

General Tips for Grassroots Lobbying

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What is Grassroots Lobbying?

Grassroots lobbying simply the art of communicating with your elected officials. It's the heart of our democratic way of life and is what concerned horse people do to influence legislators' decisions on issues that affect us.

What does Grassroots Lobbying involve? It involves knowing the facts about an issue that concerns you; contacting you legislators by telephone, letter, email, faxes, or personal visits; and presenting your viewpoint to legislators.

What's the best way for me to contact my legislators?

Probably the most effective way is to pay your legislators a personal visit during the annual 90-day legislative session (mid-January to mid-April). You can call their legislative offices to make an appointment or to ascertain the best time to drop by. If you cannot meet personally with a legislator, staff members are usually happy to hear your views and can be very helpful. During the rest of the year, most legislators have offices in their home districts and sometimes hold meetings there as well.

You can also let your elected representatives know your position on an issue by telephone, snail mail, faxes, or email. Just remember that you'll need to know the facts, be courteous, and make sure to say if you are a resident of his or her district and include your address. Be brief in your comments, spoken or written. Form letters and postcards usually are not effective and should be avoided.

How do I contact my legislators?

The Maryland General Assembly's website contains a wealth of information and is simple to use: <http://mgaleg.maryland.gov> – on the home page, scroll to the bottom left and click on "Voice My Opinion" and go from there.

Are there other ways I can make my position known to legislators?

Yes, indeed. Every bill gets a hearing, and everyone who wants to can testify in support or in opposition. Again, it is important to say where you live, know the facts, be courteous, and be brief. If someone else has testified before you and holds you same position, relinquish your time to them. Summarize—try not to read from written testimony.

In order to testify before a committee, you will need to arrive well ahead of time and sign in. Also, if you have written testimony you would like distributed to committee members, call the committee staff first to determine how many copies you will need to bring with you. When you arrive, you can hand them to committee staffers in the committee hearing room. For more information on the requirements for testifying before each committee, go to the General Assembly website (mgaleg.maryland.gov) and click on the "Committees" tab at the top. Select the relevant committee. Scroll to the bottom for "Rules and Guidelines." Remember that as the 90-day session goes on, committees can run behind schedule so be prepared to wait.

How can I find out if a certain bill has been introduced or follow the progress of a bill?

Again, the General Assembly website is an excellent resource. On the home page, you can search by bill number or by broad subject matter. Type in the bill number, i.e., hb32 or sb32. You will get the general overview and status page. To read the actual bill, you can scroll down the page and click "Documents" then on "First Reading, Second Reading," etc. This way you can also keep up with amendments to the bill. You can also click on "History" to follow the process. The "Summary" tab will have info about scheduled hearings. In addition, prior session bill information is available which will enable you to find out how a bill fared in past sessions.

If you do not have access to the internet, you can obtain information by calling the Department of Legislative Services Library and Information Services at 410-946-5400 (Baltimore area), or 301-970-5400 (Washington area).

To learn more, visit www.mdhorsecouncil.org or call 844 MDHORSE (844-634-6773)

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