

Getting Ready to Introduce a Bill – What to Do Before You Go to the Legislature

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So – You’ve decided that there are some serious problems that you want to remedy, and you need to go to the legislature to change a law. The good news is that you can do that! You absolutely have the power to bring an issue to your legislature and advocate for it, and make changes in your laws. However, the more preparation you do before introducing legislation, the better chance you have in succeeding.

Introducing a bill where you have done the proper groundwork, and which has popular support, actually has a good chance of being successful, but its important to wait and do the preparation needed before launching a bill in the legislature.

Some of the preparatory steps: (This is not linear, but some of them may be going on simultaneously)

1. Gather a group of like-minded people
Find people who care about health freedom like you do, and want to be proactive to make a difference, and start meeting to discuss what can be done. Look for people with vision, and begin the study and search process.
2. Identify the Problem You Care About and Want to Address
 - What is the problem you have become aware of?
 - Is it an issue with health freedom? Is is something that impacts you as a consumer having access to the healing services of your choice? Be able to verbalize and write down the exact problem and how it impacts citizens.
3. Research the existing laws relating to the issue.
What is the actual legal situation impacting the issue? You may want to find help from an attorney or someone to help you research and understand the existing laws.
4. Understand this situation so deeply you can articulate it clearly and simply to others. The most important step in convincing others to make a change is first to convince them that there is a problem that needs to be solved. Have the actual statutes on your computer in your writing, in your speeches, in your presentations, and be able to articulate “The Problem” very easily.

- Every piece of literature you write should start with “The Problem”
- Every meeting with a legislator or stakeholder should start with “The Problem”
- Every speech to a public gathering should start with “The Problem”

5. Identify the Best Solution

Is a change needed to a law or to an agency rule?

Exactly what changes need to be made to remedy the situation?

What are the policy goals of your proposed legislation?

What would be the ideal statute which would provide the perfect climate for your issue?

There may be multiple ways to do this – look at several ways and the pros and cons of each. Try to envision ramifications to others of passing this change. Pick the best option.

Draft your first model legislation (Get help from an attorney sympathetic to your goals or person experienced in drafting. Legislators may want to have their own aides do the drafting, but try to have your own experts who care about the issue involved or do it completely)

6. Start Building Your Team

Some examples of skills you may need to pass legislation if it is controversial (contested). Don't be discouraged if you don't have all of these at the beginning. Start the process and attract the people you need to help. Take the time to start doing the work and your team will grow as your movement grows.

- Legal research
- Drafting legislative language
- Lobbying
- Database management
- Grassroots mobilization
- Speaking, writing, communicating
- Accounting of costs
- Fundraising

7. Develop a strategy: How to go about passing this legislation

- I. Incorporate your organization. Start with a 501(c)3 group, which can collect donations that are tax deductible because it is an educational group that does a limited amount of lobbying. When you are ready to introduce legislation, start a 501(c)4 group that can do unlimited lobbying. Or, even better, start both simultaneously. (See notes on “How to Start a Health Freedom Organization in Your State)
- II. Network with like-minded individuals and organizations. Educate them about: 1) The Problem 2) Your proposed solution 3) Your strategy 4) What they can do to help. Check out that they are comfortable with the approach and be open to modifying and improving it. Build an extensive group of people who support your

goals and strategy. Build relationships with them and the ability to communicate quickly with them.

- III. Network with other important individuals and groups who are “stakeholders” in this issue. (People who will be affected in some way, positively or negatively). Present the problem and the solution. See if they are comfortable with it. If they are not, what issues cause them concern? Can you work with them to address those issues to their satisfaction without sacrificing principles important to you? Some groups will be able to resolve their issues and support or be neutral on your bill. Others may not, and may oppose it. Evaluate their opposition and decide how much if any changes or compromises you are able or willing to make to resolve their concerns without jeopardizing issues important to you.

8. Determine who will lobby your bill.

- You can do it yourself as citizen lobbyists. If so, it is best to have the help of an attorney or person experienced in legal issues. This person should be willing to advise you on your language and the issues that come up if there is opposition. This person should also be willing to be at key meetings with legislators or opposition groups, and at hearings.
- You can hire a lobbyist who is experienced in lobbying. This requires funding to cover that major cost.
- What to look for in your lobbyist:
 - I. Experience at the legislature. Knowledgeable about the legislators and the legislative process
 - II. Respected at the legislature. Has relationships with many key legislators
 - III. Open to your goals and core principles. Willing to support what you want and work for your goals. Understands the concepts behind them. Even better, someone who agrees wholeheartedly with the need for the changes and your proposed solution.

9. Choose legislative authors for your bill

- An author or sponsor is required in introducing a bill. It is a legislator who will introduce, lobby for, and shepherd the bill through the legislative process. The author makes the final decisions on language he/she is comfortable with, and often negotiates compromises to get support from other groups or other legislators. Your author is your best champion in advocating for the bill. Typically, you need an author in each house (i.e. Senate and House)
- Do background research on potential authors before making your first choice. Consult with people who know the legislators. If you have hired a lobbyist, that person will be key in finding an author.
- What to look for in choosing your authors:
 - I. The author should be on the major policy committee that will first hear the bill. For example, if the bill will be heard first in the health committee, or in the committee dealing with professions and regulation, pick a legislator who sits on that committee
 - II. The author should be of the party that is in the majority in that house (Senate or House) ie. If Democrats control the House and Republicans

control the Senate, then get a Democratic author in the House and Republican author in the Senate. However, keep your issue as bipartisan as possible – show members of both parties how your concerns relate to them and their core values.

- III. The author should be respected among other legislators and respected on their committee. If they are a leader in their committee, it helps your bill move forward.
- IV. The author should share your core principles of health freedom. If they care deeply about your goals, they will work hard to lobby other legislators to have success in passing the bill. If they are passionate about your concerns, you have a winner!
- V. The author should be willing to respect your wishes and not cut deals behind your back or make changes to the bill that would be the opposite of what you want. He/she should be willing to involve you or your lobbyist in negotiations when there is opposition and compromises are forged.

10. Meet with your first choice of authors and explain 1) The Problem and 2) Your Solution. Explain why you have chosen this solution as opposed to other approaches. Gauge his/her support of your issues, and if it is positive, ask if she/he will author or sponsor your bill.

- You may want to reverse the process – first meet with many legislators from the main policy committee about your concerns and your bill, see who really is excited about it, and then ask one to be your author.
- Estimate your costs in passing the bill. Include lobbyists, communications such as printing, phone costs, etc.
- Set your strategy and plans with your resources in mind and develop a fundraising plan to meet your costs. Start your fundraising immediately to see if you will be able to raise the funding necessary to meet the costs.

11. Decide about decision-making. Who will make the decisions about your campaign? Will it be a formal, well-defined group such as the board or boards you set up? Will it be the people who end up meeting regularly and doing the work? Will you give your lobbyist power to negotiate and make deals, or will you retain decisions in your own group? Will you require consensus to go forward? (100 % agreement) Or a simple majority, or two-thirds majority? Have discussions about this and note in your meeting minutes what was decided.

Additionally, discuss who will make decisions at the Capitol when things are moving fast and quick decisions need to be made, for example during a hearing or a conference committee. Perhaps delegate this authority to your lobbyist and a very small group chosen by the larger group to represent them.

You have your mission. You have done your homework. You understand the issues. You can communicate them effectively. You have gathered your team and planned your strategy. You have developed grass-roots strength and support. You have an author. You have raised the funding.

It is time to launch your bill! You are on your way to success!