



"The right to be heard does not automatically include the right to be taken seriously."

-Hubert Humphrey

LOBBYING TIPS

Lobbying is more simple than you might imagine, but there are a variety of nuances that will help you to have the most successful and effective meeting possible. Here are some helpful guidelines:

Plan ahead. Equality Maryland will give you time to assemble with other constituents from your district. At this time, the group should figure out what you want to say and who will say what. It helps to have one person be the clear facilitator of the visit to make introductions, bring up the topic(s) at hand, and move things along to maximize the time. An agenda will flow logically based upon legislators' past voting records. If you so desire, you can create an agenda for the meeting in which each person has a speaking part and everyone should have an understanding of what they will say. Be brief, clear and to the point and don't be afraid to show your passion for the issues and to personalize it.

Inspire yourselves. Prior to the meeting, take a moment to think about why you care about these issues and why you are going to this meeting. If there is time, share with the group.

Start with a thank you. It is rare that our Delegates and Senators hear the words "thank You" from their constituents. Make sure to always thank your elected officials for the supportive actions they have taken. If they are not an ally of the GLBT community, then just be sure to thank them for taking the time to meet with you.

Establish a connection. Mention a current event you will have a shared interest in or praise a recent vote they cast you can agree on. "I was glad to see the way you cast your vote on the slots issue" is the sort of statement that will let an elected official know you are engaged in Maryland politics and care deeply about a variety of topics. Just make sure to steer the conversation to the issues at hand before losing your allotted time. Some elected officials might prefer to talk about the weather rather than address their stance on LGBT issues.

Make the issues real. One of the most powerful ways we can advocate for our issues is to have someone speak who has been directly affected by these issues and can tell their experiences.

Paint the big picture and the small picture. For example, when talking about the Hate Crimes Penalties Act, one person could tell their story about how the issue has affected her/him personally (the small picture); then, someone else could flesh out current statistics and impact in Maryland that you find on your fact sheets.

Make specific, clear requests and ask for an answer. Often, the main reason groups have unsatisfactory meetings is that their requests were not clear and specific enough. Your elected officials need to know what you want them to do. In other words, will you vote for this bill on the floor? Will you talk to your colleagues about this bill? Will you make a positive statement to the press about the need to beat a constitutional amendment? Will you stand up for the transgender community if someone tries to strip them from the hate crimes bill? In addition to the specific requests you bring, don't be afraid to ask the legislator what else they see they could do on your issue (whether they say yes or no to your original request).

Have confidence. It's important to speak with passion and conviction, and with the knowledge that your voice is just as important as any other constituent. Just remember that you have chosen to become a part of the political process. That, in itself, makes you an activist.

Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." During your visit, you may encounter a question that you cannot answer. Fear not! It's okay to admit you don't know the answer. You can simply research the issue, or ask someone with Equality Maryland, then get back to his or her office with the information requested. In fact, this is an ideal opportunity to make another connection with your legislator and increase communication with the office. Whatever you do, never pretend you know something if you do not. Legislators will appreciate your honesty, your willingness to find an answer their questions, and your commitment to the issue at hand.

Understand the Power of Silence. Picture this. You have asked a legislator how they would vote on a constitutional amendment if the Court of Appeals were to rule in our favor. "I don't know," she says. The seconds that follow her statement are very important. Sit back, say nothing, no matter how awkward the silence is. You may be surprised about the frank dialogue that follows.

Follow up. Ms. Manners says "send a thank you note after the visit!" You can reiterate any commitments that the elected official made in your thank you note, or promise to continue to remain in contact on the issue.

Brief Equality Maryland. Please make sure to fill out a lobby visit report form. Your information is so important to us to help us best do our jobs in Annapolis!