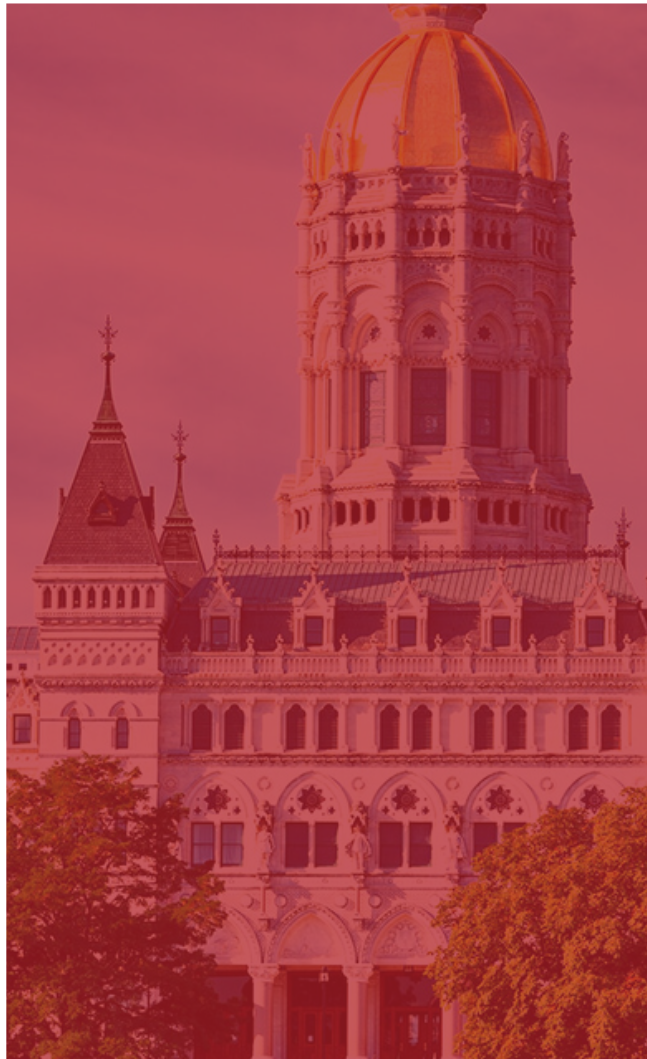


HARTFORD 101



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 legislators to influence legislation and policy. Advocacy groups of all kinds engage in grassroots lobbying, inviting people to call and write their legislators when appropriate. 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 on a bill, because the number of letters, calls, or emails on each side of an issue will frequently influence how a legislator will vote. Grassroots lobbying is very effective because the legislators are hearing directly from their constituency, who will be voting when the legislator seeks re-election.

How Do I Contact Legislators?

In the past, a hand-written letter was the most effective. 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.

Right now, the most effective methods of contacting your legislators include emails, phone calls, and social media as well.

To find your CT representatives, go to the home page for the Connecticut General Assembly (www.cga.ct.gov), and scroll down to the section that says 'Find Your Representatives'

A “bill” is a proposed law, and thousands are written and introduced every year. A proposed law will be titled S. or H.R., meaning simply ‘Senate’ or ‘House of Representative.’ An official statement of the Senate or House which does not have the force of law is called a Resolution and is often referred to as S. Res. or S. Res. Resolutions have no legal force and are used to send a message that the Congress of the United States is concerned about an issue or applauds good works. Treaties, nominations, etc., will not have a numeric designation.

The text of bills can be written by Congressmen, their staff, committee staff, special interest groups, the White House, and even by civic activist like yourself. It then is reviewed by lawyers and policy experts, and regardless of who wrote it, a Congressman or Senator will then submit it in his name as the sponsor. Often, a bill is submitted with the names of additional supporters, known as ‘cosponsors.’ The more cosponsors a bill has (at the start or later on), the more regard the bill is given. Once reviewed and ready for submission, a bill is simply put in “the hopper” (just a box) and then it is given a sequential number, such as H.R. 1234.

After a bill has been introduced, it will be sent to a subcommittee which specializes in the subject of the bill. The most effective actions at the time are: gaining support in the subcommittee, to get the bill scheduled for a subcommittee vote, and to gather additional cosponsors. Or alerting Members that a bad bill should not receive hearing, gain cosponsors, or be voted upon. Asking members not on the committee to simply vote for/against it is premature, as no vote will take place or even be scheduled until it has survived subcommittee and committee votes, so the better request would be to ask him or her to cosponsor the bill and get their colleagues to cosponsor it as well. Once the subcommittee has voted, the bill may advance to the committee. Then support must be built for a full committee vote.

The bill will be scheduled for a vote by the entire House or Senate, if it **passes at the level of committee**. Various rules and details can result in little or no debate on bills. In the Senate, "filibusters" (unlimited debate, sometimes lasting several hours to several days) are sometimes used to delay or prevent bills from passing.

The chairman of a subcommittee or committee has great power to push a **bill or prevent a vote from taking place**. You hear a bill will "die in committee," meaning it has no support, or the chairman will not put it to a vote (or even debate) because he opposes the bill and is afraid it might pass.

Once passed by both houses, a "Conference Committee" of several Representatives and Senators will be selected to work out any differences between the House and Senate versions, and only after both houses have approved the same language will the final version be presented to the President for his signature or veto.

Prepare for the Meeting

To find out when your Senator or Representative will be in their local office, you can: call their local office, check their website or get on their mailing list. Whether you arrange to meet with your elected officials in Washington or their local offices, here are some rules to follow:

- Plan to discuss no more than two issues. Meetings are scheduled to last from 15 to 45 minutes.
- If you have any supporting handouts, charts or graphics, bring them with you. Consider taking extra copies in case staff members request them,
- Find out where your legislator stands and has voted on your issue. Many pro-life groups, such as Americans United for Life, Concerned Women for America, Family Research Council, and National Right to Life have excellent scorecards.

At the Meeting

- Arrive about 10 minutes before the appointment time. At least, be on time. Dress neatly and conservatively. Be courteous and respectful. Relax.
- Do not be upset if you end up meeting with the legislator's staff. They are often more knowledgeable of individual issues than the legislators themselves, and they WILL inform the legislator of your views and requests.

- Introduce yourself to the legislator or their staff members: tell them who you are and where you live. Warm them up: Try to start by complimenting something the legislator has done recently; their vote on an issue, a bill they sponsored, etc. After a minute or two of such “small talk,” state your standpoint on the issue(s) you came to discuss. No matter how passionately you feel about the issue, do not “rant-and-rave.” Nothing diminishes your credibility more than an “in your face” demeanor. Tip: They know you pay their salary.
- Be ready to answer questions and discuss your points in detail.
- If the legislator disagrees with you, stand up for yourself, debate the issues, but do not become over-argumentative. Keep trying to emphasize the positives of your standpoint. Always try to end the conversation on a positive note.

Lobbying in the Time of COVID-19

Normally, visiting your Members of Congress, or their staff, face-to-face is the most effective way to influence them. Of course, as we face continued 'social distancing' mandates due to COVID-19, in person meetings are not possible. This is where email and social media become the most important form of contact.

In a normal session, however, individuals and groups can arrange personal meetings with Senators and Representatives either in their Washington offices, or in their local offices at various times during the year. In Connecticut, the General Assembly meets in alternating calendars. In even number years, such as 2020, it meets from the first Wednesday in February to the first Wednesday in May. In odd years, such as 2021, it meets in a longer session from the first Wednesday in January to the first Wednesday in June.

The Pro-Life Landscape in Connecticut

Some of the life related issues that the Connecticut General Assembly will be working through or taking up in the near future include.

- Legalizing physician-assisted suicide.
- Placing state oversight on pro-life pregnancy care centers due to "deceptive advertising." No actual evidence of deceptive advertising has been presented. This is part of the national NARAL Campaign. It has been stopped every year since 2015, but they keep on pushing.
- Funding of Planned Parenthood to make up for Title X funds.
- Increasing health inspections of abortion clinics from every three years to every two years. Regular outpatient surgical centers are inspected every two years.



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