
Prevention Action Alliance

Lifetime Prevention | Lifetime Wellness

Legislative Advocacy Tips

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Tips for In-Person Meetings with Elected Officials

Step 1:

Research Relevant Political Matters Research a few things about the officials and their political beliefs and establish your goals for the meeting. This can help make your visit productive. Familiarize yourself with the political climate in Columbus or Washington, D.C. Republicans control state departments, statewide offices (Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Treasurer of State, and Auditor of State), the Ohio House of Representatives, the Ohio Senate, and six of seven Ohio Supreme Court Justices. Democrats control no statewide offices or legislative bodies and have three members on the Ohio Supreme Court. In Washington, D.C., the U.S. House of Representatives and the US Senate are controlled by Democrats. President Biden is also a Democrat, meaning that federal agencies are led by Democratic appointees. Understanding term limits in Ohio is important for knowing who you can continue to work with in the future. State Representatives are limited to four two-year terms, and State Senators are limited to two four-year terms. Statewide officeholders are limited to two four-year terms in the same office.

Step 2:

Establish Your Objective Before You Meet. Establishing your goals before you walk into the meeting is important - otherwise, you may end up wasting what could be your only shot at speaking with them for some time.

Step 3:

Get to Know Your Elected Official's Staff Members Legislative staff members are the gatekeepers to their elected bosses, if you treat them with respect and build a rapport with them early on, you are likely to be treated with the same respect in return.

Step 4:

Meet with Your Legislator or Elected Official

Meeting in Columbus - Typically, legislators are only in their Columbus offices when they have official meetings (such as committee meetings or voting sessions). If you would like to meet with your legislator in Columbus, try to do so on Tuesdays, or Wednesdays, as these are the days when committees and voting sessions take place.

Meeting in the District - Meeting locally opens a greater number of potential meeting times, increasing your chances of sitting down with your elected official earlier than if you were to wait and meet in their official office. Legislative staff can help you schedule a visit in the district - all you have to do is ask!

Be Organized - Only bring guests who can speak to your arguments or who have a local connection to the elected official. Having a large group of people in your meeting can be counterproductive. Remember to introduce yourself and your guests first and outline the goals of the meeting upfront. If you are speaking about specific legislation, make sure you have the bill number.

Write down facts that support your argument. Charts, graphs, news stories, and other evidence can strengthen your case. When appropriate, specify what action you would like the official to take on a particular issue. Be clear about your position!

Be Professional - Dress appropriately. Do not mislead an official by arranging a meeting to discuss one topic and then switch to another when it's time to meet. They may not agree to additional meetings if this happens.

Prepare for the possibility that the elected official may not agree with you. If that happens, always maintain a civil and professional tone.

Step 5:

Follow Up Leave your contact information. If you are printing and leaving your materials, make sure your contact information is included within the document itself. Telephone numbers and email are the most frequently used methods of communication.

Answer Their Questions - If your legislator or elected official has questions about your issues during and after the meeting that you are unable to answer at that time, follow up quickly and professionally with the information. Always say thank you before leaving your meeting, even if you have not achieved your goals. It is also kind to write a thank you note to the legislator and their aide after the fact.

Tips for Letters and Emails to Legislators

Think Before You Write - Remember, your letter becomes a public record the moment it is received by your legislator. Don't write anything you wouldn't want any other legislative staffer, reporter, or member of the public to read. Lastly, make sure your contact information is included in the letter. Telephone numbers and e-mail are the most frequently used methods of communication.

Timing is Everything - Take into consideration when you are sending the letter, especially if you are looking to convey your opinion on a bill that may be coming up for a vote. In a case like that, it's important to get your note to the legislator before that bill moves to the floor.

Keep it Local - Always make sure you send your letter to the legislator who represents you. However, you should not hesitate to write to a legislator who is taking a leadership role on an issue that affects you - for example, a committee chair, primary bill sponsor, etc. - even if they are not your elected representative.

Identify Yourself - Clearly state your name and address. If you are writing on behalf of an organization, include the name of the organization and your affiliation.

Be Direct - Be brief and succinct (keep your letter to 1 -1 ½ pages long) to be effective and demonstrate respect for your legislator's time. Write about only one subject. Be aware that, generally, your letter will be tallied one of three ways: "support," "oppose" or "interested party."

Keep it Personal - Do not send a form letter – you can use information from a sample letter as a guide but do your best to make your letter personal. Explaining how the issue impacts you make your letter more compelling. Photos have a lot of impact on legislators. Write your letter with the knowledge of the likely reader in mind.

Request a Follow-Up Response - If you are writing about a particular piece of legislation, ask the legislator to explain his/her position on the bill in response. If you are asking for their help with a constituent services issue, include case numbers and other pertinent data. You should NOT send personally identifiable information to a legislator's office.

Be Specific about Legislation - If referencing a bill, be sure to identify the bill by number. If you are writing about a specific provision of state law, make sure you accurately reference the impacted section of the Ohio Revised Code or the United States Code.



Tips for Testifying Before a State Legislative Committee



Schedule your Testimony To be put on the committee schedule, you must email your testimony and witness slip to the chair of the committee's aide. From there, you will be put on a list in a first-come-first-serve order for testimony. To receive a witness slip, you can email the chair's aide in a request of it. Keep in mind that committees can be delayed, canceled for any amount of time, or have bills removed from their schedule at the call of the chair, so be patient with staff as they work with you.

Research your Audience Once you've been added to the schedule, it's informative to look at the members that sit on the committee to familiarize yourself with their background.

Research your Subject Matter Try to learn as much as you can about the subject matter and bill of your testimony while you are preparing it. While you should not include every facet of an issue you are testifying about in your prepared statements but knowing more about an issue will help you answer questions from legislators.

Tips for Writing your Testimony

There is no one "correct" way to write your committee testimony. Sometimes, it's best to stick to facts and data to present your point; in other cases, it's good to appeal emotionally to committee members.

- Begin by addressing the chair, vice-chair, and ranking member by name and thanking the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on the bill. Then introduce yourself and your organization, if you are acting on behalf of one, and what your organization does.
- Explaining your position on the bill is important. Be sure to convey that throughout your message.
- Be solution-oriented; your role is to help educate and persuade committee members. This is when facts are useful.
- Make sure any facts and figures you cite are accurate and can be easily verified with source information attached.
- You are asked to keep your testimony to 5 minutes when presenting, so keep that in mind when determining the length of your speech.
- Visual aids are good when used effectively but should only be included if they will truly enhance your testimony. If it benefits your message, you can include supplemental documents to the committee when you are submitting your testimony to the chair's aide, and they will distribute it to the committee members.
- There's no harm in suggesting a modification to the legislation but be specific about the ask.
- When you're approaching the end of your testimony, try not to re-hash the testimony you've just given. A strong finishing sentence outlining your goals is helpful - repeating all the points you've already made is not.
- Before you finish, be sure to thank committee members again for their time and communicate that you're happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Tips for Presenting Testimony

Arrive Early and Be Flexible - Try to arrive before the committee begins so you do not interrupt proceedings with your arrival. Know that it's unlikely you'll receive a specific time at which you will be presenting, so be prepared to sit through the committee for a bit.

Fill Out a Witness Room or Sign-In Sheet - If you did not provide your testimony to the chair's office before the committee meeting, you can still provide testimony the day of. You will have to fill out a witness slip in person and provide a copy of your testimony on hand. From there you will be added to the end of the list for that bill number.

Presenting Testimony - When called to testify by the committee chair you will make your way to the podium. The chair will welcome you to the committee and you may begin. Members will likely have a copy of your testimony in front of them as you're speaking. Testimony should typically be no longer than 5 minutes.

Proper Protocol - When taking questions from the committee, it is best to address first the chair and then the member that asked the question before providing an answer.

Example question from the committee:

Representative Smith: "Mr. Chairman?"

Chairman Jones: "Representative Smith."

Representative Smith: "Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What color is a stop sign?"



Example response from the witness:

Witness: "Through the Chair, to Representative Smith, stop signs are red."

It is often easy to forget this protocol. While you should try your best to adhere, don't worry if the chairman reminds you to follow protocol, many understand that it can be confusing if this is the first-time providing testimony. Unruly witnesses who repeatedly refuse to follow the rules may be asked to end their testimony early.

Committee Follow-Up - Sometimes witnesses are asked for additional information that was not provided during testimony. If this happens, provide the chair's office with the information and they can appropriately distribute it to committee members' offices.

Glossary of Legislative Terms

Administrative Rule / Administrative Code: ●○ Any agency directive, standard, regulation, or statement of general applicability that implements, interprets, or prescribes law or policy, or describes the procedure or practice requirements of any agency. These rules are submitted to and ratified by the Joint Commission on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) and are codified in the Ohio Administrative Code (OAC).

Act: ●○ A bill that has been made law by passing both houses of the Legislature, and which either has been signed by the Governor, filed without the Governor's signature or passed by both houses of the Legislature over the Governor's veto.

Amendment: ●○ An alteration made or proposed to be made to a measure. Measures may be amended more than once.

Appropriation: ●○ A sum of money designated for a particular purpose by an Act. For example, an appropriations bill funds a state agency over the upcoming biennium.

Bill: ●○ A measure that creates new law, amends, or repeals existing law, appropriates money, prescribes fees, transfers functions from one agency to another, provides penalties, or takes other action.

Bill Analysis: ● A summary of a bill, prepared by the nonpartisan Legislative Service Commission (LSC), that is updated as the bill moves through the legislative process.

Caucus: ●○ "Caucus" is used as both a noun and a verb. A caucus (noun) is a group of people who share something in common (e.g., they are members of the same political party, such as the Senate Republican Caucus or the House Democratic Caucus). When these people caucus (verb) they meet to address their group's, policy questions and to select political candidates for office or political party leaders.

Chair / Chairperson: ●○ The legislator appointed by the Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate to preside over an individual committee; for example, the Chair of the Ways and Means Committee.

Clerk of House/Clerk of Senate: ●○ The chief administrative officers of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Clerks are elected by all the members of the House and Senate and are responsible for keeping records of the proceedings of each, supervising employees, acting as parliamentarian of official proceedings, and advising members on parliamentary procedures.

Committee Report: ●○ A summary report made to the Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate by a standing, special, or conference committee, which recommends further action on a measure or reports the measure without recommendation.

Concurrent Resolution: ●○ A measure affecting actions or procedures of both houses of the Legislature or Congress. A concurrent resolution is generally used to express sympathy, commendation, commemorate the dead, or declare an "official" symbol of Ohio (e.g., Ohio's State Fossil).

Concurrence: ●○ Formal means by which one house of the legislature signifies agreement with changes to a bill after it has been passed by the other.

Conference Committee: ●○ A committee usually consists of two or three members of each house, appointed by their respective presiding officers. A conference committee is appointed when one house refuses to concur with amendments to a measure adopted by the other house. Its goal is to prepare a version of the measure acceptable to both houses.

Effective Date: ● Unless the Act contains special provisions, such as an emergency clause or a special (delayed) effective date, most bills become effective 90 days (about 3 months) after the Governor’s signature. Separate sections of the same bill may have different effective dates.

Enact: ●○ To establish by law.

First Consideration: ● The formal recitation on the chamber floor of the bill number, title, and sponsor by the Clerk upon introduction of a measure in either house. After the first consideration, the measure is referred to the committee by the Speaker or President. According to legislative rules, a bill must go to a relevant substantive committee.

Fiscal Impact Statement / Fiscal Note: ● A statement that estimates future costs resulting from the passage of a bill.

Floor: ● The area in both the House and Senate Chambers are reserved for legislators and certain legislative staff members.

General Assembly: ● A term describing the Ohio House and Senate collectively. Each General Assembly meets for a biennium and is numbered – the 128th General Assembly begins meeting in January 2009.

Hearing: ● A public meeting of a legislative committee held to take testimony concerning proposed legislation. There is no limit on the number of hearings a bill may receive or how many times it may be amended through that process.

House of Representatives: ●○ The legislative body of 99 members, called Representatives, each of which represents a district of approximately 115,000 Ohio citizens. Representatives are elected for 2-year terms. In Congress, there are 435 Representatives, each of which represents a district of approximately 700,000 U.S. citizens (though that number can vary greatly by state).

Joint Committee: ●○ A legislative committee composed of members of the House and Senate.

Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR): ● A legislative body made up of both House and Senate members that reviews and approves administrative rules drafted to implement Ohio statutes. Approved rules are codified in the OAC, which is organized to correspond with the related sections of the OHIO REVISED CODE (ORC).

Joint Resolution: ●○ A measure used for proposing constitutional amendments, creating interim committees, giving direction to a state agency, expressing legislative approval of the action taken by someone else, or authorizing a kind of temporary action to be taken.

Journal: ●○ The edited record of all the proceedings on the floors of both houses, published the day after each legislative session.

Leadership: ●○ The presiding elected officers of each house: the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. They are elected by all the members of each chamber when the body gathers for a legislative session following a general election. “Leadership” can also refer to the Majority and Minority Leaders, elected by their caucuses.

Legislative Service Commission: ●○ A non-partisan state agency responsible for writing all bills and amendments for changes to the Ohio Revised Code (ORC). Lawmakers do not write their own bills.

Lobbyist: ●○ A person who is employed by an organization, association, industry group, or corporation to represent its interests before the Legislature. Lobbyists and their employers must register and file periodic reports with the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee.

Majority Leader: ●○ A legislator elected by his or her peers to lead the party having the majority in his or her house. The majority leader is responsible for the development and implementation of the caucus agenda.

Minority Leader: ●○ A legislator elected by his or her peers to lead the party in the minority in his or her house. The minority leader is responsible for the development and implementation of the caucus agenda.

Motion: ●○ The formal way of directing debate on the floor. It is the way, for example, that a member introduces a measure for debate on the floor.

Ohio Revised Code (ORC) or (RC): ● The codified laws of the State of Ohio. The current ORC is available online through the State of Ohio website (www.ohio.gov).

President of the Senate: ● In Ohio, the presiding officer of the Senate is a member of the majority party elected by all members of the Senate when the Senate organizes for a regular Legislative session. In the Congress, the President of the Senate is the Vice President of the United States.

President Pro Tempore: ● President “for a time”: a Senator elected to serve as the temporary President in the absence of the President of the Senate.

Quorum: ●○ The number of members required to be present before business can be transacted in the House, Senate, or a committee. In the House, 50 members must be present; in the Senate, 17 members; and in committees, a constitutional majority constitutes a quorum.

Reconsideration: ● Taking a second vote on a measure after a motion to do so, following the defeat of the measure.

Refer: ●○ To direct a bill (after the introduction and First Consideration) to a committee: “HB 25 was referred to the Ways and Means Committee.” Bill referrals (also called “Second Consideration”) are made by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House through each chamber’s Reference Committee.

Resolution: ●○ A measure used by the House or the Senate (a measure passed by both would be a joint resolution) to take an action that would affect only its own members, such as appointing a committee of its members, or expressing in opinion or sentiment on a matter of public interest.

Roll Call: ●○ A recitation by the Clerk of each legislator’s name to identify those present and voting on a legislative issue. Votes are recorded through electronic means in the Ohio General Assembly.

Rules: ●○ The guidelines by which the Senate, the House of Representatives, or a committee governs its meetings. Rules are formally adopted at the first convening of the Legislative Assembly or of a committee and require a vote (with at least a quorum of members present) for official adoption.

Rules Committee: ● The legislative body chaired by the President in the Senate and the Speaker in the House that determines when bills reported out of committee are presented to the full House or Senate for a floor vote. Many bills reported out of committee are not presented to the full House or Senate for a vote.

Second Consideration: ● The second consideration of a bill occurs in the committee of each respective chamber in the legislature. When reported by the committee to the full chamber, it is said to have received its second consideration.

Senate: ●○ In Ohio, the legislative body of 33 members, called Senators, each of which represents a district of approximately 345,000 Ohio citizens that fully encompasses three Ohio House districts. In Congress, there are 100 Senators (2 per state) in accordance with the U.S. Constitution. Population does not factor into a state's representation in the United States Senate.

Session: ●○ The period during which either or both houses of the General Assembly or the United States Congress Officially Convenes.

Single Subject Rule: ● The constitutional requirement that each bill passed by the General Assembly address a "single subject." This rule is routinely ignored or interpreted in the most liberal manner possible, especially near the end of a legislative session.

Speaker of the House: ●○ The presiding officer of the Ohio House of Representatives and the U.S. House of Representatives, elected by all members when it convenes at the beginning of a biennial legislative session.

Speaker Pro Tempore: ●○ Speaker "for a time": a Representative elected to serve as the temporary Speaker in the absence of the Speaker of the House.

Statute: ●○ A codified law. (NOTE: "Codify" means "to arrange laws systematically." A codified law is one that has been incorporated into that section of the ORC or the United States Code [USC] that it amends, modifies, or accompanies.)

Subcommittee: ●○ A subordinate committee composed of members appointed by the Chair (or by House or Senate leadership) from the full committee. A subcommittee will consider a narrower range of topics than the full committee, and generally is authorized only to make recommendations to the full committee.

Third Consideration: ● The final consideration of a bill by either house (following reporting of the bill by a committee), is usually done before a final vote.

Veto: ●○ An action of the Governor or the President in disapproval of a measure that has passed both houses of the respective legislatures. After a veto, the bill is returned to its house of origin with written objections. A veto may be reconsidered by both houses, and if it is again passed by two-thirds of the members present, it is considered overridden and becomes law.

Line-Item Veto: ● The Governor in Ohio has "line-item veto" authority, permitting him to veto certain parts of an appropriations bill without having to veto the entire measure. The President has no such authority in items passed by the Congress.

Vice-Chair: ●○ A committee member chosen by the Speaker or President to serve as the committee chair in the chair's absence.

Witness: ●○ A person who testifies before a legislative committee.

● Applies in Ohio General Assembly

○ Applies in Congress

Helpful Resources

Ohio Legislative Services Commission (LSC)

The Legislative Service Commission (LSC) is a nonpartisan agency providing drafting, fiscal, research, training, code revision, and other services to the Ohio General Assembly. LSC was created in 1953, primarily to conduct studies of legislative issues during the interim periods between legislative sessions. Other duties were added over the years. Prior to 2000, the General Assembly's nonpartisan fiscal analysis services were provided by the Legislative Budget Office (LBO). But the LSC and LBO staff merged that year to provide better coordination of the drafting and fiscal analysis functions, and now LSC's Budget and Fiscal Analysis section performs the duties of the former LBO. The LSC has an incredible number of helpful resources for citizens interested in advocacy. Their publications provide individuals with a basic understanding of the legislative process, simplify complex legislation with online bill analyses, and help advocates track issues. Their website is a wonderful, yet underused, resource for the citizens of Ohio. Credit: Ohio LSC Credit: Ohio LSC.

