



CHILD CARE PROVIDERS TOGETHER

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How to Convince Elected Officials Through Lobbying

Why lobby?

Lobbying elected officials on the state, county, city or town level is an important part of AFSCME's program to advance the interests of its members. In general, lobbying is merely trying to affect the outcome of a decision or trying to convince someone to do something.

Every AFSCME member needs to be involved personally in the process as citizens and taxpayers, thereby convincing legislators that AFSCME is more than a handful of officers and staff. Legislators respond to their constituencies and a good lobbying campaign demonstrates that their constituents support a certain position.

The principal goal in lobbying is to demonstrate strong, broad-based support for AFSCME's positions and to persuade decision-makers to agree with us. Elected officials need to be convinced that AFSCME's position has support in the community.

A coalition of family members, community groups, and other concerned citizens may be able to lobby an elected official more effectively than AFSCME members alone. Because of this, lobbying efforts should always include some form of coalition building. Coalitions do not need to be permanent or covered by the press to be effective.

How to convince elected officials of the merits of AFSCME's position

The first step is to summarize the arguments. Prepare what will be said to the elected officials verbally in a meeting or on the phone and what can be put in writing either as a fact sheet or a letter. Prepare any backup material they may request. The elected officials will need information that they feel comfortable using to explain their support for AFSCME's position to their constituents and other officials.

One of AFSCME's strengths is that the union has information on what other Councils and Locals are doing and on what is happening nationwide. AFSCME has a reputation for providing accurate and understandable information.

State and local officials will be convinced by two factors: the information provided to support AFSCME's arguments and the usefulness of that information; and the number of residents and other leaders in their districts who express support for AFSCME's position.

What are some ways to demonstrate support of AFSCME's position?

To show state and local officials that a substantial number of their constituents support AFSCME's position, the Lobbying Committee can organize:

1. Letter writing campaigns. Personal letters are always more effective than form letters;
2. Postcard campaigns;
3. Petitions;
4. Crowd support at hearings, community meetings and other public events;
5. Statements of support from other official bodies;
6. Media – letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, press statements, buttons, bumper stickers, etc.;
7. Letters of support from influential people/organizations;
8. Discussions at public meetings or forums;
9. Expert testimony at committee hearings or county board/city council meetings;
10. Telephone calls;
11. And most important of all, one-to-one meetings with elected officials at their offices or public events.

How to prepare for a meeting with an elected official

- Meet as a group before the meeting with the elected official.
- Select a spokesperson for the group, with the understanding that others can add to what's being said. Too many voices can confuse things so that not all your points get covered.
- Review and discuss the facts supporting your position so that everyone understands the issues and you can discuss your presentation and develop your ideas together. Think about arguments for and against your position.
- Research past election data, personal background and voting behavior of the official so you know



something about him/her personally. Pay particular attention to the voting record on issues similar to the one you will be discussing.

- Role play your meeting.

Conducting the meeting

- Arrive a little early so you don't feel rushed and can dispose of coats — if you have them — in the outer office. It's distracting to be fumbling with coats as you enter the official's office.
- Don't get upset if you have to wait. Elected officials often run late. It also can be a way to put you off guard.
- Don't be intimidated by the office or the way you are seated. Sitting behind his/her desk can be a way the official tries to keep the upper hand psychologically. Remember he/she works for you, not the other way around.
- Always use facts; don't exaggerate. Never threaten. Be polite and to the point.
- Begin your presentation by thanking the official for meeting with you and for any support he/she has given on past AFSCME issues. Express disappointment for any wrong votes. This will establish you as someone who knows what the official is doing and who will keep track in the future. Also, it's nice to be thanked and that can start the meeting off on a pleasant note.
- Present your case and try to personalize your argument as much as possible by explaining how you, the AFSCME membership, and the public will be affected. Always try to make your case in a way that is politically attractive to the official.
- Concentrate on what the official says. It's important to know what he/she is thinking. Don't get angry if you disagree. Don't take notes during the meeting. The official may be less candid. Don't interrupt.
- Leave a fact sheet with AFSCME's or the coalition's position. Leave on a pleasant note.

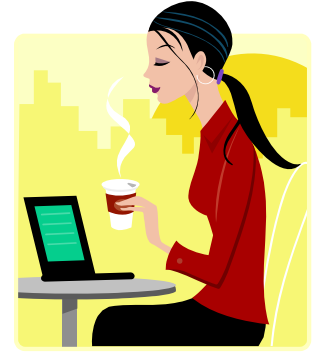


Follow-up and reporting

- Go someplace immediately after the meeting and write down what the official said, before you forget.
- Send a thank-you note to the official that also reminds him/her again of your position and requests that he/she keep you informed.
- Report on the results of your meeting to your brothers and sisters at the next Local meeting and to the coalition with which you are working.

What to remember when writing to elected officials

A good letter clearly and concisely spells out why you, as a constituent, are interested in a particular issue. Here are some additional suggestions:



1. Check the spelling of names and the proper form of address.
2. Identify yourself as a constituent by telling him/her where you live.
3. Explain why the particular issue is important to you and your community.
4. Make it clear what action you would like to see your official take.
5. Ask to be informed of his/her position on the issue.
6. Include your return address clearly printed or typed.
7. Express your thanks. Being rude or threatening only hurts our case.

It is always helpful to figure out a way to make your elected officials feel good about supporting AFSCME. Everyone wants to support a worthwhile cause.

