

# How to Lobby

Lobbying your elected officials is one of the most important actions you can take to bring about the end of the death penalty. This section contains basic tips for communicating effectively with government officials.

## What is lobbying?

Lobbying is getting your government to work for you. It is not limited to the hallowed halls of Congress or restricted to professional lobbyists - it is a tool we can all use to communicate with our decision makers and shape the communities in which we live.

Lobbying takes many forms, such as writing a letter, showing up for a public event, making a phone call, sending a fax/email/form letter, or anything else you can do to provide your elected official with information about your issue and a request for him/her to act on it.

## How do I lobby?

### Do your homework

There are many organizations and activists who are already lobbying on the death penalty in your state. To find out how to get involved with your state's grassroots lobbying efforts, contact your SDPAC or state coalition.

Find out what positions your elected member has taken in the past, for example, bills that s/he may have sponsored, his or her voting record, or speeches s/he has given. Familiarize yourself with the specific issue/legislation you want to address, prepare talking points, and provide information to your legislator. Once you've done your homework, you are ready to make contact with your legislator!

### Visit your elected officials (state senator, state representative/delegate, Members of Congress, mayor, governor, attorney general, city council members)

**Be ACCURATE:** To build a working relationship and achieve results, you need to be viewed as a credible source of information. Never bluff! If you are unable to answer a question, use it as an opportunity to make contact with the office again when supplying the information.

**Be BRIEF:** The official and his/her staff are incredibly busy and so are you. They appreciate it when you get to the point and respect their time. Be ready with the bill number and the specific action you want your legislator to take (for example, cosponsor/support the legislation). Provide a copy of any relevant materials you will be talking about, such as a copy of the bill or list of current cosponsors.

**Be COURTEOUS:** Always, always be courteous! A thank you letter to the staff member for listening to your concerns, especially if they take action, is ALWAYS recommended. Commend your elected official publicly, including letters to the editor or items in a newsletter (and share copies with his/her staff).

## **Write a letter**

**Hand-write** your letter if possible. Be sure to include your name and address on the letter and envelope so they know you are a constituent.

**Be brief and personal.** Share your knowledge and experiences with the death penalty and the criminal justice system. Feel free to mention any organizations you are working with on this issue.

**Be specific.** Cite a specific bill number or an individual case. Be sure to include the specific action you want your elected official to take (sponsor the bill, intervene on behalf of a prisoner, attend an event, etc.). Ask him or her to respond with information about the action taken.

**Thank your official** for any positive steps he or she has taken in the recent past.

**Follow-up.** Continue to maintain contact with the office to ensure that your elected official fulfills his or her commitments. Continue to provide information, and thank him or her for any positive actions taken.

## **Make a phone call**

**Ask** to speak with the legislative assistant dealing with the death penalty and/or criminal justice issues.

**Identify yourself as a constituent.** You might also mention your AI group, if appropriate.

**Be specific:** Identify the bill you are concerned with and the action you would like your legislator to take. Ask if your legislator has taken a position on the legislation. Volunteer to provide further information about the bill or about the death penalty in general. Ask for the name of the person you spoke to and let him or her know you will be calling back to follow up.

**Follow-up** with a thank you note and a small packet of information if necessary.

If you receive only a voice mail, identify yourself as a constituent and note the bill you are interested in and the action you want your legislator to take. For example, "Hello, my name is Jane Doe and I live in Anytown in your district. I am calling to ask you to co-sponsor HB 213, a bill to halt executions for two years. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions, at 123-456-7890. Thank you for your time."

## **What are the next steps?**

**Concentrate on building a relationship.** Lobbying can take a while, and the more focused you are, the better the results. Remember that the bill you are working on may not pass during this session or that you may undertake another legislative initiative next year. Establishing this relationship is key to your work in future sessions.

**Be sure to provide any information** you learned with the state organization you are working with - you are gathering important intelligence.

**Thank your legislator publicly.** Write a letter to the editor or a short article for your group's newsletter or a weekly paper. Be sure to share the information with your legislator.

**Continue to track the bill and provide periodic updates** to your legislator as necessary.