tennesseans.

I will be glad to send you highlights of the TREAT bill, if it would be helpful.

(This is another way to continue to lobby and build the relationship. Send a TREAT synopsis along with a handwritten letter within a few days of the call.)

When do you think Sen./Rep. _____ might be able to look over TREAT and get back with me on what s/he thinks? I would appreciate if Sen./Rep. _____ would get back with me soon and let me know where s/he stands on TREAT.

Thank you for your time.

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Calling SUPPORTERS to Contact Legislators on TREAT:

Hello, my name is _____. I'm calling with _____.

Did I catch you at a good time?

(If no, ask when you can call back.)

The reason I am calling is that we are looking for constituents of Sen/Rep _____, who is on the _____ (Sub) Committee. We need to get the bill out of this (Sub) Committee so it can move forward and be put up for consideration by the entire Senate/House. We need folks who are willing to call her/him and ask that s/he support our TREAT Bill, SB2862/HB2536. Would you be willing to do this? And could you do this within the next week (or specific time period).

(If yes, then give them overview of TREAT, name of legislator, and their phone number, and sample script above. MAKE SURE the person has a reasonable understanding of key points of TREAT -- comprehensive understanding not necessary. Let person know they aren't expected to be policy wonks—that they should pick out a few points to share with their legislator.)