



NDSA

Governmental Affairs Handbook

Prepared by the Policy, Advocacy, and Research Task Force

Chaired by Carter Gill, Director of Policy, Advocacy and Research

Published March 15, 2024



Legislative Preparation Task Force

Governmental Affairs Handbook

Lobbying is a crucial part of advocacy. Whereas, it is the responsibility of elected officials to listen to and represent the voice of their constituents, constituents must first voice their concerns. Lobbying is a valuable skill, which makes a monumental impact in the decisions of elected and appointed officials and passing of policy. Through this guide, the North Dakota Student Association hopes to empower the students of North Dakota to advocate for their concerns.

If you have any questions about student advocacy, you are always welcome to contact the Vice President of Governmental Affairs or President.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Lobbying is the active attempt to persuade or influence elected officials or regulatory agencies. This can influence their policies, actions, and decisions. Lobbying is done by a wide range of individuals: constituents, organizations, groups of people, individuals from the private sector, corporations, and even fellow government officials and legislators. There are typically two types of lobbyists, professional lobbyists who are paid by an organization or group to lobby for their cause, as well as average people who have a vested interest and choose to speak in support of their issue.

Most lobbyists choose to lobby because they have a special interest they want addressed or because something of interest to them is currently being considered—this can be yearly (i.e. an annual budget) or something less frequent (i.e. a proposed law). When lobbying for the NDSA, you are representing the views of the students in North Dakota as authorized by the NDSA. All testimony must be based on a resolution that has been passed in the past four years. Lobbying is regulated by the government, so it is important to understand the implications of lobbying and when you will need disclosures and paperwork. For example, gifts given to political officials need to be disclosed to the Secretary of State. Generally speaking, much of the content included in this handbook will not require you to submit forms to the Secretary of State. If you have additional questions regarding legal implications, contact the Secretary of State.

II. PREPARATION

- Find and download [testimony template](#)
- Search for key words relating to the subject you are testifying on.
- You can only testify on behalf of the NDSA using resolutions passed in the last four years
 - o Here are some example testimonies:
 - [HB 1003](#) NDUS Appropriations
 - [HB 1256](#) False Sexual Assault Allegations
 - [HB 1404](#) Open Carry
- Remember and memorize the bill title and number that you are testifying on.
 - o Be sure to proofread and make sure that the bill number is consistent throughout your testimony in case of typos.
- You can take some creative liberty in interpreting NDSA resolutions either for or against a bill.
 - o Find as much information from NDSA and credible outside resources as you can so that you have all of the information you need when constructing your testimony.



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- If you use documents and research outside of the organization, be sure to cite them in the testimony document. It doesn't need to be a specific citation style, but it does need to be consistent.
 - Be aware of word choice and phrasing. The legislature is inherently a partisan and political institution, meaning that some words or phrases may be politically charged, intentional or not.
 - Have some kind of narrative to your testimony, don't just list facts and statistics; the legislature has more than likely heard them already. Also consider what kind of message you want to share with legislators, because above the facts in your testimony, the message of what you say is going to be the impression that you leave on legislators.
- Research the committee that you are presenting to, know who is on it and what their history on the issue you are testifying on is. Above all else, know who the chair is. This is who you will be directly addressing throughout the hearing, aside from individual questioning from other members, so knowing the right name is extremely important in this case.
- When finished writing your testimony and before testifying to a committee in person, you must submit it to the NDSA President and Vice President of Governmental Affairs 18 hours before the hearing testimony submission deadline.
 - Feedback must be received 4 hours before the submission deadline.
 - If the Policy, Advocacy, and Research (PAR) Taskforce charter is active, you must submit testimony to all members of the taskforce for review.

III. LOBBYING BASICS

When lobbying, it is important to present yourself in a clean cut and professional manner. Dress business professional, stay well-groomed and manicured, bring mints in case of bad breath, and do not be over the top or flashy. You want to be memorable, but not in a bad way.

Things to Keep in Mind:

- Introduce yourself
- Remember bill numbers and titles
- Provide information
- Personalize it
- Be clear
- **Avoid party politics**
- Know the legislator's history on an issue

If you have not interacted with public officials before, it might feel a little bit intimidating.



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That's alright! You just need to prepare and get ready for the when the time comes. Maybe this means you put some key details, like bill numbers or important facts, on a small notecard. Perhaps you practice what you are going to say before you go to the meeting.

If you notice legislators, public officials, or even students engaging in party politics, do not join in. Attempt to defuse the situation and refocus everyone's attention on this core principle: public policy is meant to be designed for the good of the people.

IV. METHODS

There are multiple effective ways to lobby, depending on the circumstances and the extent to which you wish to lobby will help determine the method you use.

- Write a Resolution:
A resolution is a written document outlining what a person/organization supports, wants, or does not support. This can be useful when a large body or multiple people are willing to sign this document. One may use a resolution when an upcoming change is pending. NDSA's website provides several examples of approved resolutions. An example is provided on the last page of this handbook.
- Testify:
If you or your organization articulated a position on a piece of legislation, you may want to consider providing testimony to the legislative committee the proposal is being reviewed in. Contact the relevant committee's chair to learn when it would be appropriate to visit the legislature in Bismarck and share your message. Then, draft your testimony in its entirety to ensure your speech is clear and understandable. Consider having someone review you testimony to catch any potential glaring errors. Practice your speech in advance. Finally, when appropriate, travel to the capitol, attend the committee meeting, and testify.

V. TESTIFYING

When you arrive to testify, plan to get there about an hour early, committees tend to not stick to a rigid schedule, and if you do happen to arrive early at the committee meeting room, take the time to watch others present on their testimonies and pay attention to members of the committee who ask questions.

- If you have not interacted with public officials before, it might feel a little bit intimidating. That's alright! You just need to prepare and get ready for the when the time comes. Maybe this means you put some key details, like bill numbers or important facts, on a small notecard. Perhaps you practice what you are going to say before you go to the meeting.
- Introduce yourself. Ex. "Chairman _____, my name is _____ and I am testifying on [Bill title and number] behalf of the North Dakota Student Association."
- There are some legislators that no matter who is testifying they will prepare a question regarding their testimony so be prepared to answer questions and remember that even when answering questions, they have to be in line with the organization's stances



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through resolutions. However, you can make the distinction to the committee as speaking as a student of the university system, not the NDSA.

- If the question happens to fall outside the scope of NDSA or if you don't know what the NDSA's stance is and that's okay, you are not expected to memorize every NDSA policy for the sake of testimony. Be prepared for any kind of question.
- Some legislators will cherry pick phrases or buzzwords from your testimony to gain standing in the committee to swing the bill in their favor. However, as a representative of the NDSA, a non-partisan organization, it is important to stay as non-partisan as possible when responding to 'aggressive' lines of questioning.

