How to Be an Effective Grassroots Lobbyist for Townships

Inform

Persuade

Influence

Make a Difference
Cover photos by Socolow Photography.

**Top center photo, left to right:** PSATS Secretary-Treasurer Les Houck, PSATS Second Vice President John Haiko, and state Rep. Lynn Herman.

**Bottom left photo:** A. Carville Foster, supervisor of Springfield Township, York County, and former state representative, left, and state Sen. Michael Waugh, a former York County township official.

**Bottom right photo:** State Sen. Jeffrey Piccola, left, and PSATS Executive Board member William Hawk.
# Table of Contents

You Can Make a Difference......................................................................................................................2
  What is grassroots lobbying? ...........................................................................................................2
  Learning the ropes ..........................................................................................................................2
  PSATS will make your job easy ......................................................................................................3

Knowledge is Power ..........................................................................................................................5
  Know your legislator .......................................................................................................................5
  Know the legislative staff ................................................................................................................6
  Know the legislative process ..........................................................................................................6
  A bicameral legislature ..................................................................................................................6
  The birth of a bill .............................................................................................................................7
  Out of committee and onto the floor ..............................................................................................8
  Know the issue and PSATS’ position ..............................................................................................9

Communicating with Legislators ........................................................................................................10
  The office visit ..............................................................................................................................10
  The phone call ...............................................................................................................................12
  The letter ........................................................................................................................................13
  E-mail ...........................................................................................................................................14

Seal the Deal with Follow-Up ...........................................................................................................15
  Legislative follow-up ......................................................................................................................15
  PSATS follow-up ...........................................................................................................................15

Grassroots Lobbying in the Media ......................................................................................................16
  Letters to the editor .........................................................................................................................16
  Op-eds .........................................................................................................................................16
  Editorials.......................................................................................................................................16
Township supervisors represent 5.4 million Pennsylvanians.

And that means when you speak, legislators listen.

Now, with the PSATS Grassroots Lobbying Network and your help, PSATS’ voice will be stronger than ever. By developing or furthering relationships with your legislators and letting them know how their decisions affect township residents — their constituents — you will be speaking on behalf of every township of the second class in Pennsylvania. That’s almost half of the state’s population, and that’s power.

WHAT IS GRASSROOTS LOBBYING?

Grassroots lobbying allows the people who are most affected by an issue to share their personal experiences with legislators and urge them to support or oppose a certain policy or piece of legislation.

PSATS does, of course, lobby on behalf of its members, but there is no substitute for a legislator hearing directly from his constituents. After all, the legislator’s job is to meet the needs of the citizens he represents. If he fails to do that, he probably won’t be in office for long.

Grassroots lobbying offers township officials the opportunity to educate their legislators about an issue. As you well know, it’s hard to be an expert on every issue. Legislators are voting on bills that cover hundreds of topics, and your insight can be valuable and very persuasive as they determine their position.

LEARNING THE ROPES

Grassroots lobbying is more than just asking a legislator to vote “yes” or “no” on an issue. This guide will introduce you to the basics of grassroots lobbying and provide a quick review for those who have been more involved in the political process.

Following a few basic rules will help you become an effective member of the PSATS Grassroots Lobbying Network and play an important role in shaping legislation and policy on behalf of townships statewide.

Although PSATS lobbies for townships in Harrisburg, there is no substitute for a legislator hearing directly from one of his constituents, especially one as influential as a township official.

PSATS’ quarterly “Grassroots” newsletter will keep you informed of network news and lobbying successes.
This guide will walk you through the process, but it’s just a start. PSATS will be with you every step of the way, remaining in close contact with all members of its Grassroots Lobbying Network through regular mail, fax, and e-mail updates; a grassroots lobbying newsletter; and a dedicated Web site accessible only by network members.

The combined strength of township officials and staff from across the state speaking in a unified voice will be impossible for legislators and policymakers to ignore. This is the very nature of grassroots lobbying, and it is the foundation of PSATS’ Grassroots Lobbying Network.

**PSATS WILL MAKE YOUR JOB EASY**

We know you’re very busy running your township, not to mention taking care of so many other daily obligations. That’s why the PSATS staff will do much of the work for you.

As a member of the PSATS Grassroots Lobbying Network, you will be able to help the Association educate legislators about issues that directly affect townships statewide. (Photo features state Sen. Noah Wenger, center, PSATS Secretary-Treasurer Les Houck, left, and Second Vice President John Haiko, right.)

**Keeping you informed**

As a member of PSATS’ Grassroots Lobbying Network, you will receive regular communications to update you on the latest issues and legislative actions. You’ll receive regular communication from PSATS through:

- Faxes
- E-mail updates
- A quarterly grassroots newsletter
- A dedicated Web site accessible only by network members

Members can also log onto PSATS’ Web site at www.psats.org to view the Capitol Report, a list of township-related bills and legislative actions that is updated daily.
the legwork to make your job as a grassroots lobbyist as easy as possible when we need to call on you.

We do not expect you to be professional lobbyists or expert writers or communicators. This guide is meant to be a helpful reference source when we need you to contact your legislators for an important piece of legislation. We will provide you with letters and talking points as much as possible and guide you all along the way.

We are pleased to have you as a valuable member of our grassroots lobbying team and will make every effort to lighten your load in carrying out this responsibility you have so graciously agreed to follow through on. Toward that end, we hope you find this guide to be a useful and practical source of tips for becoming an effective grassroots lobbyist.

As a member of the PSATS Grassroots Lobbying Network, you are not expected to be a professional lobbyist. We simply need you to step up to the plate and communicate with your legislators on the most important issues. PSATS will be there to help you all along the way. (Photo features, left to right, state Rep. Gaynor Cawley, PSATS Executive Board member William Hawk, and PSATS Secretary-Treasurer Les Houck.)
Knowledge is Power

When it comes to grassroots lobbying, knowledge is the first of several keys to success. Knowing your legislator, the legislative process, PSATS’ position on an issue, and the basics of a key legislative or policy proposal increases your credibility — and therefore your power of persuasion and chance of success.

KNOW YOUR LEGISLATOR

Every township in Pennsylvania is part of a state House, Senate, and Congressional district. At the state level, one legislator represents approximately 60,000 people in each of 203 House districts, and one represents approximately 244,000 people in each of 50 Senate districts. Also, two U.S. senators and 19 U.S. congressional representatives serve Pennsylvanians at the federal level.

Obviously, not everyone can know every state legislator. That’s why grassroots lobbying is so important — and so effective. When township officials from across the state connect with their individual legislators, they create a web of communication that far exceeds what would otherwise be possible.

PSATS encourages township officials to get to know their legislators. Invite them to attend county conventions, public meetings, and special events throughout the year. A community day event, special legislative dinner, or new building dedication are great opportunities for legislators to interact with both local government officials and residents. The bottom line is that getting to know your legislator in the “off season” can help you get through the door when issues arise and make you a more effective grassroots lobbyist.

For the proper contact information for your legislators, please refer to the PSATS Legislative Directory or log onto www.psats.org and click on the “Pennsylvania General Assembly” link.

THERE ARE...

| 203 PA State Representatives |
| 50 PA State Senators |
| 2 U.S. Senators |
| 19 U.S. Congressional Representatives |

Getting to know your legislators and their staff will help you develop an essential rapport that will serve you well in your grassroots lobbying efforts. (Photo features, left to right, state Rep. Michael Veon, PSATS Assistant Executive Director Elam Herr, PSATS Executive Director R. Keith Hite, and Nello Giorgetti, a lobbyist for Malady & Wooten LLP, Harrisburg.)
When township officials from across the state connect with their individual legislators, they create a web of communication that far exceeds what would otherwise be possible.

KNOW THE LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Getting to know the staff in your legislator’s office can be just as important as getting to know the senator or representative. If your legislator is called into a last-minute session or sudden vote, you may find yourself meeting or talking on the phone with a legislative aide instead.

Don’t let this discourage you. Legislative aides are often assigned to research different topics and report back to the legislator. They become the experts on an issue, and you can provide them with valuable insight, even becoming a trusted resource they seek out for information.

These staff members are the gatekeepers in any legislative office, and developing a relationship of mutual trust and respect with them will help you do the same with the legislator.

Always thank the legislative staff for their assistance and don’t hesitate to mention them in a thank-you letter to the legislator when they have been particularly helpful.

KNOW THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

A fairly basic process guides an average of 5,000 bills through the state House and Senate during every two-year legislative session. Although PSATS will alert you when the time is right to contact your legislators, understanding the process will help you add credibility to your actions.

A BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE

Pennsylvania’s General Assembly is bicameral, meaning it consists of two bodies: the 203-member House of Representatives and the 50-member Senate. Each chamber has a majority and minority caucus with elected leaders who control floor activity and discipline within their parties. The speaker of the house presides over all actions in the House of

Add legislators to your guest list

Get to know your legislators. Invite them to attend county conventions, public meetings, and special events throughout the year. A community day event, special legislative dinner, or new building dedication are great opportunities for legislators to interact with both local government officials and residents.

The bottom line is that getting to know your legislator can help you get through the door when issues arise and make you a more effective lobbyist.

By inviting your state legislators to your county conventions, public meetings, and other events, you will already have a relationship with them when you need to contact them about an important matter affecting townships. (Photo features state Rep. John Siptroth, a former Pike County township official.)
The members of each chamber are assigned to standing committees that cover a variety of topics and that serve as the workshops of the legislature. The state constitution requires that every bill be referred to a committee, which studies the bills, may hold hearings for further input, and then, if it supports a bill, reports it back to the originating chamber for further consideration.

THE BIRTH OF A BILL

Any member of the legislature may introduce a bill in his chamber, either the House or the Senate. He drafts the bill with the help of his staff, the Legislative Reference Bureau, and input from lobbyists. After being introduced in either the House or Senate, the bill is assigned a number, referred to a committee, and distributed to all members in that chamber.

The committee chairman, appointed by the leader of the majority caucus, decides what bills his committee will consider — a tremendous power. If the chairman is opposed to a bill, he may never allow it to come before the committee, essentially “killing” it. Any bill brought before the committee is subject to review, debate, and possible hearings and will eventually reach one of four outcomes:

- Receive a “favorable report” and go to the floor of the chamber where it was introduced for consideration.
- Be reported with changes. These amendments are usually added to make the bill more favorable to committee members and almost always hasten its favorable report to the chamber.
- Be tabled, or set aside, rendering it inactive.
- Be defeated and not reported from committee, essentially killing it.

As a member of the PSATS Grassroots Lobbying Network, you should be aware of how a bill makes its way through the legislature, from its very beginning as an idea or PSATS resolution, through committee, onto the floor of both houses, and eventually to the governor’s desk. (Illustration by Jack Schmidt.)
OUT OF COMMITTEE AND ONTO THE FLOOR

If a bill is reported out of committee, each caucus may discuss the bill and coordinate the party’s position before it goes to the full chamber floor.

Once out of committee, a bill still has to clear many hurdles before it can become a law. For example, the chamber must consider the bill on three separate days before passing it and sending it to the other chamber for deliberation. On the first day, the bill is read on the chamber floor to alert members that the committee has reported the bill as originally introduced or amended. No amendments are offered, no debate is held, and no votes are taken.

Amendments to the bill may be offered on the second or third reading. The third reading garners the most action, including debate and a vote on final passage. All legislators who are present in the chamber must vote on the bill; abstentions are not allowed. All bills, except those dealing with appropriations, require a simple majority to pass. Appropriations bills require a two-thirds majority.

After a bill is approved, it is sent to the other chamber, where it is again referred to a committee and, if approved, considered by the whole chamber. The rationale for this lengthy procedure, which can take months, is to force legislators to scrutinize proposals and be fully aware of all provisions that could become law.

If the other chamber approves the bill with amendments, it is sent to its chamber of origin for final concurrence. If a House bill, for example, was amended and approved in the Senate, the House must reconsider the bill with those changes. If the chamber of origin does not agree with the other chamber’s changes, a joint conference committee of both chambers may convene to forge a compromise. After the bill is approved and signed in both houses, it is sent to the governor, who may sign it into law, allow it to become a law without signing it, or veto it.

Note: Townships can follow the progress of township-related legislation on PSATS’ Web site by logging onto www.psats.org and clicking on “Capitol Hill Report.”

Getting to know the staff in your legislator’s office can be just as important as getting to know the senator or representative.

Many bills affecting townships start out as resolutions from the county associations of township officials. If adopted by the delegate body at the state convention, the resolutions then make their way to the state legislature, where they are drafted into bill form and go forward through the legislative process. (Illustration by JPL Video.)
KNOW THE ISSUE AND PSATS’ POSITION

Before you can talk persuasively to a legislator, you need to be familiar with the issue, including PSATS’ position (as established by the delegates at the state convention), why townships are for or against the legislation or policy, and what groups are taking the opposing view and why. This means doing your homework, and PSATS is here to help.

Members of the Grassroots Lobbying Network will be called to action only to respond to issues of great importance and impact to townships. Every year at the Annual State Convention, township officials set the Association’s legislative agenda for such issues as land use, taxes, road maintenance, police and fire protection, and dozens more. This helps PSATS establish its policy on these issues and dictates what position the Association will take.

Through its regular communication with members of the Grassroots Lobbying Network, PSATS will make sure you have the facts to provide the foundation for a good discussion. However, the most important aspect of grassroots lobbying is personalizing the issue for your legislator: explaining how his vote will affect your township and its residents in terms of dollars and cents, health and safety, or other areas for which township officials are responsible.
Communicating with Legislators

Your communications with legislators will take various forms: phone calls, personal visits, letters, and even e-mail. No matter what the medium, however, you will be most effective as a grassroots lobbyist by applying a few basic rules, including the “three C’s.”

> Be Courteous — You’ve heard it before, and it’s true: You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Remember, everyone involved in the legislative process has the same responsibility: to do what is best for Pennsylvania and its citizens.

Try to understand why your legislator is voting the way he is and be respectful in your questions and comments. Arguing will get you nowhere. And don’t forget that as part of the PSATS Grassroots Lobbying Network, you are representing not just your township, but 10,000 other township officials and 5.4 million residents from across the state.

> Be Concise — Legislators and their staff are very busy, and the issue that is of prime concern to you is one of only many they are dealing with. Respect their time, deliver your message clearly and concisely, and stick to one topic per phone call, meeting, letter, or e-mail.

> Be Consistent — Legislators will only respond to the efforts of PSATS and its Grassroots Lobbying Network if we deliver one consistent message on each issue. PSATS will provide you with background information and detail the Association’s position when asking you to contact your legislator. If you would like to clarify the issue and agenda, however, don’t hesitate to call PSATS. Working together is the only way to accomplish our legislative and policy goals.

THE OFFICE VISIT

Meeting with your legislator is by far the most effective means of communicating with him. Nothing is more persuasive than a face-to-face encounter to explain your position and answer questions, and following these pointers will make your visit even more productive:

Nothing is more persuasive than a face-to-face meeting with your legislator to explain your position and answer questions. (Photo features, left to right, PSATS Secretary-Treasurer Les Houck, state Sen. Bob Robbins, and PSATS Executive Board member William Hawk.)
Before the meeting

- Call the legislator’s office for an appointment and arrive on time.
- Ask for a specific amount of time with the legislator so you can plan your comments accordingly.
- If possible and as a helpful aid, prepare a fact sheet or position statement that is short and to the point. Describe the problem or issue you are trying to address, outline your proposed solution supported by facts, and list who to contact for more information. You may refer to this sheet during the meeting and then leave it behind as a reference. This will be especially helpful to the legislator when the time comes for the legislation to be considered.
- Take a paper and pen with you to note any information the legislator asks you to provide as a follow-up to the meeting.
- If meeting as part of a delegation with several other township representatives, keep the number small to allow for a more detailed and frank discussion. Plan in advance what you will say and designate one person to lead and carry the discussion.
- Know the issue and the legislator’s record on the issue.
- For help with any of this, call PSATS.

When you arrive

- Introduce yourself every time you meet your legislator until you are sure he knows your name.
- Grab the legislator’s attention and hold it. Speak up, avoid too much small talk, make eye contact, and be physically and vocally animated—passionate but not emotional.
- Don’t be intimidated. Remember that the legislator works for you, just as you work for the residents in your township. You are the expert on the issue and have valuable information to share.
- Discuss only the issues that are relevant to this meeting. Stick to one topic per meeting.
- Listen carefully to the legislator so you can respond appropriately and effectively.
- Use facts to describe how this issue would impact your township’s residents (who are also the legislator’s constituents).
- If you don’t know an answer to a question, write the question down, promise to get back to the legislator, and then do so.
- Do not become argumentative or defensive. If the legislator challenges your position, simply restate your main point and rebut his arguments with facts.
- Be specific in asking the legislator to support or oppose a measure. Try to have him state his position clearly.
- When closing the meeting, summarize your main point one last time and ask for his support of your position, whether it is to support or oppose the legislation or proposal.
- When the meeting is over, don’t linger. Thank the legislator for his time and leave. Remember that they are often very busy and have many visitors throughout the day.

As part of PSATS’ Grassroots Lobbying Network, you are representing not just your township, but 10,000 other township officials and 5.4 million residents from across the state.
After the meeting

- Follow up by sending a letter of thanks.
- Provide the legislator with any additional information he requested.
- Be sure to let PSATS know about the visit.

Responding to cues

Chances are that you will find yourself in one of three scenarios when meeting with your legislator or his staff. Each one provides you with the opportunity to both share and gain knowledge on the issue at hand:

1) The legislator may ask a few questions but does not commit to an action.
   - Ask if you can provide additional information or answer questions to help him solidify his position on the issue.
   - Ask what he has heard from others supporting or opposing the issue. This will help you know your opponents.
   - If meeting with a staff person who is uncertain about the legislator’s position, tell him that you will follow up to find out the legislator’s position and then do so.

2) The legislator states early on that he supports your position.
   - Thank the legislator for his support.
   - Ask what he is hearing from others on the issue.
   - Ask what he thinks you should do to help broaden support for the issue.

3) The legislator clearly disagrees with your position.
   - Ask questions, if necessary, to find out why the legislator has taken this stance.
   - Respond to his concerns by stating facts that show how the issue affects the residents in your township — and the legislators’ constituents.
   - Ask if he would like you to provide any more detailed information as a follow-up to the meeting.
   - Do not become hostile. This is an opportunity to learn why the legislator has taken this position, which will help you and PSATS develop an effective strategy. Remember, you will need his support in the future.

THE PHONE CALL

Legislators are extremely busy and often difficult to schedule a meeting with. In such cases, a telephone call can be equally as effective, provided you follow a few guidelines:

- Before making the call, prepare a short list of points you want to cover and note the appropriate bill number and printer’s number. (Call PSATS if you need additional information on any topic.) Refer to this list during the call so you can state your message clearly.
- When you call, identify yourself and your township and ask to speak to the legislator directly.
  - You may have trouble reaching the legislator due to his schedule, especially when the House or Senate is in session, but at other times legislators will be very accessible, especially as they get to know you better.
  - If the legislator is not available, ask to speak to the legislative aide who is assigned to this issue.
  - If a legislative aide is not available, you may also leave a brief message with your name, township affiliation, telephone number, the topic and bill number you wanted to discuss, and your position on the bill.
- Keep the call with your legislator brief. Ask for support in one sentence and say why you are seeking that support in another.
Be willing to provide the information you are presenting in writing.
If the legislator asks you questions you are not prepared to answer, tell him you will get back to him with this information and then do so.

THE LETTER
A letter is another effective means of urging your legislator to support or oppose an issue because it officially documents your point of view and gives the legislator something to refer back to when necessary.
As with meetings and phone calls, following a few guidelines can help make your letter a persuasive, powerful tool for change:
• Timing is important. PSATS will alert you as to the best time to write to your legislator about an issue. If the General Assembly is not in session, it might be more effective to send the letter to the legislator’s district office. Addresses are available in the PSATS Legislative Directory, on the General Assembly’s Web site, or by calling PSATS.
• Know to whom you are writing. Make sure you have the correct address and know the role the legislator plays in the bill you are writing about. Call PSATS if you’re not sure. Address the letter to “The Honorable Joe Smith,” for example, and use “Dear Sen. Smith” or “Dear Rep. Smith” as your greeting.
• Type the letter on your township’s letterhead. Try to keep it to one page if possible, but no more than two pages.
• Keep the tone professional, courteous, and respectful, even if you disagree on the issue. The legislator will return the favor.
• Write in your own words, rather than following a form letter. PSATS may provide you with a template to follow, but it’s very important that you include facts and supporting documentation, if necessary, on how the issue will affect your township and its residents. This is much more effective than deluging a legislator with hundreds of copies of the same letter.
• Identify yourself immediately as a township official and a constituent to capture the legislator’s attention.
• Start and end the letter by saying why you are writing and what you want the legislator to do. Refer to a bill number and printer’s number if applicable. PSATS can provide this information to you.
• Ask for a response as to whether the legislator will support PSATS’ position.
• End on a positive note and thank the legislator for his time. Make sure he will read a future letter from you with interest, not apprehension.
• If faxing the letter, include a cover page.
• If you have not heard back from the legislator in a reasonable amount of time, follow up with a telephone call to make sure the letter was received.
• Send a copy of the letter to PSATS, along with any response you receive from the legislator.

A letter officially documents your point of view and gives the legislator something to refer back to when necessary.

Say It Yourself
Write in your own words, rather than following a form letter. PSATS may provide you with a template to follow, but it’s very important that you include facts and supporting documentation, if necessary, on how the issue will affect your township and its residents. This is much more effective than deluging a legislator with hundreds of copies of the same letter.
Remember that the legislator works for you, just as you work for the residents in your township.

**E-MAIL**

Democracy may have its foundations in ancient Greece, but it has certainly adapted well to the 21st century. Because legislation and policymaking can move forward quickly, lawmakers rely on their staff and technology to keep them up to date. Most lawmakers always have with them a pager, cell phone, and even a personal data assistant such as a Palm Pilot or Blackberry.

E-mail is quickly becoming the most prevalent form of communication in government relations. It is instant and easy to use, but it, too, requires you to follow a few rules of etiquette so your e-mails will stand out from the crowd:

- The same basic rules for letter writing apply to e-mail. Continue to use official salutations (see “The Letter” on page 13) and follow the business letter format.
- Be direct and to the point, even more so than in a standard letter. E-mails are meant to deliver quick and concise information. A legislator can easily read one paragraph on his computer screen but even more easily hit the delete button when confronted with a manifesto. Your legislator may receive hundreds of e-mails a day, and you want to make sure yours is read in its entirety.
- Identify who you are in the opening sentence.
- End your e-mail on a high note. Keep it positive, even if you disagree with the legislator’s position. Remember that you will need to work with this legislator in the future. He may not recall your name after your first or second e-mail, but he will certainly remember if your communication is negative or critical.
- Read, spell-check, and re-read before you send the e-mail. Nothing will detract from an e-mail’s professionalism and value more quickly than basic proofreading errors. Taking a few extra minutes for a final read-through will be the first step in making sure your communication is taken seriously.
Seal the Deal with Follow-Up

Making that first contact with your legislator through a meeting, phone call, letter, or e-mail is only the beginning of the lobbying process. It’s just as important that you follow up in several ways, both with the legislator and with PSATS, to help ensure a positive outcome.

**LEGISLATIVE FOLLOW-UP**

Township officials know how rare it is to hear the words “thank you.” When someone does express thanks, you tend to remember, and the same holds true for legislators.

After meeting or speaking with your legislator on the phone, send him a note thanking him for his time and consideration. If you send him a letter, thank him for responding to your concerns. When a member of the General Assembly casts a vote that is favorable to townships and furthers PSATS legislative agenda, let him know how much you appreciate his action.

Be sure to mention any staff member who was helpful as well.

**PSATS FOLLOW-UP**

To help PSATS monitor the activities of the Grassroots Lobbying Network and the opinions of the General Assembly, the Association has provided you with a follow-up form. Please make copies of the form, record your communications with and responses from your legislators, and then promptly send a copy to PSATS by mail or fax.

This form is vital to help PSATS gauge the success of our combined effort in addressing legislative issues.

Members of the grassroots network will want to use this follow-up form to notify PSATS of their communication with legislators.

When a member of the General Assembly casts a vote that is favorable to townships and furthers PSATS’ legislative agenda, let him know how much you appreciate his action.
Grassroots Lobbying in the Media

Mention grassroots lobbying, and most people picture intense one-on-one meetings with legislators or massive letter-writing campaigns.

Placing an issue in the public eye, however, can add to the grassroots effort and have even more impact on a legislator’s final vote. The media play a large role in shaping public opinion, so legislators pay attention to the topics receiving air time and press coverage.

Because some issues lend themselves to the media spotlight more than others, PSATS will help you determine when writing a letter to the editor or a guest editorial or suggesting that your local newspaper write an editorial may be a good course of action. PSATS may even supply you with the letter, editorial, or op-ed for you to place in your local paper.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper is a good way to get your point across to a wide audience. Newspapers reserve the right to edit the letter so it fits the space, but your message should remain intact. Your letter will have a better chance of being published if you:

• make sure the topic is timely, writing when the legislature is considering a particular issue;
• tell the reader who you are and why you are writing; and
• make it brief, covering one or two points and backing them up with facts.

OP-EDS

Your newspaper may print op-eds (opinion pieces "opposite" the "editorial" page), which allow you to address a topic in more detail and length than a letter to the editor. In an op-ed, you can frame the issue from your perspective and back your position up with facts. Op-eds should be printed when they would be most helpful to your cause — as an issue is being discussed in the legislature but before a vote is taken.

Before you begin writing, call your newspaper and ask who you should speak with about op-eds. Tell them the topic you want to address and ask if they would be willing to publish the piece.

Once you receive the go-ahead from the editor:
• Be brief in your writing. Keep the piece to 600-800 words and begin by outlining the issue.
• Use facts to back up your statements and make sure those facts are accurate.
• Tell the readers exactly how a legislator’s vote on the issue in question could affect them.

EDITORIALS

Although newspaper editorials will often comment on a recent news report, your local paper may be willing to explore an issue that you bring to their attention.

To secure a favorable editorial:
• send a letter to the editorial page editor describing the issue and your main concerns;
• include any substantiating documents to back up your position; and
• request a face-to-face meeting to explain the issue in greater detail.