

The Medical Cannabis Advocate's Handbook

THE ABCs of CITIZEN ADVOCACY

*Politics in America is not a spectator sport.
You have to get involved.*

—Congressman Sam Farr

The ABCs of CITIZEN ADVOCACY

Citizen lobbying is an essential part of being a medical cannabis advocate and it is the only way elected officials will know how to represent you. It is true that the issues surrounding medical cannabis are politically polarizing and may not be the number one issue for elected officials. But buying into defeatist attitudes concerning representation or conspiracy theories about our opposition has paralyzed our movement for years. Most elected officials have never met a medical cannabis advocate and have formed opinions about the issue based on media reports or our opposition. It is easier for elected officials to fall into intellectual or ethical stances against medical cannabis if they do not have a face to put with the issue. That is where you come in!

In the truest definition of democracy, our elected officials represent their constituency in government. Their constituents have thousands of needs. If you are not asking them to add medical cannabis to the list there is no need for them to advocate for you.

This section has been designed to help you understand your role in developing medical cannabis policies and to give you the tools you need to incorporate citizen lobbying into your strategic plan. Just like any other skill it takes practice. If you need help setting up meetings, putting together lobbying materials, or help getting up the courage to citizen lobby give ASA a call, that's why we are here!

WHY CITIZEN LOBBY?

It is natural to feel intimidated about contacting your elected officials. But the strength and power politicians have is derived directly from the constituents who elected them into office. Legislators are elected to represent your views and they want to hear from their constituents.

Technology has impacted the way members of Congress represent their constituents.

More than ever, elected officials are focused on learning about how a particular piece of legislation will impact their constituents. And there are more ways than ever for constituents to express their viewpoints to elected officials, including but not limited to: letters, phone calls, email, YouTube, Facebook, Town Hall forums, Twitter, campaign events, visits to the member's office, and more.

As a voter, you possess the most effective tool to influence change: your vote. As a constituent, you have the power to hold each representative accountable on the issues that affect you. But our democracy is not a spectator sport! If you want change, then you have to talk to the people elected to make our laws. As a medical cannabis advocate, it is important that you understand your power and know how to use it!

You Have the Power—Not Lobbyists

According to a survey of congressional staffers conducted by the Congressional Management Foundation in 2010, members of Congress are more likely to be swayed on an issue by concerned citizens who visit, write, or call their offices than by the efforts of paid lobbyists. As it turns out, citizens have more power than they realize!

The survey report, *Communicating with Congress: Perceptions of Citizen Advocacy on Capitol Hill*, provides valuable insight about how crucial the work of grassroots advocacy is to manifest change and about which tactics work best. For instance, nearly the entire sample of respondents, 97 percent, agreed that personal visits from constituents had "some" or "a lot" of influence on an undecided Member—more than any other influence group or strategy.

In fact, visits from constituent representatives, like lobbyists, came in second. Close examination of the survey reveals that even personal-

ized letters, e-mails, phone calls, and questions or comments at town hall meetings by constituents were more likely to change a member's mind than the efforts of a lobbyist.

The study also explored the type of advocacy that staffers believe is most effective. Turns out that content matters more than medium.

Specifically, staffers indicated that hand-written or personalized notes—even when they are fewer in number—have a bigger impact than form letters and emails crafted by influence groups.

The point is, your lawmakers want to hear from Y-O-U! They want to know how the growing divide between state and federal medical cannabis laws is affecting you and your family. They want to know what legislation would help their constituents and why. They want to know why changing federal law is important to you!

If Not You, Then Who?

Medical cannabis advocates are not the only people talking with legislators about medical cannabis law and policy. Elected officials are hearing from police organization, medical cannabis opponents, Chamber of Commerce, and members of special interest groups opposed to the use of cannabis even for medical purposes.

It is important for all medical cannabis advocates to think about the following questions:

- " Without hearing from you, how will your legislator know what is important to you?
- " Do you want to trust decisions about access to medical cannabis solely to lobbyists and policymakers?

Each and every individual who holds a state license that authorizes the use or provision of cannabis for medical purposes is breaking federal law. Hundreds of thousands of you are committing an act of civil disobedience against federal law, but few of you are talk-

ing to your Members of Congress about it. That is sort of like chaining yourself to the White House gate without telling anyone why you are participating in the action!

The point is that you are the patient, the physician, the caregiver, the provider, the lawyer, the nurse, or family member who is affected by medical cannabis laws and policy. You are the voter with the power to hold elected officials accountable for their positions on policy matters. And you are the expert about how these laws and policies affect your daily life. So if you

are not talking with you elected officials about medical cannabis, then ask yourself, "Who is?"

From Opponent to Champion

The goal of grassroots lobbying is to develop a relationship over time in order to move an elected official along a range of positions. If you think about Congressional support as a continuum or scale that ranges from, on one end, Hardcore Opponent to, on the other end, Champion, then you can begin to understand your goal as a citizen lobbyist. And, perhaps you can begin to realize the importance of developing a relationship with your elected officials.

Elected officials are human and, like you, they are not easily swayed on some issues. Rarely do policymakers change their opinions on a matter overnight. Instead, it is a gradual process. It may take as many as a dozen visits or so before you've convinced your elected official to move his or her position. But I promise that your chances to affect changes will be greater if your elected officials know you and trust that the information you are providing is accurate, fair, and balanced.

1. Champions All issues need a group of lawmakers dedicated to being tireless, committed advocates for your cause. What they



can do for you is make the case to their colleagues, help develop a strong "inside" strategy, and be visible public spokespeople. What they need is good information and visible support outside the Capitol.

2. Allies Another group of legislators will be on your side but can be pushed to do more, such as speak up in party caucuses or on the floor.

3. Fence Sitters Some legislators will be uncommitted on the issues, potentially able to vote either way. These are your key targets and lobbying strategy is about putting together the right mix on "inside" persuasion and "outside" pressure to sway them your way.

4. Mellow Opponents Another group of legislators will be clear votes against you, but they are not inclined to be active on the issue. With this group what's key is to keep them from becoming more active, lobbying them enough to give them pause but not enough to make them angry.

5. Hard Core Opponents Finally, there are those lawmakers who are leading your opposition. What is important here is to isolate them, to highlight the extremes of their positions, rhetoric, and alliances and to give other lawmakers pause about joining with them.

THE BASICS

Accurate. Medical marijuana is just one of many issues your legislator is concerned with at any given time. Make certain that the information you are providing is direct and accurate. Never lie or provide inaccurate information. If you don't know something, be honest about it. You can always locate the correct information after the meeting and use that as an excuse to follow up in the future.

Brief. In most cases, you will have a limited amount of time to make your pitch. Keep it short, and keep it simple! It is extremely difficult to relay ten pieces of information in three minutes. It is even more difficult to comprehend ten pieces of information in three minutes. Thus, it is vital that you think carefully

about two or three main talking points you hope to communicate—and stick to these points throughout your advocacy.

Courteous. Whether you agree or disagree with your legislator it is important that you maintain some level of respect. Your goal as an advocate is to create a safe space for your legislator so that tough choices can be made with confidence. It is important that you go out of your way to be a positive resource for your legislator. Be punctual and patient. Don't lie or exaggerate. Don't argue or raise your voice. Don't be rude or obnoxious.

Do Follow-Up. Be proactive and responsive. Follow up your meeting with a thank-you letter that outlines the various topics covered during the meeting, reiterates any commitments your legislator made, and includes any additional information or materials requested during the meeting. Also, you should use this opportunity to accurately communicate any information you didn't readily have available or didn't know during the course of your meeting.

When communicating with your legislators, do not feel that it is your responsibility to be a "know-it-all." A few short position statements about why you support or oppose a specific piece of legislation will suffice. Always give your legislator your name, address, and telephone number so that they know you are one of their constituents. Be sure to include this information whether you visit in person, call, or write. Most importantly, be accurate, brief and courteous when communicating with your legislators. Remember, legislators are people, too!

Timing is very important. If the legislation you are concerned about is imminent, contacting your legislator quickly by phone or e-mail can be very effective. However, if you have time, take advantage of other influential tactics, such as writing a letter, attending a city or county council meeting, calling your legislator's office or meeting directly with your elected leaders. The key is to use timing to your advantage with each tactic you use.

Develop a Relationship. Relationships are necessary in order to influence change. Advocacy is the development and maintenance of an on-going conversation to promote your position. An advocate's job is to develop a working relationship with your elected officials and the staffers who are assigned to work on your issue. When it comes time for action, knowing someone to call will pay off. The key is to develop a network that can make your position heard.

Voice Your Position and Ask for Action! Legislators frequently act on behalf of their constituency. Even if your legislator does not currently support your position it can be extremely helpful to contact them on a regular basis. Make your concerns vocal, and always ask for your legislator for an action.

Know the Issue. Legislators have several issues they are concerned with at any given time. Make certain that you are relaying concise and accurate information. Prepare and distribute information based on sound, scientific research. Ask questions about your legislator's feelings toward a particular issue, and be ready for your legislator to ask you questions about your position.

Listen & Share Information. It is very important to listen to your legislators. Really understand what their positions are and why. Relay any information you receive from your legislator to the members of your organization, community, family and friends. Information helps to shape future talking points and also helps to broaden the audience.

Dos and Don'ts

THE DON'Ts

- Lie or exaggerate
- Waste time
- Be a know-it-all
- Make promises you can't deliver
- Be argumentative
- Burn bridges

THE DOs

- Relay accurate information
- Make your arguments brief
- Be courteous, punctual and patient
- Make yourself a resource

- Choose 2 or 3 main talking points, and stick to them!
- Ask for a specific action
- Use time wisely
- Listen & share information
- Follow up: always write a thank-you note

Visiting Your Legislator

PLAN YOUR MEETING

Create a detailed plan. Decide who is going to be present at the meeting. For example: just yourself; or, you and a few other constituents; or, you and representatives from a particular organization. Also, decide who, apart from your legislator might be present at the meeting, like a staff person.

Schedule an appointment. It is much easier for legislators to arrange a meeting if they know who you are, what you wish to discuss, and what your relationship is to the area or interests represented by your legislator. And,

scheduling an appointment will help gain your legislator's full and undivided attention. Simply call your legislator's office and ask to schedule a meeting. Make certain you identify yourself, note the purpose of the meeting, and whether other individuals will be in attendance. Even if you can't meet directly with your legislator, you can schedule an appointment to meet with their staff.

Confirm the appointment. You should call to confirm your meeting. Sometimes legislators have important, last minute meetings that can't be avoided. Calling to confirm will save you a trip to the office and will give you

the opportunity to reschedule.

Know your issue. It is helpful to research relevant information including any recent studies or news articles relating to your issue prior to meeting with your legislator. You should develop a comprehensive understanding about the pros and cons of your issue and know the current status of legislation. In addition, it is important to know your lawmakers past voting record and priorities are.

Be prepared. If you are planning a group meeting, it is a good idea to have a meeting with the group before you meet with the legislators. It can be effective for your group to select a spokesperson and maybe one or two others who can act as supporting roles—providing statistics or other anecdotes. Practice your advocacy in front of the group, or have someone play "devil's advocate" and ask tough questions of the spokespersons.

Select a scribe. It is a good idea for the group to select a scribe, someone who will take notes throughout the meeting. It is especially important to write down any position statements, questions or special requests made by the legislator. The scribe can also be assigned to write the follow-up response and thank-you note.

Outline your concerns. You represent a unified front, and should present your positions as such. Make certain that you spend some time before the meeting outlining your two or three major talking points and supporting statements. Keep in mind you will have limited time, so your arguments need to be clear and concise. Outlining your concerns will help you—and the group—stay focused.

EXECUTE THE MEETING

Provide accurate information. Make certain you begin the meeting by introducing yourself and anyone else participating in the meeting. Also, say again why you requested the meeting and what you are asking your legislator to do.

Briefly make your pitch. Remember to

keep it short and simple. It is important to restate the purpose of the meeting, outline the major concerns and present supporting documentation. Finally, thank your legislator for taking time to meet with you. It is important that your lawmaker understand how the proposed legislation will personally impact you.

Be punctual. It's easy to get lost in government buildings. Make certain that you know where the meeting place is and that you arrive a few minutes early. If you have some extra time, use it to relax and review your talking points.

Be patient and flexible. Due to crowded schedules, it is not uncommon for a legislator to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with a member of the staff.

Be political. Your legislator wants to represent the best interests of the district. Keep your pitch short and to the point. Begin your meeting by informing your legislator what action you want done. Wherever possible demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the legislator's constituency. Ask questions to clarify any position statements made by the legislator and be prepared to answer questions from your lawmaker.

Leave Your Contact Info. Be sure to leave your personal contact information with your lawmaker or their staff. At a minimum, you should include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of each person attending the meeting. Leaving your contact info allows your legislator to follow-up with you personally.

Do Follow-Up. Finally, be responsive, follow up the meeting with a thank you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, reiterating any commitments he or she has made to you and send along any additional information and materials requested.

Writing Your Legislator

A letter to your lawmaker is next most effective and the most common form of communication. Writing letters helps create a paper trail. Most letters are noted and answered by legislators or their staff. The amount of mail received by a legislator ("mail count") sometimes helps to determine his or her approach to an issue. Here are some tips to get started.

Be clear and concise. The purpose for writing the letter should be stated in the first paragraph. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly.

Be specific. Ask for action. Tell your legislator exactly what action you want taken, and give the reasons for your position. Do not hesitate to cite your own experiences or how the proposed legislation will directly impact you. If you are an expert in a particular field (i.e. a doctor, lawyer, patient, etc.) mentioning that can help to build credibility.

Include supplemental information.

Enclosed with the letter you can include related editorials, news articles, research studies, letters to the editor, or other supplemental materials that support your position or generally relate to the issue you are concerned with.

One issue at a time. Address only one issue in each letter, and, if possible, keep the letter to one page. Also, thank your legislator in advance for the consideration s/he will give to the issue.

Mail to a U.S. Representative

The Honorable (Full Name)
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Mail to a U.S. Senator

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Phoning Your Legislator

PLAN YOUR MEETING

Contacting your legislator by phone is an effective way to show your support or opposition on a particular issue. Phone calling is most effective when you can mobilize "phone-ins"—when lots of people call their legislator's office(s) regarding a specific issue within a few days or even a few hours of one another.

Be aware of timing. The most effective time to place a call to your lawmaker is close to a vote or legislative hearing. It is not required that you write a letter or have made an attempt to contact your lawmaker prior to a phone call, but it is helpful. If you have written or visited with your legislator in the past remind them or their staff of this previous contact when you call.

Write a script. Before you make the call, think thoroughly about the reason for your

call. Your phone call will be short, so you really need to have an action for your legislator to make and one or two concise statements prepared to support the action. The goal is to make absolutely clear what action you want your legislator to take.

Identify yourself. Make sure whoever answers understands that you are a concerned voter and tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, for example: "Please tell Supervisor/Councilman (Name) that I support/oppose (name legislation or ordinance).

Ask to speak to the right person.

Generally, a staff member, not the lawmaker, will take your telephone calls. It is important that you ask to speak with the aide who handles your issue. Make clear your position and the action you think your member should take. Feel free to ask questions and share information about your issue, however be concise and considerate.