

Lobbying on Behalf of Your School District

Valerie Dosland

Overview of the Minnesota Legislature

- Composed of 134 members of the House and 67 members of the Senate
- Districts are determined by US Census every 10 years
- State representatives serve two-year terms, and state senators serve four-year terms (except after redistricting)
- Each state representative represents about 35,000 Minnesotans, and each state senator represents about 70,000 Minnesotans
- Legislators' salary is set at \$46,500 per year
- Legislators can also collect per diem for living and travel expenses

Overview of the Minnesota Legislature - 2023

- House: 70 DFLers and 64 Republicans
- Senate: 34 Democrats, 33 Republican
- The MN Legislature is getting more diverse –at least 35 out of 201 members identify as people of color
- 28% of the 2023 legislature will be made up of new members – 47 new members in the MN House and 24 in the MN Senate.

Leadership and Committees

- Who picks chooses leadership?
- Who chooses committee chairs, what criteria is used and when?
- How are legislators chosen to serve on committees?



Legislative Timelines

- Each legislative session is a two-year period, or biennium
- The first year of the biennium, the odd numbered year, is for crafting the state budget that will be in effect for the following two fiscal years
- The second year of the biennium, the even year, is typically for the bonding bill and a smaller, supplemental budget
- Constitution or state law dictates when legislature can begin and when it must adjourn
 - In odd-numbered years, the Legislature begins meeting the first week of January
 - In the even-numbered years they may start later
 - The Legislature must adjourn the regular session no later than midnight of the third Monday after the third Sunday in May
- Only the governor has the power to call a special session

How a bill becomes a law

- All legislation must be introduced as a bill, authored by a legislator, and is given a bill number
- Identical bills typically must be introduced in both the House and the Senate
- Bills start out as ideas – “There ought to be a law!”
- Legislators introduce bills for numerous reasons
- In 2021-2022 biennium, 4905 bills were introduced in the House and 4610 bills were introduced in the Senate



How a bill becomes a law

- Committee Chairs set committee hearing agendas and have the power to decide if a bill gets a hearing or not
- Once heard, if it is given a hearing, the bill may be amended, and then voted on, defeated, or laid over for further consideration
- A bill may be referred on to other committees with jurisdiction on the topic
- If a bill passes on the House or Senate floor, it must also be passed by the other body in the same form

How a bill becomes a law

- If there are differences, the other body can concur in the changes or send the bill to a conference committee to iron out differences
- Once a bill is passed in the same form by both bodies, it goes to the Governor
- The Governor can sign a bill, veto a bill, or allow a bill to become law without their signature
- Legislature can override Governor's veto with 2/3 majority vote by both bodies

Where to Find Information

www.leg.mn

- Look up information on bills, legislators, committees
- Sign up for legislative or committee updates
- Audio and video – live and archives
- Find general information – parking, maps, directions



What is a lobbyist?

- Lobbyists are hired by an association, corporation, non-profit organization or local unit of government to get their voice heard by, and hopefully influence, our policy makers
- Lobbyists help their clients develop an effective policy strategy and draft related legislation or amendments, and keep their clients apprised of legislation that may impact them

What does a lobbyist do?

- Legislators needs information
- Lobbyists work to ensure government officials hear and understand both sides of an issue
- Lobbyists bring people together
- Lobbyist help their clients understand the legislative process – how it works, why decisions are made
- Lobbyists help clients understand when and how to engage in the process
- Lobbyists serve as the eyes and ears for their clients

Why legislative advocacy is important

- Legislators need information - they can't possibly know everything that's going on, so they rely on their constituents to keep them informed
- You can make a difference on your issues and concerns
- Linking an issue with a face
- If you don't speak up – others will, and you might not like the outcome



Perceived Barriers?

- Government can be complicated and hard to navigate
- It can be frustrating, and you don't always get what you want
- People don't believe their voice can make a difference
- People have other demands and live very busy lives
- We have a lobbyist!

Connecting with Legislators

There are several ways to reach out to your elected official to begin an initial conversation or to request a meeting.

Some are more effective than others.

- Email
- Telephone
- Mail
- Social Media



Ways to Connect

A meeting is a great way to begin developing a relationship with you elected officials or to ask them to act on an issue you care about. Email is another way to relay information about your concerns.

- Personal visits in their district
- Visit at their Capitol office
- Email about a specific issue or relay information that might be interesting to them
- Calling is also an option but the least effective tool
- Involve yourself in your professional organization that advocates on issues you care about (they will encourage and help you find ways to engage with the legislative process)
- Follow them on social media

Remember

- Elected officials expect and want to hear from their constituents (this is how they stay in touch with their community and learn what issues people care about)
- Introduce yourself, your connection to their legislative district and the issue you are contacting them about
- Provide background information to help educate them on your issue but keep it simple
- Stay away from jargon, acronyms and technical details that might distract them from the issue you are trying to discuss
- Localize the issue. Show them why it's important to your community, the clients you serve or your profession
- Ask for specific action to be taken
- It's ok if you don't know the answer to a question – offer to get them more information later. Follow up with a thank you note and reminder about your meeting



Preparing for the Meeting

Good things to know in advance of your meeting or discussion:

- Political affiliation
- Background/biography
- Legislative committees
- Legislative priorities and bills chief authored

It's ok if you don't know this information but if you do, it can help frame your message.



Telling Your Story

What do you want to do?

- Raise awareness on your issue or concern?
- Show what is happening in your school district?
- Request a meeting or get to know a policymaker?
- Request a policymaker to support or oppose a specific bill?

Remember:

- Tell your story, not someone else's
- Tell your story in a positive way
- Stay on message and be brief
- State all the facts and be 100% truthful

Telling Your Story

- Describe who you are and where you live or work
- Share your connection to the elected official's legislative district
- Tell them about your program or profession
 - What is working?
 - What is not working?
- Describe why the issue or issues are important to you
- Describe what impact this issue has on you or the individuals you serve
- Let the legislator know what they can do to support your priorities



2023 Legislative Session

- Session begins January 3 and must end May 22
- Overarching issues: Education funding, paid family leave, tax reform, reproductive/abortion issues, police reform/public safety, legalization of recreational marijuana
- E-12 issues: Universal meals, formula funding, special education and EL cross-subsidies, pre-K, mental health, student support, other policy items



Questions?

Valerie Dosland

valeried@ewald.com

612-490-3052