



Grassroots Lobbying Guide

Introduction

Legislators have a say in everything that affects your life and job; salary, health care, retirement, job security, workforce issues, and working conditions. Important decisions such as these should not be made without input from those who are directly affected by those decisions.

The success of an EMS legislative program depends on a network of committed members like you—individuals who educate themselves on the issues and contact their legislators reinforce the efforts of the professional lobbyists working on EMS issues.

Professional lobbyists maintain a constant presence in Congress; meeting legislators, monitoring committees, and being a part of the process on a daily basis. However, professional lobbyists are most effective when they are backed up by constituents contacting their legislators directly. Elected officials listen to the citizens who put them in office. Here is how you can get involved and make a difference!

Keys to Effective Grassroots Lobbying

Preparation prior to contacting your legislator is vital to effectively lobbying on specific legislation.

- **Know your legislators:** Who are they? How many terms they have served? How have they voted in the past on EMS issues? Are they sponsors of the bill? What committee(s) has the legislation been referred to? Who are the chairmen and members of those committees?
- **Know the bill:** When discussing specific legislation, you will need to know the number of the bill and its short title. Your legislator will better understand your issues and concerns when you refer to a specific bill by name and number. Know what the bill says and what changes, if any, are being advocated. If a legislator in both the House and Senate each introduce a bill to accomplish the same objective, they are companion bills. Know the bill name and number for each.
- **Make an appointment** with the legislators you plan to contact. Check to see if and when the bill is scheduled to be “heard” before committee. A calendar can be found on the Thomas search engine of the Library of Congress, www.thomas.loc.gov, listing bills scheduled to be heard on the floor of the House or Senate, as well as a list of committee meetings for each day and bills scheduled for “hearing” in committees.
- Building **coalitions** with community groups and organization may be desirable in addition to individual lobbying. Research the position any of these groups may already have on the legislation or issue. Compile a list of groups

likely to join forces on an issue, including well-known individuals who generally support EMS issues. Be specific in the kind of action requested of each group, such as lobbying as a group or calling or sending letters to their legislators.

Contacting your legislator

Making contact with legislators following your preparations can be effectively accomplished in a number of ways.

Face-to-face meetings with legislators or their legislative aides are often the most effective means of explaining your position on an issue and seeking their support. It helps legislators to “put a face on the issue,” on the organization you are representing and could help to develop a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship with lawmakers.

These meetings can be arranged in their local office or in Washington. Legislators are generally in their home districts Friday through Monday when Congress is in session. The following guidelines can aid in effectively talking to legislators.

- **Be professional**, showing courtesy and respect when asking legislators to support EMS issues.
- **Introduce yourself**, even if you’ve talked with these legislators before.
- **Be concise**. Get right to the point in a friendly, yet brief, manner. Stick to one issue and avoid diluting your message by talking about a variety of subjects.
- **Be reasonable and honest**. Don’t argue or debate. Give them the facts in a clear, concise manner. If you are asked a question you don’t know the answer to, tell them the truth and that you will get the information for them.

- **Be consistent**, ensuring the message being conveyed is the one agreed upon by the organization or group you are representing.

Email and letter writing are both effective means of grassroots lobbying.

Email is a very effective lobbying tool because one email can reach many of legislators in a matter of seconds. The legislators may have to cast a vote on pending legislation immediately, making it imperative they hear from their constituents quickly, leaving no time for the traditional letter to be sent. However, letter writing can be seen as a more “personal” touch. A few key rules should be followed when emailing or writing your legislator:

- **NAEMT has a letter-writing tool called CAPWIZ.** This will be used when NAEMT asks its members to send letters to Congress. You will receive notification of such campaigns with instructions. CAPWIZ is also a resource that has a tremendous amount of up-to-date information about the activities of Congress. You can find a link to CAPWIZ on the NAEMT website.
- **Identify yourself**, using your full name and title (if pertinent), address and phone number. Identify the organization you are affiliated with. Your address will confirm your legislator knows you are a constituent.
- **Be direct and to the point**, using the specific bill numbers/titles. Do not ramble—get to the point in a concise manner and then expand as needed. Make it clear what you want: co-sponsorship or a vote in favor or against specific legislation. Check your email for spelling and grammatical mistakes before you send it. Emails and letters written in a professional manner, free of spelling and grammatical mistakes, add credibility to what you are saying.

Phone calls can be used as both an initial contact and as an effective follow-up to an email or personal visit. The following are effective, easy tips for phoning your legislator:

- **Make a list of points** you want to make during the conversation before you call.
- **Identify yourself** to the person answering the phone, using your full name, work or personal location and the legislative district. It is important to establish that you are a concerned constituent.
- **Ask to speak to your legislator.** If they are unavailable, there is often a staff member whose job it is to answer on behalf of the legislator. When leaving your message with a staff member, include specific information about your request, or position on a bill. If the legislator's position is in your favor, express your appreciation for their support. If they are undecided, offer to provide more information on the subject.
- Always be **courteous, concise, and consistent** and remember to thank the legislator or staff member for their time.

Follow up after every contact with your legislator. Always follow up a meeting with a thank you and any additional material they may have requested. After a vote or a co-sponsorship, follow up with a letter expressing thanks or disappointment.

- **Send a thank you letter** to the legislator for their time.
- **Follow up a personal visit** with a phone call, email or letter reiterating the key points.
- **Following a vote**, contact your legislature expressing thanks or disappointment of the outcome. Remember, legislators are always keeping a focus on their re-election.
- **Additional information** a legislator has requested should be delivered to them as quickly as possible.

- **Keep in contact** with your legislators. They want and need to know the effect of their actions and their actions were popular and supported by their constituents.
- **Notify** the coalition or organization you were lobbying for of your activities, planned events and responses you received from the legislator. A constant flow of two-way communication is essential to successful grassroots lobbying.

Internet Resources: Library of Congress: www.thomas.loc.gov, www.senate.gov, www.house.gov