

# WOMEN<sup>in</sup>ACTION

## What is Advocacy?

While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying. Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education, regulatory work, litigation, and work before administrative bodies, lobbying, voter registration, voter education, and more. (<http://bolderadvocacy.org/afj-on-advocacy/glossary>)

## Legislative Advocacy – What you need to know.

*Legislative Advocacy:* Efforts to change policy through the legislative branch of government. This may include lobbying or other communications with the legislative branch that do not meet the definition of lobbying. (<http://bolderadvocacy.org/afj-on-advocacy/glossary>)

### Understanding the System:

- Three Branches of NYS Government:
  - o Executive Branch – Governor
  - o Legislative Branch – NYS Legislature (213 Members)
  - o Judicial Branch – NYS Supreme Court (7 Judges)
- NYS Legislature is comprised of two houses:
  - o NYS Assembly
    - 150 members; 2 year terms
    - Democratic majority in 2015 (104-44)
    - 2015 Speaker of the Assembly Carl Heastie (Bronx – D)
    - To determine who represents you in the Assembly, go to: [www.assembly.state.ny.us](http://www.assembly.state.ny.us)
  - o NYS Senate
    - 63 members; 2 year terms
    - Republican majority in 2015 (33-30)
    - 2015 Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos (Long Island – R)
    - To determine who represents you in the Senate, go to: [www.nysenate.gov](http://www.nysenate.gov)
  - o Committees
    - All legislators are assigned to committees which focus on specific subject areas.
    - All bills must pass through the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, the Senate Finance Committee and the Rules Committee in both houses before they can be brought to a vote.
    - For a full list of **Assembly** committees and links to news and member lists go to: <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/>
    - For a full list of **Senate** committees and links to news and member lists go to: <http://www.nysenate.gov/committees>

## Understanding the Process:

- Timing is everything!
  - The legislative cycle is two years long and consists of two sessions. Sessions begin in January with the Governor's "State of the State" address.
  - The Governor must propose a budget by the end of January each year and it must be approved by the legislature by April 1.
  - Once the budget passes, legislation becomes the focus of the session. Sessions usually conclude by the end of June with additional special sessions scheduled if there is urgent business.
  
- How a bill becomes a law.
  - First, a bill must be ideated, sponsored and drafted by a member of the legislature.
  - When the bill is introduced into the legislative house, members may co-sponsor and the bill will move through committees. Committee actions will clarify and revise the bill.
  - The bill will be reviewed by the Assembly Ways and Means Committee/Senate Finance Committee & the Rules Committees before the leader can bring it to the floor for a vote.
  - If bills with the EXACT same wording pass both houses, it moves to the Governor.
  - The Governor can veto OR sign the bill into law.
  - *A very small percentage of bills that are introduced into the houses actually pass that house – even fewer pass both houses and become law.*

## Advocacy in Action:

- Know your issue.
  - Why is the issue important to you?
  - Who are the people that it affects? What are their stories?
  - What are the current relevant pieces of legislation and their status?
  - What supports the bill and why? Who opposes the bill and why?
  
- Know who you are talking to.
  - Are you a constituent of the legislator? If so, let them know!
  - What is the legislator's party?
  - What committees does s/he sit on?
  - How has the legislator voted on this bill or issue in the past?
  
- Know what you are asking.
  - Are you asking the legislator to introduce a bill, support or oppose legislation, become a co-sponsor, vote a particular way?
  - Are you educating the legislator on an issue that is important to his/her constituents and has legislative or budgetary implications?
  
- Know your communication strategy.
  - Letters:
    - Personal letters are best; form letters will not garner a personal response.

- Calls:
  - Calls are effective if you are prepared to have a more in depth conversation about the issue.
- Meetings:
  - Meetings convey passion about the issue.
  - District meetings are usually most effective if you are a constituent.
  - Large “Lobby Days” in Albany can be effective in showing broad-based support but individual meetings may get “lost in the shuffle.”
  - Meeting with legislative staff rather than the legislator directly is a common occurrence. Staff members may have subject-matter expertise and are able to easily convey important messages to the legislator.
  - Bring life to the issue by sharing *personal stories* about it affects constituents.
  - Bring clear and concise materials with you to leave with the legislator.
  - Be clear about your “ask.”
  - After the meeting, send hand-written thank you notes, provide answers to any lingering questions, and follow-up periodically on the issue/ask.

## More than just Legislation - Other Forms of Advocacy.

### Education and Awareness

- General Advocacy Education
- Organizing public forums
- Public Awareness Campaigns
- Organizing Public Forums
- Stakeholder and Policymaker Education
- Voter Education and Outreach

### Community Capacity Building

- Community Organizing - Grassroots Mobilization
- Attending Meetings
- Convening Stakeholders - Coalition/Network Building
- Leadership/Champion Development
- Organizing Capacity Building Events

### Communication

- Communication and Messaging
- Using the Media
- Community Mobilization - Organizing Calls to Action
- Providing Testimony
- Writing and Sending Sign-On and Support Letters
- Writing Op-Ed pieces
- Creating Public Education Resources

### Policy Analysis/Research

- Model Legislation
- Demonstration/Pilot Projects
- Policy Research
- Writing Policy Analysis/Position Papers