

# **ADVOCACY: TAKING ACTION**

Local Leagues may take action based upon positions developed at the local, state or national level. However, prior notification and approval by LWVCT or LWWUS is required if the targets of the action are not local municipal officials, i.e., if the targets are state or national officials. (“Local” officials mean municipal officials such as the First Selectman, Board of Education, Planning and Zoning Commission, Finance Board, etc.)

Local Leagues are encouraged to use LWVCT *Impact on Issues* and the LWVCT positions at their own level to influence public policy. It is the responsibility of your local League board to determine whether member understanding and agreement exists and whether the action on the local level makes sense in terms of timing, need and effectiveness. If your League wants to take action on the state level, it must first consult with the LWVCT Public Issues Vice President, or, in her absence, the relevant PI Team Director (for Government Issues, Social Policy, or Natural Resources) to ensure that the League’s message is consistent throughout the state. Our goal is to strengthen the League’s “Impact on Issues” at all levels of government.

Critical Step 1:

## **NONPARTISANSHIP IN ACTION**

“The League shall not support or oppose any political party or any candidate.” - Article II, Section 2, LWWUS Bylaws.

The League’s record of nonpartisanship toward candidates and political parties is critical to the effectiveness of our unique voters’ service and citizen information work. It also provides a strong foundation for the work we do in support of issues. Our action on legislation is the more effective when the public, legislators, media and others have reason to believe that our conclusions are based on merit, not politics.

Critical Step 2:

## **LOCAL ACTION ON STATE ISSUES**

Your League is able to act on the basis of LWVCT or LWWUS positions as well as your local positions. Action at the local level may be taken on any position, not just those selected by members for state priority action. As noted above, it is the responsibility of each local League board to determine whether member understanding and agreement exist.

When your League wants to take action on state-level issues, you must observe the following procedures:

- Your League may not speak in opposition to a LWVCT or LWWUS position.
- Your League is encouraged to take action on “action alerts” generated by the LWVCT or LWWUS. Local League action, or individual member action, in response to action alerts

does not require prior approval and is greatly appreciated.

- If your League wants to send out a local action alert on a state or federal issue and/or testify at a public hearing on a state or federal issue without having received a prior action alert from the LWVUS or LWVCT, the testimony must be cleared in advance by the LWVCT's Public Issues Vice President or the LWVCT President. Copies of such testimony should be forwarded to the Vice President as soon as the testimony is written. Additionally, your League's leaders should be confident that your members support taking action.
- If you have any question as to whether an issue is covered by a state position or whether the contemplated action is permissible under that position, please seek clarification from the LWVCT Public Issues Vice President.
- League members may always take action to advocate on a LWVCT or LWVUS position as individuals, without any reference in written or oral communications to League membership or their position with a local or state League.

### Critical Step 3

## TAKING ACTION ON ISSUES DURING ELECTION SEASON

The LWVCT defines “election season” as July 1 to Election Day. To maintain their nonpartisan nature during election season, Leagues need to exercise caution when communicating with current office holders and candidates for office. When in doubt, consult the Vice President/Public Issues.

During election season these guidelines should be followed:

- If you are communicating or discussing issues on which one or more current office holders is/are expected to take action during their **current** term of office, such discussion can take place without involving other candidates for that office. Discussions about actions planned for future terms in office should wait until after the election.
- If your League wants to discuss or otherwise communicate about one or more League positions with any candidate for office, that communication or offer to discuss should be sent simultaneously to all candidates for the same office, and should be sensitively phrased to remove any semblance of partisanship.
- If your League wants to take action on LWVCT positions, you should evaluate the degree to which the issue is viewed as partisan in your community.

### Critical Step 4

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR TAKING ACTION

- **Timing** - Is this the best time to pursue this issue? Is it a long or short term project?
- **Political Climate** - Is the government giving this issue priority? Should it be higher priority?
- **Community Awareness and Attitude** - How aware is the community of the issue? Can the League play a role in educating and/or activating the community?
- **League Members** - Do we have member support for and interest in this issue?
- **League Circumstances** - Do we have the resources to pursue this action? Where does

this fit in with other priorities?

- **Allies** - Who else is doing something about this? Could we work together? If we don't take it on, who will?
- **Controversy** - How controversial is the issue? Are we willing to deal with the possible controversy?
- **Cost** - Do we have enough money in the budget? What other funding sources do we have?
- **Public Relations** - What will this do to or for our prestige and/or effectiveness in the community? Can we get media coverage?

Techniques:  
**THE ART OF ADVOCACY**

(An earlier version of the material in this section is available as a separate pamphlet from the LWVCT office.)

**LOBBYING IS NOT A DIRTY WORD!** Everyone lobbies — you do it every day with your family, friends and neighbors.

**LOBBYING IS:**

- Being an advocate for or against an issue, letting people know that you feel strongly about a particular issue.
- Attempting to convince people of the validity of your viewpoint.
- Finding the right people to implement your position, such as local, state, or national government officials and legislators.
- Understanding human nature and having a sense of humor and an enthusiasm for your issue.

**TIPS FOR LOBBYING TO INFLUENCE LEGISLATION**

**1. KNOW YOUR ISSUE**

Be prepared by knowing the facts. Do your homework and learn the necessary background information. Know the legislator's or government official's stand on your issue. Where does his or her constituency stand? What other special interest groups will be contacting him or her (party leadership, colleagues, other organizations, lobbyists)?

**2. BE HONEST**

Be honest and accurate. You expect the same from your legislator or government official. You are building a foundation for a good relationship, so integrity should be the cornerstone. Do not let your emotional involvement in the issue cloud your facts.

**3. PLAN FOR CONTACT**

Make an appointment. A face-to-face meeting is preferable. This is a meeting of equals: concerned citizens and government officials. Elected officials need to hear from their constituents. You may want to take 2 or 3 allies (no more) with you.

**4. BE BUSINESSLIKE**

You set the tone of the meeting. Be friendly and have your "opener" planned. Be brief: limit issues and be focused on your goal for this meeting. Ask good questions that have been prepared in advance. Know the pertinent information, such as bill number, title and description. If you have a fact sheet, keep it short and to the point. Be courteous and maintain confidentiality.

**5. IDENTIFY THE OPPOSITION**

Find out who opposes your stand. If the legislator or official opposes your position, find out why but **DO NOT ARGUE!** Be sympathetic to his or her particular situation. Try to avoid a completely negative response.

Leave an opportunity for you to return another time. Make an attempt to get the official to make a commitment without pushing him or her into a corner — you do not want to lose a good working relationship.

## 6. LISTEN CAREFULLY

You can glean a great deal of information from what your legislator or official tells you about your issue. Who are the people working for or against your position? What are their concerns?

## 7. BE POSITIVE

Do not speak in negative terms. If you do not have an answer to a question, say so, and offer to find the answer. If you promise to follow up, keep that promise. Thank the legislator or official for meeting with you and for his or her support once you have gained it.

## 8. DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED

Do not give up! Be persistent: some issues take longer to accomplish than others. Get to know your legislator's or official's staff. Join forces with other like-minded people. You may want to start a community campaign.

## 9. MAINTAIN A GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP

This may not be the only time you will want to contact this person, so keep the door open and remain on friendly terms. You may not gain the person's support this time but might seek it on another issue in the future.

## 10. WRITE A NOTE OF THANKS

Everyone appreciates a timely, well-written thank you note.

### WHEN YOU CAN NOT MAKE CONTACT IN PERSON:

If you cannot possibly arrange a face-to-face meeting, try a phone call or email message; do not give up!

### IF YOU CALL AN ELECTED OR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

- Be prepared
- Have the pertinent information written down: essential points of your position and the issue; if it's legislation, know bill number, title and description.
- Try to place call at crucial time for issue, e.g., before a key vote.
- Use correct form of address, e.g., Selectman Smith, not Joe.
- Present your position briefly
- Identify yourself and where you live.
- Limit yourself to one issue per call.
- Be factual and honest.
- Use your own words.
- Mention how issue will affect the community.
- Ask for the official's views.
- Try to ascertain his or her position and how he or she will vote.
- Keep tone friendly.
- End the conversation politely
- Thank the official.
- Offer to send information on your issue.

Note: If you cannot reach your legislator or official, do not refuse to speak with a staff person. You may gain useful information and a helpful source for future reference.

#### IF YOU WRITE TO AN ELECTED OR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

- Use plain or personal stationery.
- Use proper form of address.
- Type or write legibly.
- Keep it short and to the point. Let the official know what you expect.
- Address one issue per letter.
- Outline essential information, e.g., if legislation, include the bill number, title and description.
- Use your own words. Avoid form letters. Describe personal experiences and local impact.
- Be sure to include your name, street address, phone number, and email address.

#### IF YOU SEND AN EMAIL

- Put the bill number and short description in the “subject” line.
- If possible, put “from constituent” in the subject line.
- Keep the text short and to the point.
- Address one issue per email.
- Include your street address, phone number and return email address below your name.

#### REMEMBER:

##### BE PERSISTENT

Don't give up! When your cause is worthy it is worth the extra effort and the wait.

##### BE POSITIVE

Don't contact your government official just to complain or push an issue. Let the official know you appreciate when he or she has done a good job. Be polite: say “thank you.”

##### BE A PART OF THE PROCESS

If you aren't, who will be?

Techniques:  
**PARTICIPATING IN LWVCT PUBLIC ISSUES ADVOCACY**

Legislators are most responsive to their “hometown” constituents. For that reason, the LWVCT has established a “Lobby Corps” that works with the state League’s Public Issues Team specialists. You can be involved as much as you wish. The PI Team specialists provide the expertise, the background information, and emailed Action Alerts on your topic of interest. You provide a “voice” from your community — a phone call, a letter to a legislator, or just a “heads-up” to others who might be interested.

Most Lobby Corps activity takes place during the last two months of any legislative session, and in any session certain areas will receive more attention than others (and some may not come up at all). The work load is therefore somewhat uneven. But if you’re interested in having a direct say as a League member on a particular issue or issues, or wish to be better informed on a specific issue, the Lobby Corps may be just what you want.

Lobby corps groups as of August 1, 2014, are:

- Air Quality
- Climate Change/Energy
- Election Laws (includes ethics, campaign finance reform and open government)
- Gun Laws
- Health Care
- Housing
- Land Use
- Media
- Mental Health
- Reproductive Choice
- School Finance (includes Education Cost Sharing)
- Transportation
- Solid Waste
- Water Resources

You can join as few or as many as you want. Because of the fast pace of Lobby Corps activity, you must have a working email address to be a member. To sign up, go to our website sign-up page at <http://www.lwvct.org/10-minute-activist.html>. To get more information, email the LWVCT’s Hamden office at [lwvct@lwvct.org](mailto:lwvct@lwvct.org).

Techniques:  
**PUBLIC HEARINGS:  
PREPARING AND PRESENTING EFFECTIVE STATEMENTS**  
**FORMAT FOR A WRITTEN OR ORAL STATEMENT**

Identify yourself and the local League that you represent.

Summarize briefly the special interest of your League in the subject of the hearing.

Tell briefly your League's position and how your League arrived at your conclusions to show that they were carefully developed.

State any recommendations first and add explanations as necessary. What is the public interest? Who will benefit? Who will be hurt? Most important, keep to the subject of the hearing.

Keep your oral statement short to emphasize your main points. Submit a longer written statement to provide facts, figures, analysis, etc.

Appreciation: public hearings are specific examples of the democratic process in action. It is a privilege to be a part of it. Say so, briefly.

Remember: **All statements on state and federal issues must be submitted to the LWVCT Public Issues Vice President for review and approval.**

**PRESENTING AN ORAL STATEMENT**

**Be on Time.**

**Be Patient.** Hearings seldom run on schedule; be prepared to wait.

**Know the Rules.** Each legislative committee has its own rules. Call the clerk beforehand to find out how to sign up to testify, how many copies of your written testimony you should submit to the committee and what time limits are placed on oral statements. Local boards and officials may also have specific rules for testimony.

**Be Accessible.** When it comes close to the time you may be called on, take a seat in the front of the hearing room, and have your materials ready. This saves time for everyone.

**Be Prepared.** Prepare a concise summary ahead of time or underline key portions of your statement to be delivered orally. The whole statement will go into the record if you submit written copies. Be prepared to summarize your conclusions if time is running short.

**Be Confident.** The hearing officials are presiding for the specific purpose of taking testimony from you and other witnesses to learn your viewpoints. They will usually be friendly and helpful. Questions may be asked to clarify points you have made. Respond directly to the question; if you do not know the answer, say so. Promise to obtain the needed information and state that you will submit it in writing.

**Be Cooperative.** Follow any suggestions and requests of the hearing officer cheerfully. Do not use the hearing as a forum to air old grievances. Stick to the subject, and try to add something new rather than repeating what others have already said. Give everyone a chance to speak once, before asking to be heard a second time. Do not complain because earlier speakers may have had more time than you; if a time limit is set, abide by it.

Techniques:  
**ACTING IN COALITIONS**

The decision to join a coalition should be made subject to this LWVUS guidance, originally published in *In League* (no longer in print): “Political power doesn’t depend on numbers alone, but combining forces is often an effective approach. Clout comes through leadership, information, political expertise and good organization. In a coalition, league impact can be doubled or tripled. Don’t be afraid of action coalitions. Consider them temporary or for the duration of a campaign. If league goals diverge from those of the coalition, the League or the other group can pull out. Working with other organizations exemplifies cooperation not bondage — keep your eye on the major overall goal.”

The decision to join any coalition should be discussed and ratified by your League’s board.

Before you join:

1. Verify that the goals of the coalition are in accordance with the League position.
2. Know the leadership and have an understanding of how decisions will be made.
3. Clarify how the League will respond if an action adopted by the coalition does not seem appropriate to League position.

All statements and official letters should carry the name of the President or the designated Board member as authorized by the President. All statements and letters must be approved by the President, or, if your League requires it, by a vote of your board.

The President or duly designated Board member should approve all publications, flyers, fact sheets, press releases, etc.

Verify all plans for meetings in writing and keep copies of all statements, letters and other relevant materials.

## Techniques and Requirements

# LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS AND REPORTING

The LWVCT encourages local leagues to host Legislative Meetings to provide a forum for an informal exchange of views with legislators on a variety of issues and to:

- Establish/maintain good relationship with those who represent you;
- Become familiar with legislators' own priorities for the upcoming session;
- Acquaint legislators with the league's advocacy agenda;
- Educate new and old members on upcoming legislative issues and LWVCT advocacy activity.

Discussion may include topics of local interest in addition to statewide issues.

### A FEW HELPFUL HINTS . . .

Each event should have a discussion leader who is familiar with your League's and the LWVCT's advocacy agenda. Please refer to *Connecticut Impact on Issues* and the League's online Advocacy Center (<http://www.lwvct.org/advocacy-overview.html>) for background material. In addition, THE LWVCT prepares background material (a set of possible question areas and short statement of League position) that is circulated to local Leagues, generally in December.

Briefly acquaint legislators with your League's and the LWVCT's legislative priorities and previous activity on these issues.

- Allow each legislator to discuss the priority topics before opening the meeting to general discussion about legislators' own priorities and follow up questions by League members.
- The discussion is meant to be open. Avoid any confrontation when there is disagreement with a legislator.
- Try to lead the discussion away from anyone dominating the conversation or expressing personal opinions (except the legislator, of course!).

You may choose to invite the press, but please let the legislators know if press will be present. The press is there only to observe and not to ask questions during the program.

The Connecticut Office of State Ethics regards these meetings as lobbying activity and requires accurate reporting as to the cost and attendance. A copy of the current reporting sheet is included at the end of this booklet. Remember to include the cost of the legislators' meals in your total budget, whether or not the food is donated.

### AFTER THE MEETING

Fill out the report form. Keep one copy for your files and **send the completed report to the LWVCT office as soon as possible after the meeting**. This is not optional: there are financial penalties for late filing.

A report of the discussions may be printed in your newsletter. If you plan an article in the local press, please let your legislators know in advance.

Do not forget to thank the legislators for attending!



## 2014-2015 Legislative Meeting Reporting Form

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut, Inc., including its affiliated local Leagues, is registered with the State of Connecticut Office of State Ethics (OSE) as a lobbying organization. Legislative Meetings and some advocacy forums and social events involving state legislators (i.e., those at which a League has provided food or other goods to one or more legislators) **must** be reported to the OSE by the LWVCT.

Please submit the following information to the LWVCT office **immediately** after your legislative meeting or social event involving legislators so that the LWVCT can file its report with the OSE at the beginning of the following month. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the office.

League of Women Voters of \_\_\_\_\_

Date of legislative meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of legislative meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

**Attendance:**

Number of people who attended, including legislators: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of all legislators who attended (use reverse or a second sheet if you prefer):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cost:**

Amount charged to attend (if applicable): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total cost of event (including food, facilities, and service): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach any receipts you can provide. If food was donated, estimate its total "fair market" value. If at a restaurant, give the cost of the food charged per person or the cost of the individual meal(s) provided to the guest legislator(s). Please attach receipt(s) for legislators' meals.

Cost per person (total divided by number attending, including legislators): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**LOCAL LEAGUE CONTACT PERSON FOR 2014-2015 LEGISLATIVE MEETING:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail, email or fax this form to the LWVCT office **immediately** following your meeting.  
1890 Dixwell Ave, suite 203, Hamden, CT 06514-3183 lwwct@lwwct.org fax: 203-288-7998