

Do's and Don'ts of Lobbying

How to effectively advocate for animals

DO's

- Do know who represents you at all levels of government. Keep phone numbers and email addresses handy. Help others do the same.
- Do identify yourself by name and organization, if any, when contacting your elected officials.
- Do state a clear and concise objective. For example, say that you want to ban a *certain* cruel practice (specific) -- not just that you want to stop cruelty (too broad). Explain the meaning of terms that may be unfamiliar to someone who does not have your experience in animal advocacy. Broad statements about how a certain practice is cruel may reflect how you feel, but it doesn't convey a message as to what specific action you are asking your elected official to take.
- Do explain why this issue is important to you personally. If possible, link the issue to a personal experience or a situation in the elected official's district.
- Do be aware of previous actions the official has taken on behalf of animals. You can be sure that those who oppose humane bills are also aware of the official's actions in support of them, so you want to be encouraging and appreciative.
- Do get to know your elected officials. Make an effort to appear at their town meetings and other events and be sure they hear you ask at least one question on animal issues at each event.
- Do mention how important it is for your elected officials to adequately fund animal programs ranging from local animal control, to state enforcement of wildlife protection laws, to enforcement of the federal Animal Welfare Act and others. Let them know that this is how you want your tax dollars spent.
- Do join, create, or revitalize state federations or other statewide groups to give your cause additional clout. Whenever possible, mention how many individuals your group represents.
- Do get to know and develop a workable relationship with key people having influence over animals. For example, animal control officers, veterinarians, state wildlife commission members, prosecuting attorneys, law enforcement, and health department officials have a major impact on animal protection bills. Legislators listen to their views, so work with them whenever possible.
- Do join forces with other types of groups who may have the same position as you even if for different reasons, such as churches, teachers, chambers of commerce, local universities, or specific industries. Whenever appropriate, ask school children to support your efforts.
- Do wear many hats—not just your animal advocate hat. When lobbying legislators, identify yourself as a parent, businessperson, campaign contributor, or fellow church/club/team member.
- Do work with legislative staff; they often have more knowledge of the issues. Staff speak to your representatives and senators (their bosses) regularly and often make recommendations on policy decisions.
- Do learn how to work with your local media outlets by developing a relationship with friendly reporters and editors.
- Do respond to action alerts sent by experienced animal protection groups. When these are sent, legislation is usually close to passage or in a precarious position and your action can make a tremendous difference.

DON'Ts

- Don't threaten or antagonize a legislator. If this elected official opposes your issue today, tomorrow you may find common ground on another issue. But if you make an enemy, that person may take extra steps to defeat any bill you support. A legislator who doesn't agree with you on one type of animal issue may be great on other types of animal issues, and vice versa. Don't make enemies; today's city council member can be tomorrow's governor.
- Don't refer to bills by their numbers alone. Refer to both names and numbers. Legislators and staff deal with hundreds of bills they cannot be expected to always remember your bill. You will need to educate them.
- Don't fail to listen to elected officials' comments and questions on an issue. If they ask how a bill will impact jobs, or medical care, or the budget, you know where their concern is focused. Find ways to address those issues.
- Don't ever lie to or mislead a legislator—especially to someone who is on your side and needs to know the truth about an issue. Trust is essential for a working relationship.
- Don't overwhelm a legislator with too much information or paperwork. They don't have time for it. Provide them with whatever is key to their efforts and be ready to supply any other needed information.
- Don't be inflexible. Sometimes we have to compromise. As long as such a change won't harm any animals, consider the situation carefully. Learn legislative strategies that might save a bill otherwise destined to die such as sunset provisions, grandfathering clauses, and placing provisions into regulation instead of a statute.
- Don't forget to thank someone who was helpful. Whenever possible, let your membership know how very helpful the person has been.
- Don't use terms, abbreviations, or jargon that may be unfamiliar to those who don't work regularly on animal protection issues, without explaining their meaning.



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Adapted from factsheets by the Humane Society of the United States