

Essential Advocacy Skills

Finding your legislator

- app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder
- Every person has 2 Representatives and 1 Senator

Tracking a bill

- leg.wa.gov
- Enter bill number under “Find a bill” on the right side of the page

Writing to your legislators

- Address the correspondence formally
- Introduce who you are and who you represent
 - Are you speaking as an individual or on behalf of a group?
 - List your "credentials" (e.g. I am a mother, a teacher, an expert in this field, etc.)
- Thank the legislator if you know they've voted favorably on your issues in the past
- Get to the point. Why are you writing?
 - Focus on a single policy/issue
 - Cite the bill number, if relevant
- Explain your stance
 - Use the relevant parts of your personal story
 - Use a couple of key facts/data points
- Why should they care
 - You are their constituent. Relate the issue to how it affects people in your home district
 - Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others
- Make the “ask” (e.g. “Will you vote for/against...”)
- Keep it short—no more than one page
- Offer to be available for follow-up questions
- Thank them for taking the time to read your letter

Calling your legislators

- You can call your legislators' offices directly, OR
- There is a toll free hotline:
 - 1-800-562-6000 TTY: 1-800-635-9993
 - Hotline operators will send your message to one of your legislators, all three of your legislators, or all three and the Governor and Lieutenant Governor
 - They offer language interpretation services

Testifying on bills

- Be punctual and allow enough time to find the hearing room
- First, you sign in
 - House: written sign-in at tables
 - Senate: electronic sign-in at kiosks
- You're called up in panels (pro and con) or as an individual
- If you know in advance who you're testifying with, work with others on the same panel to organize your testimonies to avoid duplication
- You're timed--usually two minutes, unless there's a time crunch. Light turns green, then yellow at 30 seconds, then red
- Begin by introducing yourself to the chair and committee members and stating your purpose. E.g. "Mister (or Madam) Chair and members of the committee, I am Marcus Jones from Tacoma. I am here representing myself. I support this bill because . . ."
 - Make it clear whether you are representing yourself or a group
- Avoid being too technical
- Do not repeat remarks previously stated by others
- Be prepared for questions from committee members. If you don't know the answer, tell them that you will follow-up with a written answer and make sure to send the answer to the committee and committee staff

Meeting with your legislators

- Recipe for effective advocacy
 1. In-person meetings
 2. Constituents
 3. Personal stories
- Before your meeting
 - Call or email and set up a meeting. It's that simple.
 - 15 min meeting during legislative session
 - 30 min + meeting outside of session
 - Call in advance—may have to wait several weeks
 - Know background of legislators that you'll be meeting with
 - Which committees they're on
 - Read their bios online at leg.wa.gov
 - Be organized
 - Know bill number
 - Know bill sponsor
 - Know where the bill is in the process
 - If you're working with an advocacy organization, they will tell you all of this
 - Dress professionally—Olympia is a formal place

- If it's a group meeting—coordinate who is covering which part (e.g. introducing the group, giving the facts/data, telling the personal story, etc.)
- During the meeting
 - Silence your cell phone and don't eat/drink
 - Be punctual: "to be early is to be on time"
 - Use non-technical language
 - Stay focused on message about one bill/policy area
 - Allow time for questions and for the legislator to state his/her opinion
 - Be flexible
 - Your meeting may be shorter or longer than you expected; may take place in a different space than planned; or could be with staff members instead of the legislator themselves
 - Be prepared for "5 and 15"—to be able to make your points in 5 minutes or 15 minutes, depending on how long you have
 - What to say
 - Thank the legislator for his/her time
 - If he/she has voted favorably on your issues in the past, thank him/her for that too
 - Introduce yourself and state your affiliation, if you're representing a group
 - State your position on the bill
 - Briefly describe the issue
 - Share your personal story
 - Why should the legislator care about this issue, aside from your personal story?
 - Present a few compelling facts/data points
 - How does the issue affect the community beyond you?
 - Ask for the vote!
 - If your legislator is undecided or evasive, let him or her know you will follow-up
 - Address concerns that the legislator expresses to the extent that you're able
 - You don't need to have all the answers. The most important thing is a clear ask
 - Leave a one-pager with information about the bill and leave your contact information
 - Thank the legislator and summarize follow-ups
- After the meeting
 - Send a handwritten thank you note, or at least a thank you email
 - If applicable: Follow through on a request to send additional information or contacts
 - If applicable: Check back on the legislator's decision on the issue if they did not give you a firm answer. Write or call 1-2 weeks later

Other Opportunities for Engagement (Outside of Olympia)

- Town hall meetings—sometimes by phone. Hold legislators accountable to what they say
- Candidate forums
- Task forces related to your interest area
- Meet your legislator in district when the legislature is not in session