

# Legislative Advocacy 101:

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL CITIZEN ADVOCACY OF THE KANSAS LEGISLATURE

- Grassroots advocacy enlists the help of the community to influence lawmakers. Often a professional lobbyist is needed to organize the effort.
- Advocacy methods include writing, emailing, and calling your legislators. For this to be effective, a large number of people need to get involved.
- Other methods often used include petitions and peaceful demonstrations.

### Using the Media for Effective Advocacy

- The use of the media is one of the most powerful tools in grassroots advocacy.
- The media has a strong influence over the government and its agenda. The more media attention a cause receives, the more likely it is that the Legislature will consider it.
- It is important for advocates to maintain strong working relationships with members of the media and to keep them apprised of new developments and issues.

### Why is grassroots advocacy important?

- If public opinion runs strongly in favor of a bill, it generally passes. When public opinion opposes legislation, it usually fails to pass.
- A Gallup poll asked members of Congress which sources of information they considered most when deciding how to vote. By an overwhelming margin, they said their most influential source was *communication from constituents*.

## When's the best time to get involved?

- The best time for advocates to make their views known is when the bill is in committee [see companion document “How a Bill Becomes Law” on this website for a complete discussion of the process]. Individuals may sign up to testify on a measure, either in favor of or opposition to the bill.
- It is also beneficial to communicate with legislators or their secretaries throughout the process (through phone calls, emails, letters, in-person visits) up until the final vote is taken in the second chamber. Secretaries will keep a tally of public opinion on an issue.

## Elements of Successful Advocacy

### *DO ...*

- ... *know your issue*. Do your homework because you may be asked by legislators to provide more information.
- ... explain the logic of your position in simple and straightforward terms. It is helpful to create a position paper and include statistics, but make sure they are verifiable.
- ... keep letters, emails, phone calls, and visits with lawmakers brief and to-the-point.
- ... include the bill number and/or name of the legislation in all communication. Lawmakers consider hundreds of measures during the legislative session.
- ... include your name, address, and phone number on all communications so legislators or their staff can contact you.
- ... always be courteous to legislative staff. Not only are they extremely busy people who deserve cordial treatment, they often control access to legislators.
- ... take advantage of strength in numbers. The more letters, emails, phone calls, and visits lawmakers receive will play a critical role in how they vote.
- ... remind your legislator how many people in your organization share your position.
- ... be patient. It may take weeks for an issue to work its way through the process.

- ... understand that compromise is often necessary. Make an honest assessment of what you can realistically expect to achieve this session and what may have to wait until next year.
- ... write a thank-you note to the lawmaker and staff, no matter what the outcome of your issue. Your adversary on one issue might be your ally on the next one.

### ***DON'T ...***

- ... try to cover too many issues at once.
- ... use form letters. Form letters are viewed as the work of a single person or two rather than an indication of broad support.
- ... ignore opportunities to visit with your legislators at home. Attend eggs-and-issues-type forums.
- ... underestimate the weight given to letters, emails, phone calls, and visits.
- ... use jargon. Explain the issue in language easily understood by those who aren't familiar with conservation principles and practices.
- ... lie or embellish the truth. *Ever.*

**KACD**  
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

*Representing Local Conservation Districts*

**Exercise your right as a citizen to make your voice heard. Become a strong advocate for the conservation of Kansas natural resources.**

*“Cautious, careful people always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing can never bring about change.”*

**Susan B. Anthony**