



LOBBYING 101 AND EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

The Legislative Process

- The General Assembly has two chambers:
 - House of Delegates
 - Senate
- Virginia's Legislative Session
 - Always begins on the second Wednesday in January
 - 60 day sessions in even years and adjourns in March
 - 45 day sessions in odd years and adjourns in February
 - Shortest legislative session in the country

Virginia House of Delegates

Consists of 100 members referred to as “Delegates”:

- Each Delegate represents 80,000 citizens.
- Delegates are elected for two year terms.
- There are no term limits.
- The Speaker of the House is the presiding officer.
- Annual salary is \$17,640.
- 55 Democrats
- 45 Republicans

Senate of Virginia

Consists of 40 members referred to as “Senators”:

- Each Senator represents 200,000 citizens.
- Senators serve four year terms.
- There are no term limits.
- The Lieutenant Governor is the presiding officer.
- Annual salary is \$18,000.
- 21 Democrats
- 19 Republicans
- The Lieutenant Governor votes only in the case of a tie.
 - But not always.

The Committee Structure

What is the purpose of a Committee?

- Committees are broken down by subject matter.
 - Example: Health, Welfare, and Institutions (HWI) in the House of Delegates
 - Bills dealing with hospitals, public health, mental health, and the provision of health care generally will be assigned to HWI.
- What is the purpose of Sub-Committees?
 - Most committees are further broken down into sub-committees.
 - Most bills begin the legislative process in a sub-committee.
 - The purpose of the sub-committee is to further refine the subject area of the parent committee.

The Committee Structure, cont'd.

Let's use Education and Health in the Senate as an example.

- Ed and Health is broken down into four sub-committees.
 - Health
 - Health Professions
 - Higher Education
 - Public Education
- The committee Chair assigns bills to the proper sub-committee
- To be successful, a bill must first pass sub-committee before it is heard in the full committee.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Bills start as ideas from legislators, constituents, special interest groups, etc.

- Bill introduction
- Committee process
 - Assigned to sub-committee
 - Hearing in sub, then full committee
 - Many ways to “kill” a bill
 - Tabled, passed by indefinitely, continued to next session, defeated, stricken, no hearing
- Floor vote
- “Crossover”
- Governor’s Action
- Veto Session

Tracking Legislation

How does a bill get on VLSSE's bill list?

- Some bills became publically available very early.
 - For the 2021 session the first bill hit the system on July 22, 2020.
 - VLSSE tracked around 50 pieces of legislation during the 2021 Session.
 - This was down substantially from 2020 due to COVID restrictions.
 - Once bills begin appearing on the system we check for bills every day.
 - As soon as a bill is identified as being “of interest” it is sent to the Chair of the Legislative Committee for review.
 - The bill is then sent to the appropriate content committee for an in-depth review.
 - If the content committee verifies that it is indeed “of interest” then a position is developed (if necessary) and the bill is added to the bill list.

Types of Positions

There are three basic positions on bills.

- Support
- Oppose
- Monitor

Types of Positions, cont'd

What do these positions really mean?

- Support

- Active Support (we will expend political capital to help the bill pass)
- Passive Support (we support the concept of the bill but its passage isn't deemed critical to VLSSE)

- Oppose

- Active Opposition (we will expend political capital to defeat the bill)
- Passive Opposition (we oppose the concept of the bill but its defeat isn't deemed critical to VLSSE)

- Monitor

- The bill is of interest and could possibly impact VLSSE
 - Legislation is often fluid.
 - Amendments to the bill could cause VLSSE to oppose.

Political Capital

What is political capital?

- Political capital is best thought of as a resource an organization builds up over time.
 - There are many things that go into building political capital.
 - Trust
 - Does the legislator believe that you are a reliable source of information?
 - Reasonable positions
 - Are you willing to work out differences?
 - A logical nexus between the advocates and the issue
 - Legislators expect groups to advocate on issues that truly impact them.
 - Working relationships with legislators
 - Does the legislator know you?
 - Legislative courtesy
 - Have you come to the legislator to discuss issues prior to bills being heard in committee?
- **ALL** public positions on legislation expend political capital to some degree.
 - Because of this passive public support or opposition should be considered carefully.

Effective Advocacy

When does advocacy begin?

- Once a bill is identified as one we will actively support or oppose advocacy should begin immediately.
 - This is critical for bills we oppose.
 - The legislator should be contacted immediately to discuss our concerns.
 - Groups behind the legislation (if any) should also be contacted.
 - You can often negate concerns or kill a bill before the General Assembly has even convened.
- We should ALWAYS try to fix a bill when possible.
 - Legislators appreciate this a great deal. Especially when the subject matter is important to them.

Effective Advocacy, cont'd.

If you are going to expend political capital do it right.

- All members of a sub-committee and its full committee should be briefed on our position and our desired outcome prior to the legislation being heard.
 - 95% of the time a bill's fate is decided before it is ever publicly heard.
 - This is why prompt positions on legislation are critical.
- This is time consuming but necessary. Therefore active support and opposition to bills should be considered carefully.
- Committee testimony is necessary but also, by itself, the least effective form of advocacy.
 - If you haven't taken the time to speak to the legislators prior to the bill's hearing you are wasting capital and often upsetting legislators.
 - The goal is to always have the outcome decided before the bill is heard in committee.

Effective Advocacy, cont'd.

What **NOT TO DO** in committee testimony.

- Shaming legislators is a popular tactic among some organizations but should be avoided at all cost.
- Having multiple people from the same group testify on a single issue.
 - Legislators really hate this.
- Overly emotional testimony.
- Opposing a bill late in the process is a cardinal sin and should be avoided at all costs.

Building the Relationship

Get to know your legislator.

- Building a relationship is worth its weight in gold.
- During session is not the best time to do this.
- Legislators love having someone with area expertise they can call on.

Your legislators can (and should) be your biggest advocates.

- Invite them to your offices.
- Explain your issues.
- Offer to be a resource.

Building the Relationship, cont'd.

Knowledge is power; online resources:

- [Who's my legislator?](#) (Use the link on the GA main page)
- [General Assembly main page](http://legis.virginia.gov) (http://legis.virginia.gov)
- [All the information you could ever want](http://leg1.state.va.us) (http://leg1.state.va.us)

Questions?
