

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF GRASSROOTS LOBBYING?

In the news, we hear about professional lobbyists who attempt to influence legislation and policy through various means. Grassroots lobbying is when everyday citizens contact their own legislators to try to influence legislation and policy. Advocacy groups of all kinds engage in grassroots lobbying, asking their members to call and write their legislators about a piece of legislation. Most people will never contact their legislators, but anyone can pick up the phone and ask their senator to support or oppose a pending bill.

WHY SHOULD I CONTACT MY LEGISLATORS?

It's important to let your legislators know where you stand, because the number of letters on each side of an issue will be an important indication of where people stand and frequently influence how a legislator will vote on a bill. Grassroots lobbying is very effective because the legislators are hearing directly from their constituency, who will be voting the next time they are up for re-election.

HOW DO I CONTACT LEGISLATORS?

It used to be that a hand-written letter was best, because it showed that the person cared enough to sit down and write a letter. However, for security purposes, all letters to the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives are now pre-screened before being delivered to congressional offices, which means that all letters are delayed. It is now better to make a phone call or send a fax or an email.

If you are planning to visit Washington, D.C., you can contact your legislator's office and ask for an appointment. They will ask which issue you would like to discuss, and chances are, you will meet with an aide who handles that issue, and not with the legislator directly. Even if you just find yourself walking past the Hart Senate Office Building while you are sightseeing, you should feel free to drop in and speak with your legislator's staff. They are there to serve you, the constituent.

Need to contact your state legislators? Locate your state [here](#), and use your state's official website to find out who your state legislators are and how to contact them.

WHAT DO I SAY TO LEGISLATORS?

When you send a fax or an email, be sure to provide your contact information, including your street address, so that they can respond to you and they will know that you are constituent. Ask for the "LA," or Legislative Assistant, who handles the life issue. State your position clearly and politely—Do you want the legislator to support the bill or oppose it? Try to keep the message short. Briefly state in a paragraph or two why you support or oppose the bill. Write a separate message for each bill, so that your message will get forwarded to the correct aide who handles that issue.

If you call their offices, they will usually take a short message and may ask for your contact information. They usually will not need or want to hear an explanation. If you'd like to submit more information, it's better to send a fax or an email, or to hand-deliver a hard copy.