

# **THE INTERNATIONAL NANNY ASSOCIATION'S EDUCATIONAL GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE GRASSROOTS LOBBYING**

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Grassroots lobbying can take many forms. From writing a letter, to coordinating a phone call campaign, to meeting with your State or Federal Representative or Senators, Grassroots lobbying is the best way to persuade legislators on issues that may effect the in-home child care industry.

While a variety of factors may influence your elected officials when they are deciding what position to take on an issue, two principal concerns guide their decisions: first, they want to make good public policy; second, they want to make the decision that helps them get re-elected.

Your contact with members of Congress and state legislators responds to both of these goals. Since child care is used by millions of Americans, your elected official will have to listen to your views. He or she must realize that you speak not only for your professional colleagues, agencies and nannies alike, but hundreds of children dependent upon the care of a in-home child care professional. An elected official that ignores the views of his or her constituents risk their re-election prospects.

## **THE “DO’s AND DON’Ts”**

Regardless of the manner by which you communicate with your legislator – whether it be by letter, face-to-face meeting or phone call – you need to keep the following “Dos and Don’ts” in mind.

### **Do....**

- Upon finding an issue that could affect the in-home child care industry, please report the issue and copies of any pending legislation to the Chair of the INA Governmental Affairs Committee or to a member of the INA Board of Directors. The INA Board will quickly collaborate together to form a position.
- Before contacting a legislator, always know INA’s position prior to communicating anything on the issue. If you are unclear what INA’s position is then, contact the Chair of the INA Governmental Affairs Committee at [inagac@nanny.org](mailto:inagac@nanny.org)
- Know the legislator you are lobbying with. At least, know his or her background, part affiliation, hometown, and if possible, whether they are on a congressional committee with jurisdiction over child care issues. You

are most effective when you are lobbying the legislator that represents your hometown because by being his/her constituent, they know that your concerns lie in their district and probably will be more apt to listen.

- Remember that no elected official can support our views 100 percent of the time – don't expect to hit a "home run" every time you meet with a member.
- Know the political dynamics – who is for and against your issue, who are the major players, understand the legislator's political philosophy, etc.
- Be confident and assertive in making your case, but don't dismiss counter arguments – different views can help guide your future efforts.
- Be concise – legislators are extremely busy and are interested in the "bottom line."
- Discuss not only the issue you have in mind, but also the merits.
- Stress why the issue or legislation is so important to you and others in the industry, and why the legislator should support or oppose it.
- Make sure the information you provide is accurate.
- Ask for a commitment, but don't expect one.

## **Don't....**

- Don't threaten, cajole or berate an elected official or their staff. This is one sure way to lose a legislator's support.
- Don't be impatient. Understand that you are one of many constituents vying for a legislator's time and attention and that there are many sides to every issue. Respect that a decision may take time.
- Don't ever ignore a request for further information. Being responsive to such requests not only observes a basic courtesy, but it gives you another opportunity to keep your name and issue under consideration.
- Don't become a nuisance by wearing out your welcome.

## **CONGRESSIONAL (OR STATE) STAFF – GET TO KNOW THEM**

Legislators depend overwhelmingly upon their staff for judgment, guidance and advice on the spectrum of issues they have responsibility for. It is impossible for a legislator to be fully informed on all these issues, so legislative staff is employed to handle various policy areas and they quickly become experts on the issue over which they have responsibility.

As trusted members of the legislator's team, staff is an indispensable resource to the grassroots lobbyist. They can help you find information on an issue, give you a hint about their boss's position, provide invaluable advice on the strengths and weaknesses of your arguments and alert you to your opposition on a particular issue.

Circumventing a member's staff is often counterproductive. If they are "blindsided" with your issue, they may question your future trustworthiness. By consulting with them initially, you have an opportunity to both get advice on how to approach the member, and to get the staff on "your side." It is much easier to obtain a member's support if you have first convinced his staff of your position.

Therefore, it is important that you get to know the staff handling child care issues and develop a friendly professional working relationship with them. Remember that you have something they need: information about the concerns of their boss's constituents. They should be anxious to work with you.

It is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff. Commonly used titles and their areas of responsibility include:

- **The Administrative Assistant or Chief of Staff** - reports directly to the Member of Congress. They have overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcome of legislative proposals and constituent requests. Usually they are in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and supervision of key staff. Very often they are prominently involved in the member's re-election efforts.
- **The Legislative Director, Senior Legislative Assistant or Legislative Coordinator** - is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations on the pros and cons of particular issues. They are responsible for coordinating activities of Legislative Assistants.
- **Legislative Assistants** - have expertise in certain policy areas and are assigned specific issues to follow for their members. Depending on the

responsibilities and interests of a member, an office may include a different legislative assistant for health, taxes, environment, etc.

- **The Press Secretary of Communications Director** - is responsible for communication between the member, his or her constituency and the general public. The press secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands and special requirements of both print and electronic media and how to most effectively promote the member's views and positions on specific issues.
- **The Caseworker or Legislative Correspondent** - is the staffer usually assigned to help with constituent requests and preparing replies for the member's signature. There are often several caseworkers in a member's office.
- **The Scheduler or Appointments Secretary** - is responsible for allocating a member's time among the many demands on the congressional schedule. This is an important staff member as constituents depend upon them to arrange meetings with their member.

## **WRITING LETTERS**

Individually written letters are very persuasive lobbying tools. Legislators often say that they introduce or support legislation because of mail they receive, as President John F. Kennedy once wrote:

“Everybody's vote counts in America, but those who sit down and write letters make their votes count more times.” Nothing is more effective than a letter that reflects both an understanding of the question involved and a sincere expression of a personal viewpoint based on that understanding.

Clearly, letters provide the pressure and support necessary for the passage of important legislation affecting our members and the profession.

Working with the International Nanny Association's Government Affairs Committee, you can obtain the necessary material and support for an effective letter campaign. Letters introduce a legislator to an issue and can spark his or her interest in the issue. As a grassroots lobbyist, you should attempt to follow the letter with a personal visit.

In addition, you may want to have others in the industry also write letters. Of course, simply asking people to write does not always work. People first need to be informed about important legislative issues and how to write an effective letter. As a grassroots lobbyist you can help spread this information by providing guidelines to all constituents interested in writing their legislators.

The following suggestions should help you write effective letters to your legislature.

- **Keep the letter as brief as possible.** A one-page, typed letter is often work best in getting your concise point across.

An Example:

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Date

(SENATOR / REPRESENTATIVE)

The Honorable (full name) / The Honorable (full name)

United States Senate / U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20510 / Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator/Representative (name) :

As a voter and constituent represented by you, I am writing to urge you to support/oppose (*insert a bill number*), a bill to (*give a brief one line description of the bill's purpose*)\_\_\_\_\_. The Committee on (*enter in the name of either the Senate/House committee that will be considering the issue*) \_\_\_\_\_ will consider this bill soon. (*Or on the floor of the Senate/House*) Passage/defeat of this legislation is important to me as a member of the child care profession.

When this bill comes up for consideration, I urge you to vote for/against it because (*in your own words, state your reasons or share your experience on the matter – relate personal experiences that are relevant*)\_\_\_\_\_.

I would appreciate your support of this position, and would like to know your views on the issue and how you intend to vote on this bill. Thank you for taking time to consider my position.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

City, State Zip Code

E-mail Address

(Area Code) Phone Number

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## PERSONAL VISITS

After you have written your letter, if possible, schedule a visit. Here are some hints for a successful meeting with your legislator. The following guidelines should help you have a productive personal visit with your member of Congress.

- **Plan Your Visit Carefully:** Be clear about what it is you want to achieve; determine in advance which legislator or staff member you need to meet with to achieve your purpose.
- **Make an Appointment:** When attempting to meet with your member, contact the Appointment Secretary/Scheduler. Explain your purpose and who you represent. It is easier for staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the member.
- **Be Prompt and Patient:** When it is time to meet with a legislator, be punctual and be patient. It is not uncommon for a Congressman or Congresswoman to be late, or to have a meeting interrupted, due to the member's crowded schedule. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. When the opportunity presents itself, continue your meeting with the member's staff.
- **Be Prepared:** Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. **All materials to be disseminated must be approved in advance by the INA Executive Board.** Elected officials are required to take positions on many different issues. In some instances, a member may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to receive information and examples that demonstrate clearly the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation.
- **Be Political:** Legislators want to represent the best interests of their district or state. Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the member constituency. Where it is appropriate, remember to ask for a commitment. Don't expect one, but let them know you would like one.
- **Be Responsive:** Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information, in the event the member expresses interest or asks questions. Follow up after your meetings with a thank you letter that outlines the different points covered during the meeting, and send along any additional information and materials requested.

If you give him or her an informed presentation, the legislator will gain an understanding of the bill's importance to you and the in-home child care industry. Be sure to ask direct questions on where he or she stands on the bill. If the legislature is undecided, ask him or her to call or write when a decision has been made.

After your meeting, immediately write a report that summarizes the meeting. This information is important for your further lobbying efforts and when sent to INA GAC Chair, the information will be helpful to others when they continue to lobby the issue or similar issues.

## **TELEPHONE CALLS**

Telephone calls give you direct access to the legislator and get a more immediate response from legislators than letters. In addition, calls can be particularly effective when a crucial vote is quickly approaching.

You should not expect to speak directly to a member when you call, although this sometimes occurs. More often, you will speak with a Legislative Assistant handling child care issues. If you do, the guidelines below should prove helpful. (even if you only speak with a receptionist, briefly state your concerns. Your call will be reported to the appropriate staffer for a response)

- As with the personal visit, study the issue before making the phone call. Familiarize yourself with basic details such as the bill's number and name. Be able to tell the elected official, or staff member you are speaking with, where the bill is located – for example, in committee, waiting for action, or in conference. When you know these details, the legislator will have a better understanding of your request.
- Legislators can be reached at either their Washington office or at their state or district offices. Members of Congress, for example, spend much of their time in their home states and are often more accessible at the district office than their Washington office. A member's Washington office can give you the phone number of their district offices – often there are more than one.
- When you make your phone call, be sure to identify yourself and leave your phone number and complete address. You can reach a member of Congress through the Capitol switchboard at (202) 225-3121.
- As with a letter, be informed, direct and polite. Even if the elected official or staff member disagrees with you, avoid arguing or threatening him or her. Legislators may sometimes disagree with you at first, but may change their opinions when they later think about their conversation with you.

- Ask the legislator or staff member for his or her stand on the issue. If he or she is still undecided, ask the legislator to phone or write when a decision is made.
- Remember to thank the legislator or staff member for talking with you and acting on your suggestions. A friendly thank you will encourage the legislator to agree with your stand and will give you an opportunity to call him or her on future issues.
- Follow your call with a thank you letter, briefly restating your issue and the position you would like the member to take. If they promised action during your phone conversation, gently remind them by thanking them for their commitment.

## **TOWN MEETINGS**

While in their districts, members of Congress and local officials may hold or attend frequent constituent gatherings. These town meetings give you an opportunity to communicate with elected officials. Legislators enjoy these meetings because they can hear your ideas. You can learn of these meetings by calling your legislator's district office or by checking your local newspapers, which frequently announce such meetings.

Plan on going to town meetings with your colleagues. When you have an issue you would like to discuss, ask a question at the meeting. If possible, prepare your questions in advance so they are concise and likely to elicit an informed response from the legislator. Your questions should be intelligent, direct and polite. Your legislator may not have an answer immediately, but he or she should be asked to call or write you after the meeting.

These meetings also offer you an opportunity to thank representatives or senators for previous support. Legislators often take courageous stands in support of our issues. Your gratitude will encourage elected officials to support us on future issues.

Just like a private visit or telephone contact, any public statements on our bills should be recorded on a report form and sent to INA's Governmental Affairs Committee Chair for future use in lobbying efforts. This information also will help you monitor those elected officials who will support the profession on child care issues.

## FREE MEDIA

Every community in your state has newspapers, radio, or television that give you opportunities to get free publicity for our legislative concerns.

The following suggestions will help you take advantage of these opportunities:

- **Put together a listing of all newspapers, radio stations and television stations in your area.** If it is possible, call each one to get the name of person whom you can contact when the need arises. Most papers have “child care/family issue” reports – these are the individuals who will be most interested in the events and information to which our community has access.
- **Most newspapers have a “Letter to the Editor” column.** Write or encourage your colleagues to write to the editor about key legislative issues. This is especially useful if the newspaper has already printed a story or editorial about the issue. Letters to the editor put our position in one of the most well read sections of the newspapers.
- **Some radio stations have call-in programs.** These are especially valuable since legislators and their staff often listen to these programs while they are at work. You can use a call-in program to talk about a key legislative issue and ask your elected officials to take a specific position on that issue.
- **Some radio and television stations take editorial positions on issues.** If they take a stand on a legislative position, call and ask for time to respond.
- **Don’t neglect college radio stations, small circulation community newspapers or advertising bulletins,** and other forms of publicity.
- If you are contacted by a reporter to get your views on a legislative issue, be sure you are informed about the issue before you respond and always yield specific questions about the INA to the President or the President’s appointee ONLY. You may, however, articulate your own personal position on the issue and generalities in the in-home child care industry.
- In all contacts with the media, be **informed, pleasant and reasonable.**

## REPORTING YOUR RESULTS

As a child care grassroots lobbyist, you will have the opportunity to represent the child care profession in meetings with your Representatives and Senators. After each meeting, it will be important that you complete a written report of the results. This written record will be helpful to you during later contacts with your legislators and will also help reinforce what you have learned during your contact. Reports should be sent to the Membership Services Office, in care of the INA GAC Chair.

## CONCLUSION

With few exceptions, the stimulus to which elected officials most readily respond is constituent pressure – pressure applied from the grassroots. Your involvement as a grassroots lobbyist ensures that your view, those of your colleagues and those of your clients are effectively channeled toward influencing decision makers to support our issues. When members of Congress know that the child care profession in their state and district is well organized, informed about the issues and willing to communicate its ideas, they will pay attention to our concerns. However, a disorganized, fractured and uninformed profession wields little influence and will be unable to maximize its political power.

This opportunity to involve oneself on legislative decision-making is a privilege enjoyed in only a few nations in the world. Our grassroots lobbying effort provides all INA members with an opportunity to be a part of the legislative process as it is happening. Thank you for being involved.

*Please note that according to the INA By Laws, members cannot represent the INA's view or positions on an issue. The INA President is the only one who can represent that the INA feels a certain way or the INA President can appoint someone under certain circumstances. The INC GAC encourages the membership, once one is informed on an issue, to represent themselves by saying, "**I am a Nanny,**" or "**I am an agency owner,**" or by saying, "**I am a member of the International Nanny Association's Governmental Affairs Committee.**"*

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