

Factsheet

Lobbying for Change

An essential part of any movement for social change is the effort to create new legislation. To do this, you must know how to communicate with your elected officials. First, find out who they are. For a list of federal, state, county, and city officials, call your local board of elections, library, or Project Vote Smart at 888-VOTE-SMART (or visit www.vote-smart.org). Do not confuse your federal legislators with your state legislators. Federal legislators have virtually no effect on state and local legislation, and vice versa. Next, get to know as many legislators as you can. Don't wait until your group wants to introduce a bill. Lay the foundation now, before you start a legislative campaign. Despite your personal political leanings, avoid party politics. The animals need the support of all parties. Attend "town meetings," at which legislators meet with voters to answer questions. Write to thank them for taking an animal-friendly position. Arrange to meet with them, even if it's only on an issue that you don't feel strongly about. The important thing is to establish a rapport. It's also very helpful to get to know the elected officials' aides, who are often much more accessible and can often provide you with good "inside" information.

■ Writing letters to elected officials

- Discuss only one issue in each letter.
- Keep it short. One page is best, and two pages is the maximum.
- The more personal the letter appears, the more seriously it will be taken. If your handwriting is legible, you may even want to write it by hand. Tell how the issue affects you, your family, and your community.
- State the purpose of your letter in the first paragraph.
- Support your argument with facts, not emotions.
- Don't assume the legislator knows all about the issue. Provide background information.
- Identify the bill or ordinance by title and number.
- Be polite and positive.
- Never threaten ("I won't vote for you if ..."). Today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally on another issue.
- Don't offend by saying, "You probably won't pay any attention to this," or, "I know you won't do anything about this."

- State clearly what you want him or her to do: vote yes or no, urge a government agency to investigate a laboratory, etc. Don't be vague.
- Ask for a reply.
- Include your name and address on both the envelope and the letter.
- Use the proper form of address for both the address and the salutation. Any legislator is called "The Honorable" on the envelope and inside addresses. The title for state or federal representatives in the salutation is "Mr." or "Ms." The title for state or federal senators in the salutation is "Senator."

■ Calling and e-mailing elected officials

- Phone calls are not a replacement for letters but are useful in **following up** on a letter. You can reach the congressional switchboard by calling 202-225-3121.
- Use e-mail only for brief follow-up exchanges. Never use it as the primary means to introduce yourself or explain your issue. Most legislative



offices are not equipped to reply to the volume of e-mail messages that they receive every day. However, letters will almost always receive a response.

■ Meeting with elected officials

- Make an appointment well in advance.
- If you are going with a group of people, decide ahead of time who will be the spokesperson.
- Dress conservatively and professionally.
- Find out in advance about the legislator and his or her voting record.
- Compliment him or her on past achievements.
- Clearly convey what action you want the legislator to take.
- Be friendly and positive.
- Don't turn down a chance for a visit if you can only get a meeting with the legislative aide. Go to the meeting and behave as if you were meeting with the elected official.
- Know the title and bill number of the legislation that you want to discuss.
- Provide factsheets, not thick packets. The most effective materials are informative but brief.
- Don't speak as a member of a national organization. Speak as a constituent.
- Don't wear animal rights buttons.
- Know your facts, and prepare as well as possible. If you can't answer a question, that's OK. Say you'll find out the answer, and then follow up with the information.
- Don't become emotional and start ranting and raving about how animals are suffering and how heartbreaking it is.
- Be open to counterarguments, but don't get stuck on them. Don't be argumentative.
- Make your points briefly and clearly. Don't waste the legislator's time. Thank him or her, and leave promptly.
- Send a thank-you letter for the meeting.
- If the legislator takes positive action on your issue, send a thank-you letter and tell others of his or her good work.

Remember that how you communicate is as important as what you communicate. People who care about animals are often stereotyped as overly emotional. We can change that image by doing our homework, by not getting angry or hostile, and by keeping our statements concise.

Senators

The Honorable (first and last name)
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representatives

The Honorable (first and last name)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515