



Legal Resource

Working with Legislators

Animals can't vote, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't have a voice in the political process.

You can give animals that voice! This advocacy toolkit will walk you through the basics of how to lobby for pro-animal legislation.

What is Lobbying?

Whether they're city council members, state representatives or U.S. Senators, elected officials care — or ought to care — what their constituents think. The word “lobbying” may have some negative connotations — but it's good and important to let lawmakers know that you care about laws affecting animals, that you want better animal protection laws.

By sending letters and emails supporting pro-animal measures that are on the legislative agenda, you can help convince these politicians that the voters who put them in office want to see animals protected from cruelty and neglect.

And if there are no pro-animal items on the agenda, you can help change that, too. Tell lawmakers what types of animal protection laws you would like to see introduced and passed. The Animal Legal Defense Fund's model animal protection laws are available as a template.

Lay the Groundwork

To be an effective advocate, or lobbyist, you need to lay the proper groundwork.

Here are some tips to consider, before approaching an elected official to advocate for specific legislation:

- Strive to be well informed about the issue so that you come across as credible and knowledgeable. This can require research and possibly contacting others who have worked on similar campaigns in the past.
- Coalitions of people and groups who join together with a unified aim can be very powerful. Find out if there is anyone else in your area working on the same issue — if so, you may wish to join them, so that efforts will not be duplicated.
- Get a feel for the legislative process. For example, if you are contemplating a county-wide ordinance, contact the county council office for information on enacting legislation. Then attend an open council meeting to become familiar with how they function.
- Click [here](#) or contact the local League of Women Voters to find out who the elected officials are in your district. Consider attending functions where legislators meet with constituents. Introduce yourself and thank them for supporting other measures that may be related to your issue.

- Establish rapport with legislators’ support staff early on — they are often more accessible than the legislators and can provide good information. Keep all contact brief and professional, remembering to thank them for their time and assistance.
- Prepare well-researched and well-written informational packets that include a factsheet on the proposed reform and, if possible, a list of endorsements.
- Find advocates in each district and ask them to contact their legislators. Ask constituents to write polite letters to their legislators that demonstrate support for the proposed legislation. Letters that use the constituent’s own words, rather than form letters, postcards or emails, will be taken more seriously. Advocates can also write letters to the editor of their local newspapers to garner more support for the effort.
- Create a Facebook page and a stand-alone website dedicated to information about your issue, and to building support in the community. These will be repositories of useful information, but will also help show lawmakers that members of the community are engaged on your issue. Post regular updates, both to keep folks informed and to show lawmakers that this is an active issue.

Establish Goals

Once you have laid the groundwork, you must determine your goals:

- Refer to **the Animal Legal Defense Fund’s Model State Animal Protection Laws** or consult with an attorney if you need help composing the language of the proposed legislation
- Be strategic in your campaigns. For example, perhaps a complete ban on hunting in your state would be inconceivable, but a ban on, say, baiting certain species might be feasible and manageable.
- Look to other communities where advances on your issue have been made. This will give you a sense of what has been politically feasible elsewhere. You can look to these other areas for guidance as to what tactics have been effective, as well.
- At the same time, recognize that every single advance in animal protection law begins somewhere, when members of the community push for what they believe is important, if novel.
- Obtain endorsements from influential individuals and organizations in your community.
- Be prepared to consider compromises that may need to be made when working with politicians.
- Be patient, and be persistent. Sometimes you don’t get the law you want passed, or even introduced, on your first try. It may take more than one legislative session to see results. Don’t get discouraged; be in this for the long haul.

Make Contact

Lobbying is nearly impossible without personal contact.

The following pointers will help the visit go smoothly:

- Call the legislator’s office and schedule an appointment. While you may feel most comfortable attending the appointment as part of a group, it is advisable to go alone or with just a few others. Appoint one person to be the main spokesperson.
- Dress professionally.
- Identify yourself as a concerned citizen, constituent, business owner, voter or whatever may apply. Remember that legislators sometimes prefer to get feedback from people who vote, rather than organized lobbyists.
- Be positive, brief, and to the point, supporting your argument with facts. Provide just enough background information to explain the proposal, as public officials are busy and may know little or nothing about the issue. Explain how the proposed bill will have a positive impact on their constituents. Consider showing a short video if it would help illustrate the issue.
- State clearly what you want the legislator to do: sponsor a bill, vote no on an anti-animal amendment, etc.
- Offer to work to publicize the issue and find additional support.
- Leave a packet of information that contains a clear, concise summary of your proposal.
- Always follow up with a personal thank you to the legislator and support staff after every visit or positive action taken by the legislator.
- If you are speaking publicly at a council meeting or committee hearing, follow the above procedures, keeping your presentation clear and concise.
- Visit the **Animal Law Resource Center** [↗](#) to find out more about current laws.

Other Ways You Can Help

- **Send an email to your state legislators today** [↗](#) and ask them to support stronger protections for animals.
- **Support the Animal Legal Defense Fund’s Animal Bill of Rights.** [↗](#)Through the Animal Bill of Rights, the Animal Legal Defense Fund is working to show Congress a groundswell of support for legislation that protects animals and recognizes that, like all sentient beings, animals are entitled to basic legal rights in our society.

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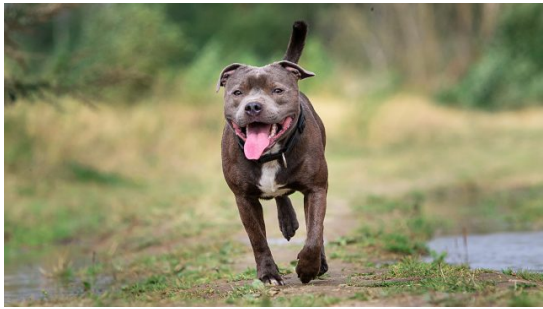
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