



League of Women Voters®

Massachusetts

EFFECTIVE LEAGUE LOBBYING

WORKING AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL
TO MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN



LWVMA

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Foreword

The League of Women Voters has been active in influencing government policy since its beginning over 90 years ago. The League's influence has been recognized at the national, state and local level.

This booklet has been created to support you in the many different tactics that have been utilized in advocating at all community levels. It is not required that you use all of them. Feel free to choose those that work for you. It's also a work in progress, so your input is important.

However, it has been my experience that some members can be ill at ease about getting into the fray. These concerns can be about "League process." However, don't let this process intimidate you. It is there to support and guide you.

It is important to remember that, if you are advocating as a League member, your communications must comply with state and/or national League positions. These can be found in [Where We Stand](#) on the state web site and [Impact on Issues](#) on the national web site.

Sometimes the concerns involve the governmental process. We are fortunate now to have access to this information, sometimes too much information. We hope to give you some basic information and simple connections to help you get started.

If you do not have an experienced local member to work with, there are always members of the LWVMA Board, Program and Action Committee members and office staff available to answer questions. The content of this booklet, and other materials for members interested in advocacy, are available on the LWVMA website, under Member Resources>Toolkits for Members>Advocacy Toolkit. <http://lwwma.org/member-resources/toolkits-for-members/advocacy-toolkit/>

Finally, even League members sometimes feel their voice won't make a difference. However, a lot can and has been done by individuals and small groups speaking up, letting their voices be heard. As League members, we have the benefit of history and credibility and our public officers do want to hear from us.

Remember, Democracy is Not a Spectator Sport.

Thank you for all you do.

Carole Pelchat

Third Vice President and Chair of the Program and Action Committee, LWVMA

Why Lobby?

The Microsoft Encarta College Dictionary (2001) defines lobbying as an attempt to persuade a political representative or influential person to support or fight a particular cause. The goal of lobbying is to produce a vote by a member of a legislative body in line with a position.



As an organization devoted to encouraging informed and active participation in government, the League aims to assure that the people's voice is an important part of political dialogue. Citizens are the guardians of democracy. Without citizen participation, we have no democracy.

Paid lobbyists and special interests aggressively seek to influence public policy, but the same message has a different impact coming from the grassroots. Lobbying as a League member or citizen provides our legislators with direct access to information on how particular proposed legislation might affect their constituents – the people who live, work and vote in their districts.

As League members we have a singular capacity to educate our elected officials and fellow citizens because of our reputation for being non-partisan, well-informed and coming to our positions through open-minded, careful study and the consensus of our members.

As League members we may advocate at the local, state and national levels based on LWVMA and LWVUS positions ([Where We Stand](#) and [Impact on Issues](#)). As citizens, we may advocate on any issue of importance to us, however we must always consider whether our position in the community may be interpreted as a communication from our local, state or national League. When in doubt, contact a member of your local and/or state Board.

The following pages are intended to provide you with information that will support your lobbying efforts, from the simplest (Contacting your Elected Officials) to most labor intensive (Presenting Educational Forums). To begin, there is a brief description of the Steps to a Law. Please contact the League office (617-523-2999 or lwwma@lwwma.org) with questions or concerns and for access to League resources.

Getting Ready to Lobby

Use these as guidelines and thought triggers to help you advocate successfully at any level.



Think about your issue:

- Narrow your focus – there are always multiple issues, but a narrow focus is easier to describe to others. If necessary, prioritize and work on the issue that best matches demands of the community and available resources.
- Determine the branch of government where you need to advocate and acquire allies.

Do the homework on your issue:

- Research the existing laws and regulations at the local, state and national level that are related to your issue.
- Find out what efforts may have been made in the past to resolve the issue and the outcome. What were the stumbling blocks in those efforts? Have circumstances changed, if so how?
- Get feedback from those you plan to approach regarding their assessment of the issue and any efforts they may be studying or working towards.

Know where your issue fits into the scheme of government:

- Does a state law or regulation need to be changed, or is this a local issue?
- State laws require working with the legislature.
- State regulations require working with the appropriate state agency.
- If your issue is a local issue, is a hearing required? What are the notice requirements for a hearing? What are the voting requirements?

Know the economic implications:

- What are the tax, bonding or other cost implications?
- If expense involved, how will it be paid for?
- Assess potential for negative impacts to your community.

Find your natural allies on the issue:

- What other groups or individuals are interested in this or similar issues? Can you work together toward a common goal?
- Who are your allies within the government?
- Post a question related to the issue on a local blog to assess interest.
- Meet with potential allies; establish goals and working parameters, develop plans.

Stay positive; avoid confrontation:

- Contact potential opponents of your position, hear their concerns, and attempt to find mutually satisfactory solutions.

Know your capacities and capabilities:

- Who is on your team?
- Is the team big enough to complete the work? Are additional members available?
- What skills do team members possess? What's missing? Can these skills be found?
- Is the team aware of the difficulties to be faced?
- Is the team motivated to work through the problems that may be encountered?

The Massachusetts Legislative Process

The [Massachusetts legislature](#), or General Court, is the primary author of laws enacted in Massachusetts. It is a two-chambered body – the Senate with 40 members and the House of Representatives with 160 members, elected to concurrent two-year terms. Each session begins on the first Wednesday in January and ends on the day before the beginning of the next session.

Five Sources of Legislation:

- Legislators (principal route)
- Governor
- Administrative agency reports
- Special commission reports
- Ballot initiative



The majority of legislation is submitted to the House or Senate Clerk's office on or before 5:00 pm on the 2nd Wednesday in January of each two-year session. Financial bills are always initiated in the House. Any citizen may submit a proposal to a legislator and request their support in submitting it as a bill. In the week prior to filing, caucuses are held where sponsors seek other legislators to co-sponsor their bills.

Assigning Docket and Bill Numbers

Bills are given House or Senate Docket numbers, assigned to a Joint Committee, and sent to the non-initiating chamber for agreement to the bill and the committee assignment. Once accepted, bill numbers are assigned, but those numbers can change during the course of deliberation, particularly when similar bills are joined and/or major changes are made to the text.

The Joint Committee Process for Bills

Once a bill is submitted to a Joint Committee, that committee is required to hold a public hearing on the bill. These hearings are open to the public, and interested parties may attend and submit oral and/or written testimony. Every bill submitted must be acted upon by the assigned Joint Committee. Bills not voted out of committee by the end of the first annual session are carried over at their current status to the second annual session. Bills are required to be reported out of joint committees by the third Wednesday in March of the second annual session.

Following the public hearing the committee will deliberate in Executive Session of the committee, which is also open to the public but visitors may not address the committee. After deliberation, the committee makes its recommendation to the body that initiated the bill.

Their options are:

- Ought to pass
- Ought not to pass
- Ought to pass as changed
- Discharge to another committee
- Refer for a Study Order

The first three are self-explanatory. A recommendation of “Ought not to Pass” does not prevent a bill from being voted on by the full chamber, but the recommendation is usually accepted.

When a Bill is Amended

Changed (amended) bills are frequently given a new bill number. Bills are usually discharged to another committee if there are overlapping areas of interest. That committee will then hold its hearing and make its recommendation. A study order authorizes the committee to create a subcommittee to study the bill during recess and file a report on its findings, but this is usually a quiet way to kill a bill.

When a Bill Moves out of Joint Committee

Once out of the Joint Committee, a series of reviews by House and/or Senate committees occurs (*e.g.*, Steering and Policy, Ways and Means if appropriations are required, Third Reading). Bills can be held up or die in these committees, particularly Ways and Means. When voted out of the chamber committee, it is placed on the calendar to be discussed; amendments offered and voted on in formal session of the initiating body. These sessions are open to the public, but space is limited and observers may not address the Chamber. With a positive vote (passed to be engrossed), the bill is sent to the non-initiating body.

The non-initiating chamber places the bill on its calendar to be discussed, have amendments offered and voted on in a formal session. Both chambers must deliver a positive vote (passed to be engrossed) on the same bill. If the second chamber alters the initiating chambers bill, a conference committee is formed to work out a bill both branches will adopt.

When a Bill is “Passed to be Engrossed”

Once both branches have “passed to be engrossed” the same bill, it is sent to the Engrossing Division for the official printing. The bill is then sent first to the House and then the Senate for enactment. The engrossed bill may be debated and rejected but not amended in either chamber, but this is usually just a formality.

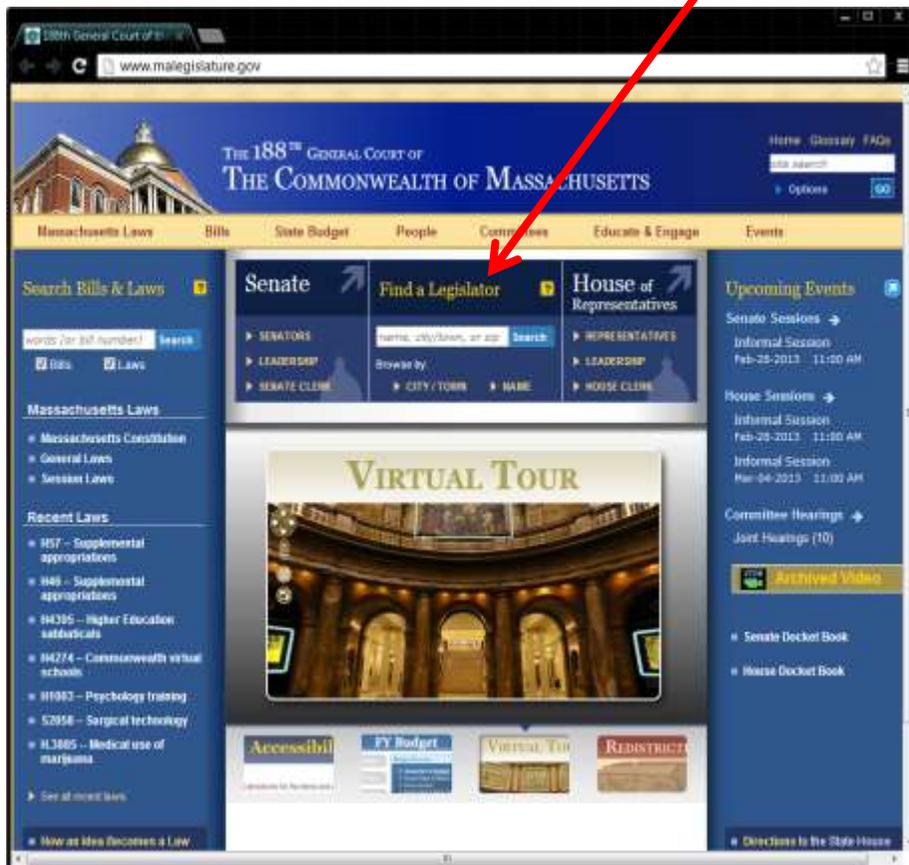
When Engrossed Bills go to the Governor

Once forwarded to the Governor, he/she may sign the bill, return it to the originating branch with recommendations, or veto it within 10 days. It requires a two-thirds vote of the Senate and House to override the Governor's recommendations or veto. If the Governor neither signs nor vetoes the bill within 10 days, it automatically becomes law, unless the legislature adjourns within the 10 days (a *pocket veto*).

Contacting Your Elected Officials

Names and contact information for local officials can usually be found on your community web site, otherwise contact your city or town Clerk.

To find information about your state legislators for the current session (e.g., 188th General Court for 2013-2014), search www.malegislature.gov. Under “**Find a Legislator**” enter zip code, city or town, or name of legislator.



The telephone numbers for Representatives will usually connect you to a Committee Office. Multiple Representatives share the same number; just ask for the Representative’s office or his or her aide.

For information on federal officials, search on www.usa.gov, click on “Contact Government,” then “Elected Officials” on the drop-down menu. If you do not have Internet access, call the League office and we will be happy to find the information. For your own convenience, you may want to keep contact information for your current elected officials.

Basic Tips

- When possible, meet your elected officials on a casual basis first – have your League put on a *Meet Your Legislator* event or introduce yourself when officials are holding hours at their local office.
- An email message is the quickest and easiest action. Personalize form letters when possible.
- Time is always a concern. Be brief and to the point in any contact.
- Know your issue. If appropriate, include personal experiences, yours or others.
- When speaking to a particular issue, introduce yourself and whom you are representing.
- On phone contact, if you cannot speak to your elected official, speak to his/her aide and get the aide's contact information.
- Be respectful and listen carefully to opposing opinions.
- Take notes and request an opportunity to provide feedback, either by email, phone or an in-person meeting.
- When attending a scheduled meeting, be on time. If you intend to bring others, be sure to provide this information.
- Always bring written information to leave behind, including your contact information.
- Always send a Thank You following a meeting.
- When presenting written testimony on a particular issue, try keeping it to a single page. Provide links to additional information if needed.
- "Being there" is important. Even if you're not testifying, attending the hearing has great value in signaling public concern and interest in an issue. A large crowd clearly demonstrates the issue is important to many people.
- When presenting oral testimony at a hearing, keep your discussion brief. Do not read your written testimony; include individual experiences where appropriate.

Emails, Faxes and Letters

These are the most widely used forms of communication and are important to elected officials and their staff. All elected officials are now accessible by fax and email, and the number of contacts on a particular subject may determine an official's attention to an issue, as well as the position taken.

Address only one issue per document. The subject line should be succinct and relevant. All documents should include a formal address. A letter should be addressed formally (*e.g.*, The Honorable John Smith, title and official address). Emails should start: Dear Senator, Representative, Governor, Mayor, Councilwoman, *etc.* See **Basic Tips** for content. Add your contact information (street address, email address and phone number).

Form letters may be the least effective communication, but they do save time and express your views. Most online form letters offer the opportunity to alter the message in order to make it more personal, so take the time when you can. And all communications, form letter or otherwise, are counted. Expect to get a form letter in response to your written communication.

Telephone Contact

Telephone numbers listed on the MA web site for Representatives will usually connect you with a person answering for a committee. Ask for your Representative's office, and they will connect you to his/her staff. Senator's phone numbers will usually connect you directly to his/her office. If you are connected to an answering machine, introduce yourself, indicate your reason for the call, give a specific bill number when appropriate, and give call back information. Aides are generally very good about returning calls if requested. If you are contacting your legislator to express your position on an issue, expect to be connected to an aide. See **Basic Tips** for content. If follow up is requested, provide contact information.

Personal Visit

A personal visit is a very effective way of getting your message heard by your elected officials. Many local officials have regularly scheduled office hours, but they are frequently employed and serve on a part time basis, so may be most easily contacted initially by email. Most state elected officials will have office hours locally, as well. Information may be found on community web sites or by calling the State House number.

Federal elected officials usually have one or more offices in their districts, with staff available to meet with you. Check their web site. Office hours may be on a "first come, first served" basis, but it is generally recommended that an appointment be scheduled.

Be sure to ask if your legislator is going to be present on any specific date, and be prepared for schedule changes. See **Basic Tips**.

Media Outreach

Reaching the public via media needs to be broad and comprehensive.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor of local and regional papers are one of the most effective ways to voice your opinion to policy makers and educate people in your community about the issues. The Letters to the Editor section is one of the most frequently read segments of newspapers and magazines. Public letters often provoke others to write, creating a dialogue that brings out more aspects of the issue, and showing the prevailing and diverse sentiments of the community.



Additionally, letters can correct or interpret facts in response to inaccurate or biased articles, explain the connection between a news item and your priority issues, or respond to a recent article, editorial or letter. Whatever your purpose, your letter will reach many people in your community, including elected officials, who make a point of following the press in their districts.

Your initial paragraph should address the major point you wish to make. If responding to an article, Op Ed Piece or Letter to the Editor be sure to note the title, author and date. Your local or regional newspapers provide guidelines for word length and submission on-line or by phone. When responding to a Letter to the Editor, be clear about why you disagree. Always be respectful.

- Letters to the editor should be timely, succinct, informative and personal.
- To find out the maximum length of a letter, how to submit it (fax, post, email), where to send it, and other pertinent information, check the paper's editorial page or website or call the newspaper's editorial department.
- Write on only ONE issue in a letter.
- If a Letter to the Editor mentions a Representative's or Senator's name, they will likely see it. Elected officials care about how they are perceived in the district and they pay attention to letters that ask them to take a specific action on legislation.
- Urge other readers to support your position and let their elected officials know their views.
- Do not be discouraged if your letter is not printed. Keep trying. You can even submit a revised letter with a different angle on the issue at a later date. If your letter is published, send it to an official with a personal note attached.

- Only the state or local League president (or designee) is permitted to speak for the League in an official capacity. However, members are encouraged to take action on League topics as individuals. For example, when responding to an LWVUS Action Alert, local League presidents can send a message on behalf of the organization on League letterhead; members might contact the same official as individuals, rather than League members.

Op Eds

An Op Ed opinion column is longer and generally more detailed than a Letter to the editor and harder to get accepted. Newspapers are looking for opinion pieces that will make people think or provide new insights into a problem. Newspapers are especially interested in receiving pieces on local and state issues that are not covered by national columnists. Submit the piece to one newspaper at a time if there is more than one in the community. Newspapers want an exclusive. If the article is rejected, submit it to another newspaper.

Tips for writing an Op Ed Piece:

- Focus on one issue.
- State your opinion forcefully. Start with the premise, and then present the facts to support it.
- Have a set of facts, quotes from authorities and specific examples. Provide documentation for the newspaper when you submit your Op Ed.
- Respectfully explain why the opponents' argument is wrong.
- Restate your opinion in the conclusion.
- The subject matter should be timely and relevant to the public.
- Be succinct. Op Eds can vary in length, but are usually around 700-800 words.
- Have others read your piece before submitting it.

Social Media and Blogs

Using local "Patch" sites or other local on-line media is increasingly popular and can be very effective for publicity. You can post your press release, invite others to join your cause, and learn by monitoring responses to your proposal from fellow citizens. You will quickly find your natural allies and opponents.

- Have someone knowledgeable in social media do the posting and monitor/respond as necessary.
- For a large effort, consider a customized Facebook page.
- To get the word out, create a Twitter hashtag that is catchy, easy and good for your position. Use that hashtag to keep people updated via twitter on events, progress, when their support is needed.
- All of the previous advice about facts, timeliness and succinctness are even more important when using social media.



Press Releases

A press release can announce an event, be used as a handout, can become a position paper, or can be used to educate the media about a topic. It is always important to **have something in writing**.

- Timely release is important. If your event is planned in advance, send out information at least a week ahead. If a short lead-time is all you have, fax or email the release.
- If there isn't time for publication of your release, call a reporter who covers similar issues to alert them to the event. This call could result in press coverage.
- Brief is best. **Always include the "five W's" – who, what, where, when and why.**
- The next paragraph(s) should explain the purpose of the event and provide some context or history regarding why the event is taking place.
- Try to include a catchy quote to 'catch' the attention of the reader.
- Begin with "For Immediate Release." At the top type "PRESS RELEASE." Be sure to include contact name and email or phone number at the top or bottom of the release.

Educational and Advocacy Forums



Every educational and advocacy forum is unique, conceived, planned and offered from the perspective of the organization hosting the forum for an intended, specific audience. However, all forums share similar design elements, listed below.

One basic rule applies for a League educational forum – its purpose must be to inform, not persuade. A League advocacy forum (*i.e.*,

intended to persuade) is appropriate only when a position has been taken at the state or national level.

Design Questions

1. **Why are you holding the forum?**
 - To inform League members, a specific demographic, or the general public?
 - League visibility?
 - To attract new members?
2. **What is the topic or theme?**
 - Is it of local importance only or for a broader audience?
 - Is it related to a local, state or national program initiative?
 - Is it a “hot topic” or long-standing issue?
3. **Who is your audience?**
 - What is their level of knowledge?
 - Is your target audience adults, teens, parents, or “all of the above”?
4. **Where will it be held?**
 - How large is your expected audience?
 - Will the venue draw attendees?
 - Is parking and/or public transportation an issue?
 - What is your budget?
5. **When will it be held? Consider:**
 - Venue availability
 - Availability of speaker(s)
 - Potential conflicts with other local events, school schedules, holidays, major sports events, *etc.*

Planning

1. **Talking Points:** After preliminary approval from your local League Board, you will need a couple of conversation starters to use when approaching your moderator, potential speakers and the League Board if the topic is more than a local issue. Getting concurrence with the moderator, whether internal or professional is very important. Explore his/her ideas for framing the event. An outline of the proposed event will be useful here.

After consultation/discussion with the moderator/speaker(s), create an overview, which will change over time. The overview can be distributed to potential or known speakers, your moderator and local and state League Boards when seeking final approval. The overview will also serve to keep everyone involved “on the same page” in terms of expectations and the topic.

A request to the LWVMA Board for co-sponsorship and/or approval should contain:

- Purpose – Educational or advocacy, topic, target audience
 - Who – Partners, speakers
 - Structure – Panel, individual speakers
 - Time frame – Date and time
 - Location
2. **Budget:** A rough idea of costs should be presented to your local Board. If other groups or organizations are involved, determine their share of expenditures. Following are some expenditures that could be included:
 - Printing – programs, flyers, resource materials, sign-up sheets, name tags, membership materials
 - Refreshments – Paper goods, food (seek donations from local businesses)
 - Facilities – Space rental, custodial fees, insurance fees
 - Speakers - Honorarium, gifts, travel, lodging, meals
 - A/V – Cameras, sound, screen
 3. **Publicity:** This is a major factor in achieving the turnout you want. Following is a general timeline and checklist:
 - Prepare and distribute a press release announcing the program – modify to match your audience.
 - A Save-the Date notice may be issued well before the program. A more detailed announcement should be issued three to four weeks before the program.
 - Email local Leagues and LWVMA to include in their bulletins, newsletters and websites. When appropriate, notify other state Leagues.
 - Post on available web sites (*e.g.*, Boston.com, local Patch.com).
 - Send personal invitations to local officials and prominent interested citizens.
 - Distribute and post flyers, using websites and community announcement boards.
 - Post on Facebook and other social media.

- Create large signs and posters containing pertinent information.
 - Seek press coverage and provide a press packet including basic information, speakers, topic, and sponsors.
 - Distribute a program to attendees with a time line and information about speakers, sponsors and the League.
4. **Audio/visual details:** This will depend on speakers' needs and location. If being taped, permission must be obtained from the speakers and the attendees must be informed. If this is being done by your local cable channel, they may have forms. Legal advice may be required.
5. **Donations:** Ask for product and advertising contributions. Make sure to acknowledge contributions/contributors in the program.
6. **Logistics:** Create a "To-Do" list early and recruit a team. The size of the team and expertise of the members may be a function of the planned event. A good rule of thumb is to start with the event, listing everything you think you will need, and work backwards, indicating the resources needed and timeframe required to assure everything will be in place when needed. Check and double-check everything!

Then and Now



Action in our democracy is
always needed.