

LOBBYING 101: TIPS TO EFFECTIVE LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Lobbying decision makers is one of the most effective ways to influence public policy. Effective policymaking requires citizen participation. Any citizen can and should lobby decision makers on proposals and policies that impact their community, livelihood, and profession. You are in a unique position as a representative of both the general public and a highly respected profession. You play a critical role in educating legislators on the implications of issues impacting the dental profession and dental patients.

Below are several elements of effective legislative advocacy that will help you during your interactions with lawmakers.

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

Researching your legislators' history on dental issues and understanding which policy areas they are passionate about is a critical part of effective lobbying. Take a look at the attached bios to get a better understanding of your legislators' knowledge of health care and dentistry issues.

- Remember – you are the expert on this issue, understand that your legislator may not be.
- Keep in mind that these questions often guide lawmakers' decisions on policy proposals:
 - How does this impact my district and my constituents (you and your patients)?
 - How much will this cost and who will pay for it?
 - If you are advocating for a position, are there groups that are against it? How will you counter their argument?
- Treat lawmakers with respect – they may not agree with one of our issues but may support us on another in the future. Be respectful and ensure that the lines of communication stay open.

PREPARE YOUR MESSAGE

Before you meet with your legislator, use the MDA issue brief sheets and Lobbying 101 sheets to become familiar with the MDA's talking points on our issues. Understand that messaging must pertain to the lawmaker and his or her constituents.

- Understand that your message and talking points may be effective for one member based on political leanings, district location, and knowledge of the issue but won't be as effective for a member of a different party, district, or background.
- Always address your legislators as "Senator" if they are a member of the Senate or "Representative" if they are a member of the House of Representatives.

DELIVER YOUR MESSAGE AND FOLLOW UP

- Be concise but avoid one-word answers – avoid technical jargon and practice your talking points ahead of time.
- Provide concrete examples – always back up claims with specifics, statistics, and examples if possible.
- Tell your story – use stories about your practice and patients to make your point and convey your message.
- Always say "thank you" at the conclusion of the meeting and follow up with a written note, phone call, or email.
- Report back – let the MDA know how your legislator responded to our issues.

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