

## Legislative Advocacy: Frequently Asked Questions

*Q: How can I find out who my legislator is?*

A: Go to <http://www.vote-smart.org/> and enter your 9 digit zip code. This website will identify your U.S. Representative and Senators, as well as the legislators who represent you at the Georgia General Assembly.

*Q: Where can I find contact information for my legislators and copies of legislation?*

A: Go to <http://www.legis.ga.gov/en-US/default.aspx>. This website includes contact information for legislators, the text of bills, and meeting notices. There are also links to a live feed of the legislature when they are in session as well as House committee meetings.

*Q: When does the legislative session start and end?*

A: The Legislature convenes on the second Monday in January each year. The session lasts for 40 legislative days, but only the days that the legislators are meeting in chamber count towards this limit. On some days, legislators are in recess for committee meetings. Typically, the session concludes by the end of March or early April.

*Q: When is the best time to lobby my legislator?*

A: Before the session starts! Citizens should develop relationships with their legislators between April and December when legislators are not busy with the session. Contact your legislator and let him/her know the issues of most importance to you.

*Q: How should I lobby my legislator?*

A: One seasoned legislator suggested a 3-step approach. First, write a letter before the session identifying yourself as a constituent and letting your legislators know the issues you care about. Second, write a letter during the session when legislators will have an opportunity to vote on those issues. Third, write a letter after the session either thanking them for their good vote or letting them know that you wished they would have voted differently. This won't take much time, but because so few people take this approach, you (and your issues) will definitely stay on your legislators' radar screens.

*Q: How does a bill become a law?*

A: A bill can be introduced in either the House or Senate, but must pass both chambers to become law. Once a bill is introduced, it is assigned to a committee where members review it and decide if it should pass out of the committee. If it does receive a "do pass" recommendation, the bill is then eligible to be voted on by the full House or Senate. The Rules Committee determines which bills will be on the calendar for the following legislative day. If a bill passes one chamber and is amended in the other chamber, the originating chamber must either agree to the changes or insist on the previous version. In that case, a conference committee of 3 Representatives and 3 Senators is appointed to resolve the differences. Once a bill passes both chambers in identical form, it is sent to the Governor who has 40 days after the session concludes to either sign or veto legislation. For more detail on the legislative process, go to <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/pdf/legchart.pdf>

*Q: My legislator has voted the wrong way on my issues in the past. Should I bother contacting him/her?*

A: Absolutely! There is always the possibility of changing hearts and minds through persistent attempts at education. Additionally, it is important for legislators to hear that their constituents want them to vote differently.

*Q: Since I work for a non-profit organization, am I allowed to lobby legislators?*

A: You can lobby so long as a substantial part of your organizational budget is not spent on such activities. However, federal tax law defines lobbying as any attempt to influence specific legislation. If you are educating legislators about issues in general or offering resources, you are

not lobbying. Certain grants may prohibit the use of grant funds for lobbying. Additional information is available at <http://www.afj.org/>.

*Q: During the session, what is the best way to contact my legislator?*

A: Ask your legislators what they prefer. Some legislators love emails while others disregard them. As a general rule, the best way to contact your legislator is as follows in descending order of impact: personal visit to the Capitol; letter mailed or faxed to their office; phone call to their office; email.

*Q: Can I come to the Capitol during the session to meet with my legislator?*

A: Certainly. The best time to find your legislator is generally between 10 a.m. and noon when they are meeting in the chamber on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Capitol, although they convene at different times on some days. Check with the House Clerk's Office and the Secretary of the Senate's Office to determine what time they go into session on the day you plan to visit.

*Q: How can I find my legislator once I get to the Capitol?*

A: Come to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Capitol. You can fill out a form to request that your legislator leave the chamber and meet you in the hallway. To see your Representative, use the white forms on a stand near the office of the Speaker of the House. For Senators, fill out the yellow form on a stand near the Secretary of the Senate's Office. On the form, always specify that you are a constituent and the issue you would like to discuss. Give the form to the secretaries sitting at the desk just outside of the main entrance to the House and Senate chambers. A page will deliver this form to the legislator inside the chamber and let you know whether the legislator will be out to see you. Depending on what is happening that day, your legislator may or may not be able to leave the chamber. But even if they can't come out and meet with you, it is important for them to know that a constituent took the time to come down to the Capitol and express their opinions.

*Q: How do I get to the Capitol?*

A: The easiest way is to take MARTA to the Georgia State University Station on the East-West line. You will exit the train station in the Sloppy Floyd building which is across the street from the Capitol. Driving directions are as follows:

- **Traveling Southbound on I-85/I-75**, take exit 248A (MLK/State Capitol/Stadium). Stay in the right lane off the exit ramp. The lane will yield to the right onto Butler Street. Park in the Butler Street parking deck which is the second entrance on your right, or, if full, the Grady parking lot is down the street on the right. If that lot has already filled, parking is available at Underground Atlanta at the intersection of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Central Avenue.
- **Traveling northbound on I-85/I-75**, take exit 246 (Central Avenue/Fulton Street). Follow the sign to Fulton Street and turn left onto Butler Street. Park in the Butler Street parking deck which is the second entrance on your right, or, if full, the Grady parking lot is down the street on the right. If that lot has already filled, parking is available at Underground Atlanta at the intersection of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Central Avenue.

*Q: What should I bring to the Capitol?*

A: You must produce a driver's license or other photo identification to enter the Capitol. You should also bring a business card or other printed material with your contact information so that legislators can get in touch with you in the future. If you are lobbying on a particular piece of legislation or issues, you may also wish to bring a fact sheet.