

Legislative Advocacy 101: Getting Your Voice Heard

What this tool is

This tool will show you how to tell your personal story to people in power. Through personal legislative lobbying and advocacy, you can help change the minds of lawmakers and get the laws in your district changed.

How to use this tool

This tool presents some common ways of getting in touch with legislators. It will show you ways to present your story individually (in person, or otherwise), or to a large public group at a legislative hearing. You will be dealing with people who hopefully want to represent your needs, but who are also very busy. You must be confident and plan your words well in order to convince them that what you are saying is important.

What is the difference between lobbying and advocacy?

Lobbying is when people or groups push for a specific law to be passed or removed. For example, writing to a senator and asking them to vote against involuntary medication laws would be lobbying.

Advocacy is trying to make people more educated and aware about specific issues. For example, a group like ASAN might want to show that disability services are a big necessity, and cause members of the public to oppose cuts to these services.

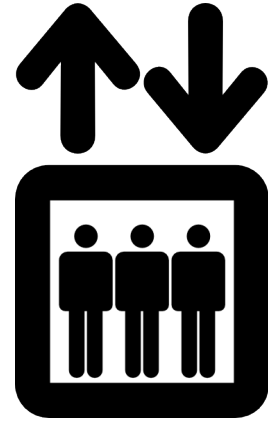
What are you advocating for?

You should pick an issue that you feel is important. There is a nearly endless list of problems in society that need attention. A more specific issue may be a better one to work on. This way, it will not be overwhelming and you can come up with specific proposed solutions easier.



What Is an Elevator Speech?

Once you know what issue you want to advocate for, you need to prepare what you will say. An elevator speech is a short speech that you have memorized in case you get a moment with a legislator, like riding the elevator with them.



Begin by saying

- Your first and last name
- Where you live
- Your school, workplace, or some other part of the community you belong to
- Thanks to the legislator for listening to you

Next, bring up the policy issue you are advocating for. Talk about how the issue affects you or the people around you.

Tell them WHY you and others need the policy you support.

Sample statements to consider using:

- We should balance the budget with a change in our priorities.
- We should change our priorities so that all people get the services they need to live with dignity, respect, and independence.
- People should be valued, not just be evaluated.
- A budget is a document of values.
- Treat people as people, NOT as problems that cost money!
- Please do not keep balancing the budget on the back of people with disabilities.

Here is something to remember when you are writing your elevator speech.

KISSSS

K Keep

I It

S Short – two minutes at most

Sincere – speak from the heart

Simple – use a group's whole name – no initials

Stick to the facts – don't make things up



Here is an example of the “big issue” part of the elevator speech. As you can see it is short and sweet.

For next year, we need money for students with disabilities who are graduating from high school. It is estimated that there are 96 students in this area who will need Medicaid Waiver services. Without support, these students will likely lose their livelihoods. We are asking that the legislature appropriate \$1.074 million for services for the new graduates.

Now that you know what you are going to say, it is time to connect with your legislators. There are many ways to connect: letters, emailing, calling, having a party, testifying at the state house.

How do you set up a meeting with your legislator?

Do you know who your legislators are?

- Most states have a state legislative website that you can look up online to find out who your legislators are in your district.
- Once you know who is in your district, set up an appointment with them by email or phone.
- Lunch is usually a good time to meet when you are at the statehouse.
- Write the appointment on your calendar and make arrangements to get there and for support if you need it. You don't want to forget this!



What do you do on the day you meet with your legislator?

- Look your best. Dress to impress.
- Remember how important it is to present yourself well. You are not only representing yourself, but you are representing your organizations and people with disabilities in general.
- Introduce yourself and use a firm handshake. Remember what you prepared in your elevator speech. State your name, your district, and that you vote.
- Focus on what they are saying. Listen and respond.
- Don't forget to thank them for their time.

What is a legislative testimony?

- You may be asked to speak in front of a legislative committee.
- You would be speaking about a bill that is being discussed.
- You need to prepare ahead of time. **NEVER** “wing it.”
- A testimony is official and will go on the legislative record.
- You will be at a public event and speaking in front of a group.



How do you write a legislative testimony?

- Start by introducing yourself. Say your name, where you live, and what organization you work for.
- Speak from the heart.
- Make sure you cover the whole issue. Cover the positives of passing your policy and the negatives of not passing it. Also be realistic about the costs. Know what kind of impact this would have on the district budget.
- Thank your listeners at the end.
- It is good to bring copies of what you’ll be saying to the public hearing and email legislators your testimony ahead of time.

