

HOW TO LOBBY



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NEBRASKA LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE

Each Nebraska senator has at least two staff members: Administrative Assistant and Legislative Aide. Senators and staff are often overwhelmed with the amount of communication, during the legislative session, — particularly via email.

So, how do you get your point across?

LEGISLATIVE LESSONS

BE PATIENT

- On average staffers received between 50 – 200 emails per day (depending on what's going on). Senators can receive between 200 and 1,000 emails per day.
- Staff will respond, but be patient with them.

DETERMINE WHO YOU WANT/NEED TO TALK TO

- **Administrative Aide (AA)** — you want to talk to an AA if you feel that you have limited knowledge on the subject, or want to convey a short message on the issue. AAs can take your name, address, contact information and if you support/oppose a particular bill.
 - Depending on their level of knowledge, some AAs can share the senator's position on bills. This can be particularly helpful during the legislative session when LAs can be hard to reach.
 - AAs can answer general questions, since they are usually tasked with being in the office.
- **Legislative Aide (LA)** — if you have additional thoughts on the bill, want to know the senator's position on a bill or want to have a longer/in-depth conversation on a bill, ask to speak to the LA.
 - During the legislative session, LAs often are back and forth between their office and the legislative floor. If you have specific questions, it is best to email.

FRAME YOUR MESSAGE

A succinct message has three components:

- Problem:** state the problem/challenge, use personal information if possible
- Solution:** explain how the bill you are calling about provides a solution,
- Position:** state your opinion (support/oppose legislation)

Example: "Payday lenders prey on individuals who need short-term loans and charge high interest and fees trapping people in a cycle of debt (*problem statement*), LB 194 is an attempt to re-balance the industry by capping interest rates and fees and giving individuals more time to pay off their initial loan (*solution*), I urge you to vote yes to move LB 194 out of committee for general floor debate (*position*)."

SHARE YOUR OPINION AT THE RIGHT TIME

- Senators and their staff are generally focused on the bills they are introducing; followed by the bills heard in the committee they are appointed to. Typically, they will not have a lot of knowledge about other bills and won't have their minds made up about a bill until that bill gets to the floor for debate.
- Keep in mind where the bill is in the legislative process and time the sharing of your opinions accordingly.
 - Constituents have the most "power" with their own Senator. Early in the Legislative process, share opinions about the bills introduced by your own senator and/or the bills he/she will hear in their committees.
 - Next focus on committee chairs and committee members who are going to hear a bill you are interested in talking about.
 - Then followup and communicate with your own senator as the bill moves to floor debate.

USE THE LEGISLATIVE WEBSITE

NebraskaLegislature.gov is a great resource to sign-up for the bills you want to follow during the legislative session. Committee hearings will be announced at least seven days before the hearing date. Contact CSN to get connected to other advocates who can help coordinate committee testimony.

HOW TO TESTIFY BEFORE A COMMITTEE HEARING

A woman with glasses and a microphone is speaking at a hearing. The background is a blurred crowd of people. The entire image has an orange tint.

Once bills are introduced, they are assigned to one of 14 committees for a hearing. In Nebraska, every bill receives a hearing, which is an opportunity for members of the public to make their views known on a particular piece of legislation; and those comments become part of the official committee record.



Public hearings are typically held, each day, in the afternoon at 1:30 p.m. during the first half of the legislative session. Visit NebraskaLegislature.gov to see the hearing schedule.

- It's a good idea to check in with the committee chair (call the office of the senator who is the chairperson of the committee and ask to speak to the committee clerk) to confirm the date and time of the hearing – a week in advance of the hearing date. Sometimes, the hearing date may change due to weather or unexpected events. In these instances, hearings may be scheduled for the morning or over the noon hour.
- The committee chair determines the order in which the bills will be heard, the rules for testifying and the time limit on your testimony (which usually depends on the number of people wanting to testify on a particular bill).
- This can change the day of or even during the hearing. Usually, the committee clerk will post the final order of the day outside the chair's office and/or the hearing room. However, never be afraid to call the clerk with questions before a hearing.

At the beginning of the hearing, the senator sponsoring the legislation will introduce the bill, then the committee chair will ask proponents (supporters) of the bill to come forward individually to testify, followed by opponents, then those who wish to testify in a neutral position.

If you want to testify, fill out the testifier sheet (a colored piece of paper) at one of the tables located just inside the hearing room entrance(s). When you come forward to testify, hand your completed testifier sheet and copies of your

testimony and any supporting documents (i.e. fact sheets, data) to the page or clerk. When you sit in the testifier's chair, state and spell your name for the record before you begin reading your testimony. Testimony is recorded and then transcribed for the official record of the hearing.

If you forget to state and spell your name, the committee chair will stop the hearing (but keep the time going) and ask you to state and spell your name for the record. If you want to get through a lot in your testimony, this will take up valuable time.

Prior to the hearing, you also may submit written testimony to the committee chair, in lieu of providing oral testimony. Your testimony can be submitted electronically, via email. The email (and the letter) must state that you want your comments to be part of the official record of the hearing. Each committee has different procedures for submitting written testimony. In general, written testimony must be submitted by 5 p.m. on the business day before the hearing. If the hearing falls on a Monday, you may need to submit it on Friday, or Thursday if there is a legislative recess day.

After the hearing, the committee goes into executive session, where members discuss bills, amendments and take votes to advance bills to general file for debate by the entire legislative body. Members of the media can be present during executive sessions. It's important to stay in contact with committee members and their staff to gather information on the progress of the bill (i.e. will a vote be taken soon? Do committee members need additional information?) and determine timing for grassroots advocacy and lobbying.

HEARING TIPS

PREPARE 15 COPIES OF WRITTEN TESTIMONY

There are seven to nine committee members, plus committee staff. Please prepare 15 copies of your remarks and hand them to the clerk or page before you sit down and begin your testimony.

- Committee chairs often offer pages to help make copies. Don't use that option unless absolutely necessary. It can take a long time, and most likely leads to the Senator not seeing your handout during your testimony.

BE PREPARED TO LIMIT YOUR TESTIMONY TO 3-5 MINUTES

If many people want to testify, the committee chair may limit remarks to either three or five minutes, depending on the committee. Be prepared to have a "short version" of your remarks. Also, listen to others who are present to ensure that your testimony isn't repetitive.

- If senators have a handout of your entire testimony, don't be afraid to give a quick overview and some off-the-cuff remarks. While reading it word-for-word offers some comfort in a sometimes-nervous situation, it can lose senators' interest.

WATCH THE TIMER

The timer starts as soon as you start talking, including when you introduce yourself, spell your name for the record and mention your organization. At the beginning, the light is green, and then turns to yellow and then red when you are out of time.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Take time to practice reading your testimony out loud to friends, family or other supporters, so you know how it sounds and to make sure you don't stumble over your words.

BE PREPARED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

Some senators may ask clarifying questions that you may not expect.

- Think of the questions you may be asked ahead of time and write down answers.

- If you get a question that you're not prepared to answer, do answer to the best of your ability but if you don't know the answer, say so. And offer to find out the answer and follow-up with the senator who asked the question.
- Senators of an opposing view have been known to press testifiers if they try an answer a question without knowing the answer. Don't let yourself get caught in that trap. Simply, say you don't know the answer and will be happy to research and follow-up with the committee with the answer.

AMENDMENTS HAPPEN

The bill's introducer may offer committee amendments to the bill.

- The committee clerk rarely knows if an amendment will be offered during the hearing. The legal counsel of the committee may know but it is best to just proceed with your planned testimony.
- If an amendment is introduced, ask the introducer's office staff for a copy of the amendment. Or email the committee clerk the following day and ask for a copy of the amendment. (Don't try to ask them following the hearing as they have a great deal of work to organize/wrap up).
- Between the hearing and the executive session of the committee, you can provide a follow-up email to the committee about your position on an amendment.
- Amendments also may be offered during the committee's executive session. Be sure to check if any committee amendments are filed when the bill gets to the floor for debate.

OPPOSING A BILL

If you or your organization plans to testify in opposition to a bill, it is a good idea to let the senator (who sponsored the bill) and his/her staff know that you or your organization plans to oppose the bill. A best practice is to inform the senator's office at least 24 hours before the hearing. Additionally, offer to meet with the senator and his/her staff to explain the reasons for your concern about the bill and offer suggestions for amendments. It is a nice gesture that can go a long way towards building a credible relationship with senators.



USING FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS TO LOBBY

Personal visits are a highly effective way to help legislators understand your position on a specific issue(s). Most Nebraska senators welcome visits from constituents. However, their time is valuable, so it is important to plan ahead and use the meeting time well.

Here are some important tips to keep in mind:

SETTING UP A MEETING

Use the NebraskaLegislature.gov website to find the contact information for the Senator you want to meet with. Call the office and ask to speak to the Legislative Aide (LA) to discuss what topic/bill you want to talk about with the Senator. Then, ask to speak to the Administrative Aide (AA) to set up the meeting.

DURING THE MEETING

Expect a 15-minute meeting (especially during the legislative session). Be on time, prepared and brief. Create or use 2-3 talking points to keep the discussion concise and help the senator remember your key points.

MEETINGS DURING LEGISLATIVE SESSION

There is no guarantee the senator will be able to keep it. Legislative schedules/floor debate can change quickly. Don't take it personally, it happens. Either reschedule or schedule a time to meet with the Legislative Aide (LA) to discuss a bill.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Remember that senators are often focused on their bills and those before the committee(s) that they are a part of and may not be focused on other legislative issues.

- Senators are typically only paying attention to what is in front of them, such as, what bills they are facing that day on the floor or the next day's agenda.
- Many only read the bills that are coming to the floor for debate. If a bill doesn't get out of committee, the senator will likely never read it (if it isn't before the committee he/she is assigned to).

BE PREPARED TO EXPLAIN THE IMPACT OF THE BILL

How the bill will affect you and others in your district. Use talking points to effectively share your opinion.

EDUCATE AND ADVOCATE

Sharing data, personal stories of clients/constituents is a great way to connect the bill to the day-to-day lives of Nebraskans. It also is important to advocate on behalf of nonprofit clients and community members by clearly urging the senator to support/oppose/amend the bill.

FACT SHEETS

If you have a 1-page fact sheet about the issue/nonprofit group, it is helpful to share it with the senator and/or his/her staff (or leave behind in case the meeting is interrupted).

IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER

...it's okay to tell the senator that you will do some research and get back to him/her. Make sure to follow-through (again this builds the relationship and credibility of you and your organization).

ASK HOW YOU CAN HELP THEM

Before you leave, make sure you ask what you and/or your organization or community partners can do to support their work on a particular bill or issue. Do they need more information? Would a site visit help? Do they need community members to testify during a committee hearing?

THANK YOU NOTE

Follow-up with a thank-you note and any information requested.



USING PHONE CALLS TO LOBBY

Phone calls to your senator or staff can be an effective way of sharing your opinion about a particular legislative issue. Use the NebraskaLegislature.gov website to get the contact information for the Senator you want to speak with. Remember these tips to get your point across, quickly and efficiently:

DETERMINE IF YOU WANT TO SPEAK TO AN AA OR LA

If you want to share your opinion – briefly – or don't feel as if you have a lot of knowledge about a topic, you can leave a message with your legislative position with an Administrative Aide (AA). If you want to know a senator's position on a bill, you also can ask the AA. If he/she doesn't know, they can get back to you with an answer.

- Let the AA know if you want the senator to call you back.
- If you want to have a more in-depth conversation about the issue, then you'll want to ask if you can speak to the LA. Then, ask if the LA has time for a conversation.

IDENTIFY YOURSELF

As a constituent or concerned member of the public. Start your call with, "Hi, my name is... and I live in Sen. XX's district." Give your address and phone number as well. Most lawmakers want to hear from the people they represent and if you live in their district, they want to know your opinion.

REFER TO THE BILL NAME AND NUMBER

Make sure you include the bill name and number after you identify yourself. Ex., "I'm calling about the payday lending bill, LB 194."

USE YOUR OWN WORDS

You will likely have "talking points" or bullets of information to share but staff can tell right away if they're getting multiple calls repeating the same words. Instead, think about (and convey) why this issue is important to you and what you want to share about it.

VOICEMAIL IS YOUR FRIEND

If you have to, leave a message. Sometimes, staff may be out of the office or on another phone call (remember there are only two staffers), so leave a message. When you do, indicate who you are, what district you live in, the bill number and your opinion (support/oppose) and how you can be contacted. If you want the senator/staff to call you back, ask them to do so in the message.

BE BRIEF AND RESPECTFUL

Whether you talk to an aide or leave a message, remember they are busy and have feelings, too. Be kind and respectful in your tone and with their time.

THANK YOU NOTE

Sending a "thank you for your time" email to a staffer after a conversation in person or one the phone can help the staffer remember you in the future. Staff don't get thanked enough, so a small gesture can keep you in good graces for years.



USING EMAIL TO LOBBY

Similar to a hand-written letter, email is a great tool to communicate your position on legislation to a lawmaker or his/her staff. Use the NebraskaLegislature.gov website to find the email address for the Senator you want to contact. Before you hit, “send,” here are a few guidelines:

WHO ARE YOU?

Let the legislator know – right away – if you are a constituent. Most lawmakers want to hear from the people they represent and if you live in their district, they want to know your opinion.

REFER TO THE BILL NAME AND NUMBER

Make sure you include the bill name and number in the subject line and body of the email.

USE YOUR OWN WORDS

You will likely have “talking points” or bullets of information to share but staff can tell right away if they’re getting multiple emails repeating the same words.

AVOID SENDING FORM EMAILS

These can be discounted (at worst) or briefly counted as a “yes” or “no” vote (and sent to a folder never to be read). Instead, personalize the form or send your own email (in your own words).

WHAT DO YOU WANT DONE?

Describe the impact of the legislation – lawmakers want to know how a particular bill will impact people in his/her district. Use your personal knowledge gained from experience with clients/community members to share how legislation will harm or improve the lives of individuals across our state.

SHOW AS MUCH KNOWLEDGE AS YOU CAN

Don’t worry if you’re not an expert – Nebraska’s Unicameral is set up so that the public is the “first house” and is able to weigh in on legislative issues. Don’t be shy. Share what you know and remember senators are learning, too.

MAKE YOUR POSITION CLEAR

Take the time to draft your thoughts and be specific about what you want the legislator to do (support/oppose/amend legislation)

SAY THANK YOU

When the legislator votes as you asked, send a thank-you note. It goes a long way to build relationships, credibility and is a (Nebraska) nice thing to do.

EXAMPLE EMAILS

URGING SUPPORT FOR PAYDAY LENDING REFORM

FROM A NONPROFIT STAFF MEMBER WITH EXPERIENCE ON THE ISSUE

Dear Senator,

I am writing you to urge your support for LB 194 - Payday Lending Reform. In my role as a counselor in a domestic violence organization, I see the challenges that survivors regularly experience. They may often be in a position where they no longer have access to money and may need to relocate due to the abuse, further harming them financially.

Payday lending may be a last resort for some survivors and unfortunately, the current lending practices set survivors up for failure. The unaffordable payments, short duration for repayment, and excessive charges creates a situation in which a survivor may not be able to pay for other home and family expenses, further throwing her into debt.

I urge you to support LB 194, which will make payments more affordable. These changes could help a survivor to thrive, and not have to return to the abusive relationship.

Thank you!!

URGING SUPPORT FOR PAYDAY LENDING REFORM

FROM A CONSTITUENT WHO CARES

Dear Senator,

I am a constituent in your district and want to urge your support for LB 194 – Payday Lending Reform. As Nebraskans, we value hard work and the ability to provide for your family. Yet, many people, myself included, have struggled to make ends meet especially after an unexpected expense. I worry about what happens when someone turns to a payday loan but then gets trapped in a cycle of debt ending up paying outrageous amounts of money for a small loan.

LB 194 would provide much needed reform to allow individuals access to loans with manageable payback. I urge you to support LB 194. It's only fair.

Your fellow Nebraskan,

EXAMPLE PHONE SCRIPTS

URGING SUPPORT FOR PAYDAY LENDING REFORM

FOR NONPROFIT STAFF CALL WITH LEGISLATIVE AIDE (LA)

Nonprofit Staff: My name is...and I'm [describe position and organization]. I would like to speak with the Legislative Aide about LB 194 – Payday Lending Reform.

Wait until the LA gets on the phone, then ask if that person has time for a conversation. If yes, then proceed.

Nonprofit Staff: Do you know Senator xxx's position on LB 194?

LA: He/she hasn't made up his/her mind yet.

Nonprofit Staff: I'd like to share some information with you and Senator xx. Our organization works with many individuals who struggle to make ends meet. When faced with an unexpected expense, they often turn to payday loans to cover typical obligations (i.e. food, childcare, utilities, rent) and stretch their budget. Interest rates of 461% and the requirement to repay the loan in 30 days is outrageous and burdensome to hard working Nebraskans. Colorado recently instituted similar reforms to what is proposed in LB 194, which resulted in consumer protections while preserving the industry for those individuals to need access to short-term loans. I can provide additional data, fact sheets if that would be helpful to you and the Senator. I'd also like to schedule a time to meet to review the information and discuss your thoughts on the bill.

LA: Thank you for reaching out. Please email me and the Senator the information for us to review. And I'll transfer you to the AA to schedule a meeting with us.

Nonprofit Staff: Great, thanks so much for your time.

URGING SUPPORT FOR PAYDAY LENDING REFORM

FOR CONSTITUENT CALL WITH ADMINISTRATIVE AIDE (AA)

Constituent: Hello, My name is...and I'm a constituent in Senator xxx's district. I would like to share with you, for the Senator, my opinion on LB 194 – Payday Lending Reform.

I know that many hard-working Nebraskans often turn to payday lenders for unanticipated expenses, such as medical bills, home or car repairs. But the excessive interest and fees often keep people in a cycle of debt. LB 194 would provide much needed reform, allow individuals access to short-term loans without the burden of additional debt. I urge Senator xxx to support LB 194.

AA: Thank you for calling. Do you want the Senator to call you back to discuss this further?

Constituent: No, thank you. Just please relay the message to him/her

AA: Okay, I will.

Constituent: Thanks so much for your time.

Visit our website, strongnebraska.org, for more resources, including a short video regarding the rules for nonprofit lobbying.



You can also watch our animated video *How a Bill Becomes a Law in Nebraska.*



It is available in English and Spanish.



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