

LAWMAKER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES DURING THE LEGISLATIVE INTERIM

Kate Baber, Homelessness
Policy & Advocacy Specialist,
Washington Low Income
Housing Alliance

Michele Thomas, Director of
Policy & Advocacy, Washington
Low Income Housing Alliance

INTRODUCTIONS

- Name
- Organization
- City & County
- What issue are you the most interested in discussing with lawmakers during the legislative interim?
- What are you hoping to learn in this workshop?

WHAT IS IN-DISTRICT LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY?



Meeting with your state senator and two representatives in your home community, also known as your legislative district, is one of the **most effective strategies** to advocate for policy change.

You have a **unique and powerful perspective** about homelessness and affordable housing issues and solutions in your community.

Lawmakers **rely on hearing from constituents** to learn about and understand important issues that require state funding or legislation in order to be adequately addressed.

Find your district at: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/>

WHAT IS THE STATE LEGISLATIVE INTERIM?

Washington State Legislative Session

- Period of time when state lawmakers **convene at the State Capitol** in Olympia, WA to create a state budget & pass legislation.
- During odd years (2013, 2015), legislature meets for a **105-day** legislative session to create two-year state operating, capital, & transportation budgets.
- During even years (2012, 2014), legislature meets for just **60 days** to pass smaller supplemental budgets.
- All legislative sessions begin on **second Monday of January**.

Washington State Legislative Interim

- Period between legislative sessions when lawmakers are back in their **home legislative districts**.

IN-DISTRICT ADVOCACY WORKS!



Watch Senator David Frocht reference an in-district advocacy meeting during a 2014 Senate floor debate on document recording fee legislation [here](#).

1. **Strengthen** your relationship with elected officials.
2. **Elevate** visibility of homelessness and affordable housing in your community.
3. Help elected officials deepen their **understanding** of complex issues.
4. Provide a **hands-on**, experiential learning opportunity.
5. Ensure legislators have enough lead-time to develop a comprehensive **legislative proposal**.

CAN I LOBBY? YES!



“The fact is that 501(c)(3) nonprofits CAN engage in most forms of advocacy, including lobbying for legislation. Nonprofits have the best understanding of the challenges their clients or constituents face and ideas for possible solutions to those problems. If you are not sharing that information with policymakers, they will be making decisions that affect you and your community without the information they need.”

–Nayantara Mehta, Senior Counsel,
Alliance for Justice, www.afj.org

- Advocacy: Educating on an issue.
No limits.
- Lobbying: Advocating for a specific piece of legislation or budget.
Some (generous) limits.
- Two IRS options: “Substantial Part” test and 501(h) election.
- Free lawyers: Alliance For Justice - Bolder Advocacy at www.afj.org.
- Campaigning: Helping get someone elected.
Never allowed!

PREPARING FOR YOUR ADVOCACY MEETING: IDENTIFY YOUR MEETING GOAL



What Are You Trying to Accomplish?

Broad Goals:

- Introduce yourself and your organization
- Develop a working relationship
- Introduce broad issue to lawmaker

Specific Goals:

- Request lawmaker to action to address specific issue
- Increase lawmaker's understanding of a complex or specific problem
- Ask lawmaker to sponsor legislation

PREPARING FOR YOUR ADVOCACY MEETING: RESEARCH WHO YOU ARE MEETING WITH

Helpful Information to Know Before Meeting With a Lawmaker:

- What's the lawmaker's position on homelessness and affordable housing issues?
- Does the lawmaker serve on any key policy committees? Does the lawmaker hold a leadership position?
- What's the lawmaker's voting record on the legislation you care about?
- What policy issues does the lawmaker have a history of supporting and opposing?



Rep. Marcus Riccelli

Assistant Majority Whip
(D) [3rd LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT](#)

Olympia Office:
327 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7888

District Office:
25 West Main
Suite 239
Spokane, WA 99201
(509) 456-2760

[E-mail](#)

[Rep. Riccelli's
Homepage](#)

[Biography](#)
[Press Room](#)

▶ **Committees:**
[Health Care & Wellness](#)
(Vice Chair)
[Capital Budget](#)
[Transportation](#)

▶ [Print Quality Photo](#)

▶ **Voting Record:**
[2013 3rd Special Session](#)
[2013 Regular, 1st and 2nd Special Session](#)

▶ [Bill Sponsorship](#)

You can find your lawmakers' information here: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rosters/Members.aspx>

PREPARING FOR YOUR ADVOCACY MEETING: CHOOSE AN IN-DISTRICT ADVOCACY MODEL



- **Individual meetings**, including one-on-one meetings and small group meetings.
- **Site visits** to physical spaces where services are delivered, or to sites that are not yet developed. Includes tours and meeting with direct service providers and clients.
- **Organizational events**, such as annual member meetings, fundraisers, open houses, and ground breaking ceremonies.

IN-DISTRICT ADVOCACY MODELS CONTINUED



- **Community events** that connect legislators to their constituents and create a forum for constituents to share their priorities with legislators. Events can include candidate forums, town hall meetings, and listening sessions.
- **Need help?** The Housing Alliance is here to help you plan a successful in-district lawmaker meeting that meets your organization's affordable housing and homelessness policy goals.

PREPARING FOR YOUR ADVOCACY MEETING: IDENTIFY & COORDINATE WITH MEETING ATTENDEES



Coordinate Before Your Meeting

- Does everyone understand and agree on the meeting goal?
- Does everyone understand what their role is and how much time they have to speak?
- Does everyone have sufficient background information on legislator, topic and messaging to fully participate?

Who Should Attend Your Advocacy Meeting?

- **People directly impacted by the issue**, such as people who have experienced homelessness and housing instability, have unique expertise to share with lawmakers.
- **Non-profit board members and staff** at all levels of an organization have valuable perspectives about emerging needs & policy implementation.
- **Community leaders and local elected officials** representing city and county governments can be effective messengers and increase the visibility of an issue.
- **Unexpected messengers** representing sectors outside of homelessness and affordable housing can illustrate nexus between housing and other issues.

PREPARING FOR YOUR ADVOCACY MEETING: MAKE A MEETING REQUEST

Meeting Request Tips:

- Make a meeting request four to six weeks in advance of your event.
- Contact lawmaker's legislative aid (LA) to schedule a meeting.
- Be prepared to tell LA what the meeting topic will be, who will be in attendance, and when and where you are able to meet the legislator.
- If inviting the legislator to an event, be prepared to share information regarding the general audience, if the lawmaker will have a speaking role, and if the media will be in attendance.



Rep. Norm Johnson
(R) 14th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Olympia Office:
122C Legislative Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7810

District Office:
421 N 20th Ave Ste A
Yakima, WA 98902
(509) 454-7210

[E-mail](#)

You can find your
lawmakers' contact
information here:

[http://apps.leg.wa.gov/
rosters/Members.aspx](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rosters/Members.aspx)

PREPARING FOR YOUR ADVOCACY MEETING: CREATE MEETING MATERIALS



Utilizing the Private Market

Document Recording Fees benefit private market landlords. In fact, 91% of the state and local fees used for rent assistance, are paid to landlords in the private market. The remaining rental assistance is used in nonprofit or public housing. Rental assistance accounts for more than 60% of the total funds.

Rural Washington Depends on These Fees

In general, rural homelessness budgets are more reliant on revenue from document recording fees than urban areas. According to the Department of Commerce, 61% of rural homelessness project budgets are fee-supported, versus 35% of urban homelessness budgets. A loss of recording fees greatly endangers rural Washington.

It's Working

- The 2013 Point In Time Count documented an 8% decrease in the rate of unsheltered homelessness from the previous year, and a 15% unsheltered homelessness decrease from 2006.
- Unsheltered families with children reduced by 28% from 2012 and decreased by 73% from 2006.
- According to the Department of Commerce, there were about 3,500 more households receiving homeless and housing assistance during the 2013 Point in Time Count than during the 2012 Point in Time Count. This greatly contributed to the reduction in homelessness.

Updated 1/8/2014

Make Permanent Washington's Most Vital Resource for Homelessness Programs

Prevent the sunseting of the state's document recording fees
Facebook/Twitter Hashtag: #DRF2014

Washington's homelessness programs work.

We can prevent and end homelessness with targeted investments and evidence-based services. The total incidence of homelessness has decreased by 29% since 2006. At the same time, there are more people at risk of homelessness than ever before. Poverty rates remain high, rents have risen, and more homeless children are being counted in schools across the state. But when people were connected with "springboard" services, they were housed and provided with the resources needed to bounce back on their feet, exit homelessness, and thrive.

Document recording fees are a vital resource.

Washington State has embraced the use of modest recording fees on some real estate related documents as a significant source of funds for homelessness programs. These effective state and local programs help transition people off the streets into shelters and homes. The fees are the state's most significant funding source for homelessness programs, representing almost half of all funds.

This fee is set to reduce by \$10 in July 2015 and then reduce by another \$20 in July 2017. This would result in a loss of 62.5% of total current funding for homelessness. If this happens, effective homelessness programs across the state will experience severe cuts or will close. This could seriously set back the progress we've made in decreasing homelessness in Washington.

Effective programs are at risk.

Document recording fees fund domestic violence and emergency shelters, provide rental and moving assistance, and fund other critical programs that prevent and end homelessness. Here are a few examples of effective programs that will experience severe reductions in service:

Whatcom County created and continues to maintain a Homeless Service Center with document recording fee funds. Here people can access a wide range of help in a single location. Since the center began in 2008, overall homelessness has decreased by 34%, and the number of homeless veterans is down 60%. Recording fee funds make interagency coordination more feasible, resulting in these impressive outcomes.

King County's Landlord Liaison Project (LLP) worked with 173 landlords and 53 service agencies to secure rental housing in the private market for 2,231 people with barriers to renting, such as a criminal record, eviction record, or negative credit history. The LLP reassures landlords by paying for case management services, a 24-hour support hotline, access to resources to prevent loss of housing, and the availability of a Landlord Risk Reduction Fund to cover unexpected costs (such as physical damage to a rental unit).

Don't allow the fees to sunset.

Make the document recording fees permanent to keep Washington on the successful path of preventing and ending homelessness.



Pamela went from sleeping in her car to living in a stable home thanks to a document recording fee-funded program in King County.

Advocacy Material Tips

- Keep materials brief and easy to read; main points and should be easily identifiable.
- Writing should be clear and concise; avoid jargon and technical language.
- Include your organization's name and contact information.
- Frame issue using values-based messages: *"all people deserve a safe, healthy & affordable home."*
- Include information about local homelessness and poverty indicators, such as your PIT count number, local poverty rate, OSPI homeless student numbers.
- Include success information, such as outcome data, client stories, and cost savings information.
- Include an ask!

THE LAWMAKER MEETING: WHAT TO EXPECT



- Lawmakers want to meet with you!
- Expect a 30 to 60 minute meeting during legislative interim.
- Don't assume lawmaker has background information on issue; ask lawmaker if she is familiar with topic and start with the basics.
- Messages that resonate lawmakers:
 - Values based messages grounded in examples from real people.
 - Messages that resonate with lawmakers' personal values & priorities.
 - Policy demonstrates cost savings or ROI.
 - Policy or program is effective; it works!
 - Issue has support among constituents.

THE LAWMAKER MEETING: GETTING STARTED

- Coordinate with meeting attendees beforehand
- Start with introduction:
 - Name
 - Relevant affiliations
 - How are you connected to legislative district?
 - How are you connected to issue or meeting topic? Why are you here?



THE LAWMAKER MEETING: DESCRIBE THE POLICY ISSUE



- Don't assume the lawmaker is familiar with the program, policy, or issue you are working on; start with the basics.
- Provide relevant background information; what is the policy or program?
- Describe why the issue is important. This is a great place to use values-based messaging.
- Share your ideas regarding what needs to be done to improve the policy.
- Use examples from real people who are directly impacted by the issue.
- Keep your comments focused; only share what lawmakers need to know to understand the policy or program.

THE LAWMAKER MEETING: MAKING AN ASK



- Always make an ask!
- Differences between advocating for a budget item vs. bill.
- Leave advocacy materials and your contact information behind.
- Ask lawmaker if she would like any additional information.
- Describe how you can be a resource to the lawmaker in the future.

THE LAWMAKER MEETING: MEETING FOLLOW-UP



- Send a thank you note and reiterate your message.
- Is any follow-up required? Did you commit to sending additional information after the meeting?
- Is another meeting needed?
- Are there other opportunities during the interim to continue to engage the lawmaker?
- Keep in touch! Send your lawmakers regular updates and visit them in Olympia during the legislative session!

THE LAWMAKER MEETING: TIPS ON ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS

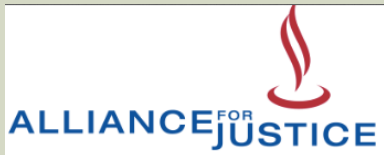
Types of Tough Questions:

- You are asked a technical question and *don't know* answer.
- You are asked a question that you *don't want* to answer.
- You are asked a question about a real problem within a policy or program you care about.
- A lawmaker disagrees with you.

ADDITIONAL ADVOCACY RESOURCES



- Washington Low Income Housing Alliance: www.wliha.org
- Kate Baber: kateb@wliha.org
- Michele Thomas: michele@wliha.org



- Alliance for Justice: www.afj.org
- Bolder Advocacy: www.afj.org/our-work/issues/bolder-advocacy



- Washington Legislature: www.leg.wa.gov
- Legislator Roster: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rosters/default.aspx>
- Legislative Information Center: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/lic/Pages/default.aspx>

EXERCISE: PLANNING YOUR IN-DISTRICT ADVOCACY VISIT

1. What is your meeting goal? What are you trying to accomplish by meeting with lawmakers? Which lawmakers should you meet with?
2. Once you've identified a lawmaker you'd like to meet with, what do you know about their background? What additional information would be helpful to know? Where can you find this information?
3. What in-district advocacy meeting model(s) best meet the your meeting goals?
4. Who else should be invited to your meeting? What preparation is needed prior to your advocacy meeting?
5. Do you know how to contact the lawmaker's legislative aid (LA) to schedule the meeting? Do you have all the necessary meeting details to share with the LA?
6. What materials should you prepare for your meeting? What background information will help the lawmaker fully understand your issue?