



Citizen Lobbying Information

Voting

- Your ability to vote (and mobilize other voters) is your superpower in the lawmaking arena. The primary motivation of your legislators is getting reelected. The number and strength of democracy laws we are able to pass is directly proportional to the strength of our voting bloc.
- Make sure that you are registered to vote and show up for all elections: federal, state and local. Please urge your family and friends to register as well. Voter turnout numbers are often abysmally low. In some jurisdictions, less than 10% of registered voters show up to vote in off-year elections, so those who do vote have a huge impact in those elections!
- How one votes is private, but whether one votes is publicly available information and you can be sure that your elected officials know whether you vote or not—it's a matter of their political survival. If you neither vote nor are perceived to influence other voters, legislators will not care nearly as much about what you think.

Build Strategic Coalitions with "Likely Voters"

- Strive to form a partnership with people who exert the most influence on your elected official: "Likely voters" (constituents who vote regularly) and those in a position to influence likely voters. Join forces with community members and groups who may have the same positions as you even if for different reasons (e.g. teachers, church members, members of your local chamber of commerce, local universities, specific industries, etc.) all while encouraging these coalition partners to vote.
- Note that it's quality over quantity: An organized minority of likely voters is usually all it takes to swing elections, thus mobilizing them is the most efficient strategy for influencing an elected official.

Legislator Meetings

- One of the most powerful ways to foster effective, professional relationships with your federal, state and local legislators is to set up short, in-person meetings with their district offices at least once or twice each year. These meetings have the most impact because legislators know that engaged constituents are more likely to vote.
- Set up, prepare for and actively participate in meetings with your legislators.

Do Your Research

- You don't need to be an expert on the issues you're lobbying on, but you should know the basics.
- Keep track of bills you are interested in and know who is the prime sponsor and cosponsors of the bill. During the legislative session, regularly check the status of the bills and see when Congress is in session.
- Review existing talking points for those bills and become familiar with them.



- Bring the fact sheets with you to your meeting, plus any relevant published letters to the editor, news stories and local ordinances and resolutions that support your position, as well as any articles that highlight your legislators' positions in relation to the issues, if they're available; politicians are keenly interested in the public's perception of them.
- Visit official legislator websites to gain insight about the legislator's background, interests, and positions, which could come in handy during your meeting.
- Look for common ground and cultivate mutual areas of interest to help build effective, long-term relationships.
- Getting to know your local elected officials now can help even more in the future. Today's city council member could be tomorrow's governor!

Schedule Your Meeting

- Go to your elected official's website and find the district office closest to you. Call the number and ask to set up a meeting with the staff member who works on animal protection issues. State your name and let the staff member know that you're a voting constituent from your city and that the purpose of the meeting is to review the HSUS's priority animal protection legislation.
- These meetings usually last 15 to 30 minutes. Invite your friends, members of your network and/or coalition to attend with you if they live in your congressional or state legislative district. Be sure to let the office know if you'll be bringing additional people—there's power in numbers!
- Note that you will likely meet with a staff member; the staff members are the eyes and ears of the lawmakers and they can have tremendous influence over issues and policy decisions. Establishing a positive relationship with staff members is vital!

Be Polite, Professional and On Time

- State your views firmly but be friendly and courteous, even if the legislator disagrees with you.
- Avoid party politics, as you often will need support on both sides of the aisle.
- Dress professionally; legislative offices are more likely to be persuaded by folks in business attire.
- Make sure to arrive on time!
- Make eye contact, smile and convey a positive attitude.

Introduce Yourself as a Constituent Who Votes

- Only lobby your own legislators; it's a waste of time to contact a legislator who doesn't represent you and sends a red flag that you or the pro-democracy movement might not be very politically savvy.
- Introduce yourself and everyone in your group, including representatives from any associated organizations.
- Use your own judgement about whether to highlight your affiliation with other organizations or to just represent yourself as a constituent. If you know that your



legislator dislikes certain groups or organizations, then just note that you're a voting constituent.

- Begin with a compliment—state how good their voting record is on animal protection issues. If they don't have a good record on animals, try to find another area that you agree on, such as education or transportation. If you can't do that, simply begin by thanking the legislator or staff member for taking the time to meet with you.
- Thank your Representative or Senators' staff members for the bills they have cosponsored and ask them to do what they can to rally support for those bills among their colleagues.

Making Your Ask & Providing Materials

- Provide both the bill number, name and description of the bill. Legislators and staff deal with hundreds of bills and should not be expected to remember bill numbers.
- Be clear, polite and concise about what you're asking for. Common "asks" include support or opposition on a bill or to co-sponsor legislation.
- At the beginning of the meeting, provide your legislators or their staff members with the fact sheets for the bills that you will be discussing, as well as any other materials including relevant published letters to the editor.
- Keep the information you leave them with minimal and strictly related to the topics you discuss.
- Use any talking points that you have researched and prepared.
- Articulate concisely. Explain why you are concerned about the issue.
- Share relevant personal stories that are specific to your community and the bill(s) you're advocating for. The more personal you can make it to yourself, and the more grounded in the district, the better.
- Highlight community connections. Mention your community involvement and relationships with groups.
- Explain why you are concerned about an issue and how it affects you, your family and your community.
- Identify yourself as a parent, businessperson, teacher, church member, etc. to signal that you can influence other constituents of theirs who are likely to vote.
- Highlight your professional relationships with community members who have an impact on pro-democracy policies.
- Stick to the facts. Be truthful and honest. You don't need to be an expert on the issue; your influence lies not just in the merits of the issues, but in your ability to vote and influence others in your legislator's district.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, simply let them know you will find out and get back to them.
- Listen. After presenting your message, let the legislator or staff member respond to the issues you raise. Their comments and questions will give you cues on how to frame your arguments and what additional information might be useful. Listening, and showing that you're listening by summarizing what they say back to them and responding to their questions, is one key to building an effective, long-term relationship.

Other Important Tips and Follow Up



- Keep meetings short. Between 10 and 20 minutes. While legislators and their staff members want to meet with constituents from their districts, they're very busy and appreciate short meetings.
- After your meeting, contact your state director to find the answer for you. Circling back with your legislator's office presents a valuable opportunity to continue building a relationship and trust.
- Be flexible. Sometimes compromise is a must.
- Don't forget to follow up with any additional information that was requested.
- Take a photo with your legislator and the staff member at the end of your meeting; post the photo and tag your legislator with a public message of appreciation on social media.
- Thank your legislators and/or staff members who took the time to meet with you by sending handwritten thank you cards.
- Keep in touch after the meeting. If a legislator takes the action you requested, be sure to thank them both privately and publicly for taking that action.
- Legislators often hear from constituents who are upset but they rarely receive thank you.
- Even if your legislator doesn't agree with you on a specific issue, you may find common ground on another issue.
- Offer to be a resource for them and keep in touch!
- After in-person meetings, phone calls are the next most impactful, followed by emails. When you communicate through email, you can increase your efficacy by following up with a phone call or personal visit.