

# LOBBYING—FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## WHAT IS LOBBYING?

While it may seem complicated, lobbying is simply influencing legislation (local, state, or national) and/or administrative actions. Lobbying can take the form of direct meetings, phone calls, letters, and e-mail. Discover more on NCH's Lobbying 101 webpage: <http://nationalhomeless.org/taking-action/lobbying/>.

For more information on letter-writing as lobbying, refer to the Bread for the World's Offering of Letters section (p.28). This section will focus on how to set up direct meetings and speak with elected officials.

## TO WHOM/WHERE CAN I LOBBY IF I DON'T LIVE IN WASHINGTON, DC?

Raising awareness and ending homelessness needs to happen at all levels of government. Consider visiting state senators and representatives, mayors, and other local officials. Federal senators and representatives have local offices in their districts as well, if you are really passionate about a piece of federal legislation. Remember, you may not be able to set up a meeting directly with an elected official, but ask to speak with a staffer or aid who deals with homelessness and hunger issues.

## HOW DO I PREPARE?

You should pick your topics, no more than two or three that you want to address. Then do some research so that you feel comfortable discussing the issue. If you're nervous, practice talking to others before you go. Also, consider what your goal for the meeting is, for example, a commitment to cosponsor a bill, vote in favor of a bill, or to take a leadership role on an issue. Also gather some background information on the official you will be speaking with. Find out where they have stood on past issues. Make sure to acknowledge/thank them for past support during the meeting, if applicable; this will show that you are informed and serious.

## WHAT TOPICS SHOULD I BRING TO ELECTED OFFICIALS?

You don't have to talk about a specific piece of legislation. It is appropriate to discuss homelessness, hunger, or poverty in general, but do be specific on the actions that you would like to see taken. For current policy recommendations visit the NCH website at <http://nationalhomeless.org/about-us/policy-priorities/>. The website breaks down issues into four different areas: civil rights, housing justice, economic justice and health care justice.

## WHAT SHOULD I SAY OR DO?

- Make sure you identify yourself as a constituent and as a participant in a Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week.
- Go in a small but diverse group (no more than five people) to show that a wide range of citizens care about hunger and homelessness. Additional tip: bring someone who has experienced homelessness.
- Be concise and clear and answer questions as best as possible.
- Make sure to tell them what your opinions are and share any relevant personal experiences.
- It is best to listen closely and provide information when you can. Consider taking a notepad with you and jotting down some key points during the conversation; this will also show you're listening and interested in what they are saying. The meeting should be a dialogue not an attack or a rant.
- Feel free to make a one page fact sheet to leave with the office so they have a reminder of what was said.

## WHAT SHOULD I NOT SAY OR DO?

- Don't overwhelm an elected official or their staffers. Keep your group to five or less.
- Don't be disrespectful, argumentative, or confrontational. They may not agree with you on this issue, but if you're negative, they may not listen to you in the future.
- Don't make up facts. It is okay to say, "I don't know, I'll have to get back to you on that" if you can't answer a question. Just be sure to actually follow up with information you promised.

## OKAY, SO I VISITED MY ELECTED OFFICIAL, NOW WHAT?

Send a follow-up letter thanking them for their time. Reiterate your opinion, and if they made any commitments during the meeting, repeat your understanding of their plan of action.

