

Wisconsin Advocates for Music Education

Legislative Action Guide

The 5 C's of Advocating

Are you an effective advocate for music education?

Whenever you're writing to, meeting with, or calling a legislator, keep in mind these lobbying tips:

- **Be "Courteous"** – Always be courteous, even if you and your legislator don't see eye to eye on an issue. What's most important is to keep the lines of communication open.
- **Be "Candid"** – Don't be too candid. Explain only your side of the issue. Don't give a legislator arguments on both sides of a topic – or you may be setting yourself up for defeat.
- **Be "Correct"** – Tell what you know but don't embellish the facts with statistics or information you can't back up. In letters/emails, make absolutely certain your grammar, spelling and punctuation are correct.
- **Be "Concise"** – Don't be long-winded. On paper stick to one page letters that focus on single topics. If there are several issues you wish to address, it's best to write letters on each topic.
- **Be Focused on "Constituency-based Concerns"** – Zero in on what's going on in your school or in your school district. Legislators are naturally most interested in what's happening in their geographic regions.

How to Make an Appearance at Public Hearings and School Board Meetings

During the committee work periods and throughout the legislative session, public hearings are held on many bills. An effective presentation by concerned constituents will often have a great impact on the ultimate fate of a bill.

IT CAN BE EFFECTIVE

Your presentation can be very effective because you will be speaking as one directly affected by the proposal being considered; because you have special knowledge of the subject, or because you represent the viewpoint of many constituents who share the same circumstances. To ensure that your presentation is as effective as possible, keep the following points in mind:

1. Double check the date, time, and room number of the hearing or school board meeting. You can verify this information with the Legislative Hotline 800-362-9472 or your local school district.

2. Obtain the names of the members of the committee that will be hearing the bill (this information can be found on the Internet – www.legis.state.wi.us). It's often helpful to be aware of the legislators'/school board members' backgrounds – occupations, hometowns, interests, etc.
3. Arrive promptly. Many of the hearing/meeting rooms are not large and they might fill up early. Room numbers in the Capitol will indicate the floor and location of your room.
4. Be prepared to wait. There might be other bills or business to be heard before yours. It's also difficult to judge how long each speaker will take. Don't be surprised if you have to wait some time before being called upon to speak.
5. When you arrive, fill out a registration form. State your name, address, and whom you're representing. Also indicate whether you're appearing in favor of the bill, in opposition to it, or for information only.
6. If you have traveled some distance to appear and will be returning home that day, note that fact on the registration form. The committee chairperson will often call such witnesses early to allow for their travel time.
7. Be well-prepared. Have your points and thought logically organized for your presentation. Write a one or two page statement of your position (typed). Begin with a sentence of who you are, your address, and who you represent. Follow with a simple statement of your position: " I support Assembly Bill ___ and urge you to vote for it." Tell the legislators what the bill will do for you. Avoid education jargon at all costs. Keep it extremely simple. Focus only on one or two points. End by saying "Thank You."
8. Do not read your statement word for word, but speak about the most important points. If you get a chance, practice your testimony with a friend or co-worker and ask them for suggestions.
9. Keep your presentation reasonably brief and to the point. Speak in a normal manner, using everyday language to explain the effects of the proposed legislation on your district.
10. Do not repeat at length the points already made by previous speakers. If you have something to add to what was already said, by all means, do so. If you don't have anything to add, simply note that you agree with the earlier speaker(s) and move on to the rest of your presentation. To be effective, your presentation needs to be somewhat flexible. Pay attention to what other speakers say.
11. Do not attempt to answer questions if you don't have the answers or aren't sure of the facts. Bluffing is easily recognized. Offer to provide additional information after the meeting.

12. Be courteous. Address the chairperson and members of the committee each time you speak or answer a member's question. Don't let nit-picking or other upsetting behavior by committee members cause you to become angry, argumentative, or flustered.
13. Finish with a brief summary. This will let you tie together any loose ends and add emphasis to the important points. You can also clarify any answers that were made in response to questions from committee members.
14. When you have finished, thank the committee for the opportunity to appear. You will leave on a positive note.
15. If you promised to provide additional material after the hearing, be sure to do so as soon as possible. This will add to your credibility as a witness.