

# **HOW TO LOBBY 2017**

## **The Connecticut General Assembly**

### **Betty Gallo, Gallo & Robinson, LLC**

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that can. -- Margaret Mead*

#### **Why Do I Think You Can Lobby?**

Because we all lobby all the time. Whether it is lobbying to convince a friend to see a certain movie, a child to clean their room, the boss for a raise, a co-worker to help out on a project--we all lobby to get things we want. We list the arguments for our position, we point out the problems with the other side's arguments, we enlist the help of those who are more powerful in the situation and we use our own position of power in the situation to get our way. All of this is lobbying. All are techniques we use to lobby the Connecticut General Assembly.

#### **A Few Facts About The Connecticut General Assembly (CGA)**

##### **Schedule -**

The CGA is part time. It is in session for five months in the odd numbered years and three months in even numbered years. The schedule is set by the State Constitution. In 2017, the CGA will go into session January 4<sup>th</sup> and will adjourn on June 7th.

##### **Membership –**

There are 151 House of Representative Members and 36 Senators in the CGA. Democrats currently control the House 87-64 and the Senate 21-15. One Senator, Ed Gomes of Bridgeport, was elected as a Working Families Candidate, but now caucuses with the Democrats. Neither of these majorities are “veto-proof” margins. A “veto-proof” majority occurs when at least 2/3 of the members in one chamber are all affiliated with the same party. The term is based on the premise that both the House and the Senate would need a 2/3 majority vote to override any bill that is vetoed by the Governor. The Executive Branch is currently controlled by Democrats: Governor Dannel Malloy and Lieutenant-Governor Nancy Wyman. Lieutenant-Governor Wyman also serves as the President of the Senate but only votes if there is a tie. The highest ranking member of the Senate is the President Pro Tempore, Martin Looney (D-New Haven). He is elected by the membership of the Senate. The House of Representatives is currently presided over by the Speaker of the House, Brendan Sharkey (D-Hamden). He is elected by the membership of the House. He is retiring at the end of his term and a new Speaker will be elected when the new session convenes on January fourth.

##### **Committees -**

The CGA has 27 joint committees with members from both the House and the Senate. Each committee has a House and a Senate Chair. The number of Senators and Representatives assigned to each committee is proportional by party and by chamber.

Committee assignments usually come out just before the start of the long session/budget year.

Unlike Congress, members of the CGA do not have a lot of staff. They also do not receive a lot of phone calls or mail on most issues. Legislators acknowledge that they are impressed and give special attention to an issue if they receive even ten letters or phone calls about a particular subject.

### **How To Write Or E-mail Your Legislator**

First, you should remember that we have a small state and a large GA. These legislators are your neighbors. Once you have met your representatives, you will likely run into them in the supermarket and at the post office. They also want and expect to receive letters, e-mails and phone calls on issues and use these as an important source of information when they decide how to vote. **SO, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU WRITE THAT LETTER – IT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

The letter or e-mail should be short and to the point. Try to address only one issue in each letter or e-mail.

Start the letter by stating what it is you want the legislator to do, e.g. "Please vote in favor of House Bill 0000" or "I would like you to work to maintain standards for the quality of health care provided to children on Medicaid." This could be the only part read by a busy legislator.

List the reason(s) that you care about this issue - "I am a nurse who has cared for sick children" or "I have young children of my own and cannot imagine what it would feel like to have a sick child and not be able to afford care." The more personal the note, the better.

If this bill will have a special effect on an organization or group of people in that legislator's district, then point that out. A local angle is always good.

Be polite and do not threaten the legislator. You are working to build a long-term relationship with this legislator. The truth is that even if a legislator is not with you on this issue s/he may be with you on the next issue you care about. It is important not to burn any bridges.

If you get a response to the letter or e-mail, share a copy with any organization with which you are affiliated that is interested in the issue. This is especially important if the legislator say how she/he is going to vote on an issue or expresses a particular concern about the legislation.

If the legislator asks for any information or has a question you can't answer, be sure to find to find an appropriate person to help you respond and be sure someone gets back to the legislator.

Use your letter or e-mail to your State Representative more than once. Also send your letter to your State Senator and the Governor. You can also send it to your local newspaper as a Letter to the Editor. Letters to the Editor in local papers are read by legislators.

Don't worry about the form of a letter. ANY LETTER IS BETTER THAN NO LETTER. Pen, pencil, typewriter, or even a postcard is O.K. Just be sure it is legible. Send the letter to the legislator's home address. The envelope should be addressed to The Honorable (name of your legislator). It is best to write the address on the envelope by hand. If you don't know who your legislators are, one easy way to find out is to phone the Town Clerk at your town hall.

Follow up a reply to your letter or e-mail with another letter or e-mail on an issue that concerns you. Keep up the contact. If you don't get a reply, you might want to call to be sure the legislator received your communications.

Be sure to find out what happened on the issue you wrote about and let your legislators know that you are following their action on this issue. It is great to write a "thank you" note if they voted the way you wanted on an issue. Send a note of regret if they voted against your wishes. Again be polite, but let the legislator know you are disappointed in the way he/she voted on this issue and why. LEGISLATORS REALLY DO LISTEN TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS. LET THEM KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

### **Making A Phone Call**

Some people may think it is easier to communicate by phone than to try to find the time to write a letter. Any type of contact is important!

Most of the suggestions for writing letters apply to phone calls as well. Make the call short, polite and to the point.

I would suggest you call the legislator at home. Leave a message if you don't reach him/her. But try back if you don't get to talk to your legislator. Don't call too early in the morning or too late at night.

If you get a machine leave a message as to what you want the legislator to do, e.g. "please vote against House Bill 0000" or "please support legislation that ensures that children on Medicaid get adequate health care." If a child answers the phone, ask if you can call back and leave a message on the machine.

Don't worry if you don't know the answer to a legislator's question. Promise to get back to him/her with an answer and DO.

Again, follow up on the call. Be sure to call back and thank the legislator for their support or very politely express regret at their vote.

## **Visiting With Your Legislator**

Visiting your legislator is probably the most effective way to influence him/her. The best time for these meetings is between sessions because that is when your legislator is likely to have the most time. But it is fine to try and schedule the meeting during the session. Remember that legislators are really busy, so you'll need to be flexible and try and schedule the meeting at their convenience. It is good to have the meeting in the legislator's home district to emphasize that the issue is a concern of her/his constituents.

Make an appointment by calling the legislator's home or legislative office. When you set up the meeting be sure to let the legislator know what issue(s) you want to discuss. You should limit the meeting to a discussion of one or two issues.

It is a good idea to have more than one person at the meeting. Keep the atmosphere of the meeting friendly. You are there to exchange ideas. It is sometimes just as important to know why a legislator opposes your position as it is to know that the legislator supports your position.

Leave literature for the legislator (either on the issue or general information on any organization with which you are working on the issue). This will serve as a reminder of your visit and the issue.

If your legislator is unable to attend the meeting you have scheduled, try to have the meeting with a staff person instead (their Legislative Aide will often do this). Treat the Legislative Aide as you would treat a Legislator – with respect! The Legislative Aide will then brief their Legislator about the meeting.

Follow up the visit with a thank you note and perhaps more information on your issue. If the legislator asked for certain information be sure you get back to the legislator with that information. Remember that the main objective of your contact is to establish an ongoing relationship with your legislator and establish yourself (and any organization with which you are affiliated) as a reliable source of information.

Be sure to take notes on the main points covered in the meeting. Keep a copy for your records and be sure to send a copy to any organization with which you are affiliated that is lobbying the issue.

## Let's Write A Letter

First find out the name of your legislators. If you can't figure out which House or Senate member for your town represents you, write them all. You can send them all (and also your local paper) the same letter. But be sure to personally sign each letter.

How to find your State Senate and House district and the names and addresses and phone numbers of your representatives:

- Call your registrar of voters or town hall (the number is in the blue pages of your phone book) and ask for your House and Senate district.
- Then you can look in the phone book's blue pages to find the name, address and phone number of your Representative and Senator.
- You can also log on to the Connecticut General Assembly Website (CGA) to locate your elected representatives. The website is <http://www.cga.ct.gov> Simply click on either "House" or "Senate" located on the left hand side of the page and then click on "Find Your Legislator". Your State Representative and State Senator can be found by selecting the section of town you live in.

Here's an example:

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_; (or)

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_; (or)

To the Editor:

I live in your district (town) and would like you to support legislation (to urge our legislators to support legislation) that maintains the eligibility and standards of care for all children and youth who are on Medicaid. Services for children on Medicaid should continue to meet the standards of care established by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Society of Adolescent Medicine. I care deeply about health care for children.....(this is where you should insert a few sentences about why you are personally interested.- It does not have to be long and could be that you have children or grandchildren).

I would greatly appreciate it if you would keep me informed about any legislation on this issue this session. I would be glad to provide you with additional information about health care for children.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

(Sign each copy of the letter)

(Also include your address, phone number and email address)

If you want to e-mail the message, you can. That's it. It's not so hard.

## **TESTIFYING AT PUBLIC HEARINGS**

## **Betty Gallo, Gallo & Robinson, LLC**

### **Who can testify at public hearings of the General Assembly?**

Anyone can testify at these hearings. The trick is finding out when the hearings are and what the procedures are for signing up to testify. Testifying can be frustrating for reasons I will go into later, but hearings serve a variety of very important purposes:

- Legislators often get information on an issue from the testimony given at hearings
- Hearings are a great way to generate press interest in an issue
- Hearings are important places to network with others interested in your issue

At hearings, you can learn what others with different views on the subject are saying. Remember; that if no one comes to testify on the issue, legislators can use that as an excuse to kill the legislation (claiming no public interest in it) or to pass/kill bad legislation (claiming there was no opposition): "No one testified against/for the bill."

### **How do you find out about hearings?**

Every day during the legislative session, the legislature publishes a Legislative Bulletin. (The Bulletin is published once a week off-session.) This Bulletin contains the notices of hearings. The only place to get these publications is at the Legislative Office Building (LOB) in Hartford or you can get it on-line: the address is [www.cga.ct.gov](http://www.cga.ct.gov). Few people have the time to actually go to the Capitol to get a copy of the Bulletin and not everyone has a computer. Here are some other possibilities:

- You can join the alert network of an organization that follows the issue at the Capitol.
- You can call the legislature and ask to be notified when the hearing on your issue is scheduled. Depending on the committee, this may or may not work.
- You can call your legislator(s) and ask them to notify you about any hearing on your issue (again, how well this works will depend on the legislator).

### **How much notice will I get?**

Unfortunately, the legislature's rules do not require a lot of notice. The rules mandate five days (calendar days, not business days – sorry!) notice for a hearing and three days notice of which bills will be heard at that hearing. The committees sometimes give more notice, but this is the requirement.

For example, the Public Health Committee will put a notice in the Bulletin that it is having a hearing on needle exchange programs five days before the hearing, but then three days before the hearing they will list the actual bills to be heard. So three days before the hearing you will know if H.B.5000, An Act Concerning Needle Exchange Programs, is on

for the hearing that day. The notice will have the date, time, room and subject of the hearing. The notice often contains the procedures for that hearing as well.

### **How do I find out the procedures for testifying at a hearing?**

Unfortunately, each committee has its own rules for hearings, and the rules can even change from hearing to hearing. The best way to be sure of the procedures is to call the committee clerk the day before the hearing to confirm the procedures.

More and more committees are moving to a "lottery" system for members of the public to sign up and testify at public hearings. The procedure for each hearing is posted in the bulletin 5 days prior to the hearing, with specific instructions about how to sign up.

The other "usual" procedure is that a "sign up" sheet is put out an hour before the hearing right outside the door of the assigned hearing room. Speakers are taken in a "first come-first served" order. Legislators, representatives from state agencies, and municipal officials are allowed to testify first, and the first hour of the hearing is usually reserved for them and they often take longer than an hour. But if there are not enough of these representatives or officials, the "public" portion of the hearing can start before the first hour is over.

Speakers are usually given 3 minutes to speak and are asked to bring enough copies of their testimony for every member of the committee, plus ten extra. (You are going to want to have a few extra copies for yourself and the press, as well). There is not really any place in the LOB for the public to make copies, so you need to bring the copies with you. Copies of the testimony can be given to the committee staff either in the Committee Office or at the hearing.

If you do not have time to type up your testimony or make copies, you should still come and testify. It is a good idea to send written copies of your testimony to the legislators later.

There are many variations on this general procedure. For example, the sign up sheet could go out one half- hour before the hearing, or as soon as there is a long line. The sign up sheet could be placed inside the hearing room or in the atrium, etc. Again, be sure you check with the committee clerk and /or with an organization that is following this issue at the Capitol. Often lines begin to form hours before the sign up sheet goes out. The organization following the issue may be able to sign you up. But the almost universal rule is that one person can only sign up one person, though it does not have to be him/herself. But then, the one thing that is always true in the legislative process there is that there is no universal rule.

### **What should I expect at the hearing?**

People may be a bit anxious and upset at their first legislative hearing because they don't know what to expect. Expect that there will be a wait.

It is a good idea to listen to the testimony of the people before you, especially that of the state agency representatives. They can give the latest information on the legislation and it is important to know their position. It is also important to be able to refute the other side's argument. Also, you don't want to just repeat what everyone else has said.

Expect that legislators will come and go often. Legislators are on many committees and have other meetings or hearings going on at the same time. Legislators have been known to eat during hearings and to talk to each other while someone is testifying. While this may seem disrespectful to you, it is the nature of the process so you need to do some things to be sure your testimony is heard. Here are some suggestions:

- You should try to sign up and speak early in the hearing. Legislators are more likely to be in the room and paying attention at the beginning of the hearing.
- You could use the time while you are waiting to testify to listen to others' testimony and incorporate or refute points in their testimony.
- This is also a good time to talk about your issue to legislators who are milling around, the press, and other people there to testify about the issue. Be sure you have held onto extra copies of your testimony to give to people you are talking to.

### **You have been called on, now what?**

The Committee Chairs call your name when it is your turn to testify. You go to the chair reserved for speakers and state your name and your organization (if you are testifying for an organization).

Remember that hearings are recorded and legislators have closed circuit TVs in their offices so they can hear the testimony in their offices. It is important to speak clearly and into the mike.

You should start your testimony by addressing it to the Chairs of the Committee by name, and then to the members of the Committee. Then give your testimony. (There are hints on testimony below).

When you finish your testimony, the Committee Chair or legislator presiding over the hearing will ask if there are any questions from the Committee (only Committee members can ask questions). Answer any questions you know the answer to with short, precise responses. If you do not know the answer to a question, state that you don't have that answer but that you will get back to them with it. Then it is important that you send that legislator the answer and also mail the answer to the Committee Chairs and to the Committee Clerk to be distributed to the members.

Be sure to thank the members of the Committee for allowing you to testify.

### **Some hints on testifying:**

Call the committee clerk ahead of time to learn the place, time and procedure for the hearing. For example, are public officials going to speak first? How much time is allotted for each speaker, etc.?

Keep your testimony short -- most committees limit testimony to three minutes. (Your written testimony can go into greater detail.)

Guidelines for your statement:

- Identify yourself and the organization you represent (if any);
- State your position for or against the proposed bill;
- Identify the bill by name and number;
- Summarize your recommendation first and then add your explanation;
- Sum up your position at the end;
- Thank the committee for the opportunity to speak.
- Double-space your written testimony, and type on only one side of the paper for easy reading. Remember that text written all in capital letters is not easier to read, as many people learn by experience.
- Rehearse your testimony. Anticipate questions you might be asked and practice answering them.
- Arrive early, so you can sign up to speak at the beginning of the hearing. Usually, media coverage is given to those who speak early at a hearing. Take enough extra copies of your prepared statement for the entire committee and the press. Be sure the clerk has a copy for the record.
- If your testimony is very technical, ask the committee clerk to hand out copies of your written testimony to the committee before you testify.
- If there is a microphone, your mouth should be about six inches from it. Move the mike, if necessary, to the right position for you. Do not ever forget how important it is to learn to use the mike correctly. If Committee members cannot hear you, you are ineffective, no matter how carefully your statement was prepared.
- Do not repeat points made by speakers ahead of you. If all of the points you wanted to make have been made, tell the committee you concur with the testimony given by the preceding speakers and urge them to take the appropriate action.

- Answer only those questions that you can answer correctly. Offer to find the answers to others and get back promptly to committee members with the information.
- If several people are speaking from the same organization, divide up the points to be made, with each speaker addressing different areas.
- Avoid arguing with members of the committee and with people giving opposing testimony.
- Put copies of your testimony in the Capitol mail boxes of committee members who were not at the hearing.
- Keep a copy of your statement in your files.

If you have not prepared a statement and intended only to listen to the hearing but think that you have interesting testimony (or if you discover, after listening to others, that there is something you urgently wish to contribute) ask to sign up to speak. Sometimes these "from-the-heart" statements can be the most convincing of all.

If possible, follow up your testimony with a letter to the legislators addressing certain points that were raised at the hearing(See How to Lobby).

Use your testimony in other ways: submit it as an op-ed article or letter to the editor to your local newspaper; send it to other legislators who are not on the committee but will have to vote on the bill; or send it to the editorial board of your paper urging them to write an editorial on the issue.

It may seem difficult, at times, to get through the legislative maze and testify, but it is extremely important and can truly make a difference.