

State Lobbying 101

Lobbying your state Senator or Representative is a fairly simple process and is a good way to share your message with your elected officials. Although it may sound daunting, lobbying is really just about talking to your official or their staff person about something that is important to you. Since your officials are busy people, they might not know a lot about housing issues in your area which makes *you* the expert who is providing valuable information. Remember, it is your right as a citizen to lobby your representative and it is your elected officials' responsibility to be responsive to the concerns of their constituents.

Scheduling the Meeting

When beginning to lobby, first decide who you want to meet with. The Illinois Board of Elections has a handy search function for you to find your elected officials here: <http://www.elections.il.gov/DistrictLocator/SelectSearchType.aspx>. Next, schedule the meeting either by phone or by fax. Faxing your request is a good idea because it is instantaneous and provides a written record of your request. It is always a good idea to call the office of the official you hope to meet with to make sure the request was received. You can find Legislators' fax and phone numbers on the State website here: www.ilga.gov. As part of the support materials included in this email you'll find an example of a written request that you can tailor to your organization and your goals.

Remember, your elected officials often have busy schedules so it may be necessary to be flexible to fit their schedules. Also, if meeting with a staff person is an alternative, you should take advantage of it.

The Illinois General Assembly will be on Spring Break from April 6-17. This recess could be a great opportunity to meet with your officials when they are back in their districts and a little closer to home. Even though the Assembly is not in session it will still be a busy time for legislators so make sure to start scheduling your meetings now!

Planning the Meeting

A meeting will usually be no more than twenty minutes to half an hour long and this time is your chance to highlight your organization and your particular issues. To get the most out of your time it is a good idea to plan out what you want to say ahead of time:

- Decide what two or three priority issues you'd like to discuss, how to frame your message positively and simply, and what specific actions you would like your official to take.
- **Do Not Assume** that the person you are meeting with understands or knows about your issue. It is best to start with a description of the problem in your community and then move on to solutions.
- Be sure to bring along printed materials to give to the legislator or staff person so they can review your information after the meeting and easily recall the details of your discussion.

In deciding how to frame your message, it helps to know your Legislator's professional interests and background. It also helps to know how your member voted on specific housing issues. This

can be found on www.votesmart.org by searching for your Senator or Representative. If the Legislator's record is favorable, remember to acknowledge his or her past support in the meeting. If a record is unfavorable you may express your concern but remember that today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally. After your meeting be sure to follow up with thank you notes and by completing any follow up that your Legislator may have requested.