

Activist Toolkit: Basic Lobbying



A toolkit for volunteers, partners and supporters to use in lobbying legislators and other public officials in support of the death with dignity movement.

New Mexico, Oregon and Washington advocates: before using this guide, please contact your state outreach staff to coordinate with ongoing activities.



Care and Choice at the End of Life

Public Speaking

We have a generally dim view of “lobbyists” in our country, often for good reasons! But lobbying actually includes all kinds of basic communications with our government, including everyday citizens and community members showing up to explain to their representatives what they think of certain policies and how they would like to see them vote. Its democracy in action, and you can be a part of it! Depending on which state you are in, Compassion & Choices may have an active campaign supporting death-with-dignity legislation. If so, we would love your help in lobbying your state legislature. This guide will take you through the basics of lobbying your state representative.



Every state is different:

As mentioned above, even if there is a legislative campaign in your state, there are likely to be many differences, both in the legislation and the strategy, from other states. **It's crucial to check in with Compassion & Choices before scheduling a lobbying visit.**

Letters to officials:

Writing letters to your state representatives and other officials is a great first step and a good way to build toward a lobbying visit. Please see our [Letter Writing Guide in the Volunteer Action Center](#) for information and tips on successful letter writing. Try to get 10 letters into your representative's office before scheduling a visit.



Basic Steps For a Legislative Meeting

Whatever the nature of your visit—to support specific legislation, promote the drafting of new legislation or solicit broad support for the death-with-dignity movement, follow these basic steps for a successful meeting with a legislator or their staff.

1. **Always make an appointment.** Meeting with citizens and local issue groups is a part of your legislator's job, and it is the primary responsibility of their staff, so they will very likely accommodate you. But their schedules are full, so always make an appointment. Most meeting will last 15 minutes.
2. **Prepare your pitch.** At the top of the meeting, you will be invited to summarize your concerns. Plan what you are going to say using no more than five bullet points. Then deliver each point with a small amount of supporting information. From there, let them ask questions.
3. **Always include a personal story, even if it isn't yours.** Personal stories are the most effective because they really illustrate how this issue affects people. Consider using a personal story, if you have one to share. Or you can look in the local media for an appropriate end-of-life story that helps make the point (if you do this, bring a clipping or printout of the article). If you can't find a local story, consider using the national stories of Brittany Maynard, Barbara Mancini or other stories featured on CompassionAndChoices.org.
4. **Bring some materials from Compassion & Choices to share** (quarterly magazine, etc.).
5. **Always dress appropriately.** This is a business meeting, so please wear business attire. You don't have to wear a formal suit, but jeans and polo or t-shirts are not usually appropriate. If you are uncertain about the culture of your state Capitol and what to wear, check with Compassion & Choices staff.
6. **Be on time.** Legislative offices are busy. And, like the doctor's office, you will probably have to wait a little while for your meeting. But it is important to send the right message about your commitment by being on time or a little early.
7. **Always be courteous and respectful!** Its always difficult when we encounter someone who doesn't share our views. And while most legislators and staff are polite listeners, some may become defensive or aggressive if they are staunchly opposed to our views. No matter their position (or disposition!), always be courteous and respectful. After all, they did give you a meeting.
8. **Follow up your meeting with a thank-you note.** Just like any other business interaction, the best practice is to follow-up with a short note thanking them for taking the time for meeting with you. You can also use this as an opportunity to mention anything you may have forgotten in the meeting, or to raise new facts or evidence based on what you discussed. Send a copy of your thank you note to Compassion & Choices at volunteer@compassionandchoices.org.

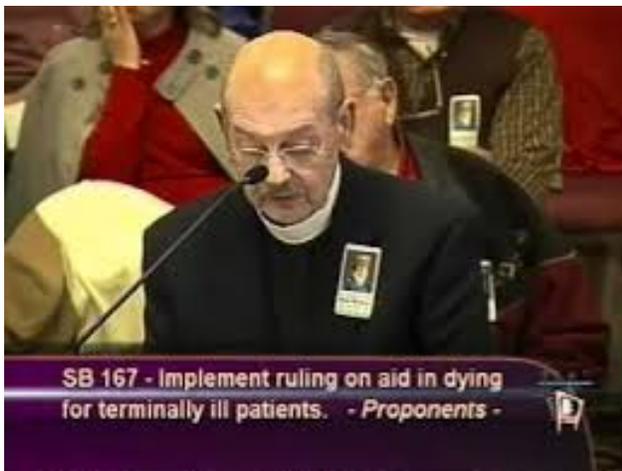


Tip #1: Meetings With Staff

If its possible to meet directly with a legislator, that's fantastic. However, it's also much less likely. The best bet, especially starting out, is to schedule a meeting with legislative staff. Use a staff meeting as an opportunity to introduce the issue to your legislator's office, and then follow up by asking for a meeting directly with your representative.

Legislative Committee Hearings

Once legislation has been introduced in any state, the legislative process can be complex. Compassion & Choices has teams of experienced personnel working to support legislation through the process. One step all proposed legislation goes through is a committee hearing. Committee hearings are held by the legislative committees with responsibility for a particular bill, based on its content. Hearings are an important moment in the legislative process where supporters and opponents of a bill marshal their best arguments and turn out key supporters to help move the bill forward—or to kill it if they are opposed. *Compassion & Choices always needs the visible support of volunteers and activists at every committee hearing. Committee hearings are almost always open to the public.*



A few tips for participating in a legislative hearing:

1. It's critical to show broad support for proposed death-with-dignity legislation or to uphold existing legislation so the first best way to support the process is to attend the hearing, and bring a friend!
2. There is usually an opportunity for public comment during the hearing. Anyone interested in speaking on behalf of the legislation is asked to sign in and then make a very brief (one to two minutes) statement. If you choose to speak, please check in with Compassion & Choices to make sure your comments reflect the current best language.
3. If you do speak, always remember to mention Compassion & Choices in your statement.
4. Always dress appropriately for a hearing: business or business casual attire (no jeans and t-shirts).
5. Strict rules of behavior (no shouting, booing or even applause is allowed in a hearing), but generally you can carry a small sign—nothing larger than you can carry by yourself, and nothing that will block anyone's view. Think of a good, short slogan and include Compassion & Choices on your sign. Check staff about the appropriateness of a sign for a particular hearing.
6. Always include Compassion & Choices' toll-free phone number: 1-800-247-7421. Feel free to refer anyone with questions to the 800 number.

Holding a Lobby Day!

Taking the step to meet with a legislator or legislative staff, is an important way to show your support, and it can really make a difference. **For even greater impact, think about gathering a small group (maybe four to six people) and schedule as many meetings with legislators and/or staff as you can in a single day**—perhaps as many as five. Lobby Days are used by many groups and organizations and can really help elevate a legislator’s view of the support for death-with-dignity laws in the community.

Tip #2: Deliver Petitions in Person!

To add emphasis to your legislative visit, consider personally delivering a quantity of signed petitions and/or letters to the legislator or staff in person. It will sharpen the impact of your visit and add weight to the signatures. Always make extra copies of signed petitions!



A few tips:

1. Be sure to schedule all your meetings in advance. All other tips for legislative meetings apply for a Lobby Day as well. Remember, meeting with staff is also a win!
2. Be sure to schedule at least 15 minutes between each meeting, as offices are not always close together, and some meetings may run long.
3. Not all assembly or senate members have private offices, so be prepared to adapt, and hold your meeting in a café or other location instead.
4. Bring enough materials—a basic letter outlining your position, as well as Compassion & Choices branded materials—to offer to each office you meet with.
5. Draft a strong, basic pitch to deliver (probably outlined in your letter, for easy reference) and keep your opening remarks brief to ensure time for questions and discussion. Where possible, try to include a personal story that helps to illustrate the human dimension of the issue.
6. Remember to mention Compassion & Choices in all your meetings.