

Legislative Workshop for Advocates

Sponsored by Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)

Unitarian Universalist Church, Annapolis: October 2017

Introduction

- Paul Keegan (SURG)

The focus of the workshop is not on choosing legislation to support, but on how to support it effectively.

Shaping Legislation

- Claudia Barber (lawyer; teacher, intergovernmental relations)

Ms. Barber reviewed the stages of legislation:

- **DRAFT:** Citizens can approach legislators to introduce bills (188 MD legislators elected for 4-year terms). Bills may also be drafted by legislators, supposedly in response to needs of their constituency.
- **INTRODUCE:** Bills can be introduced in advance of legislature sessions.
- **LEGISLATIVE SPONSOR:** If a legislator agrees to sponsor a bill, then it is...
- **DRAFTED** by the Department of Legislative Service. Then their reading clerk refers it to a committee and has it evaluated for Fiscal and Policy Notes.
- **COMMITTEE:** Reads the draft.
- **FISCAL AND POLICY EVALUATION:** Produces a document evaluating cost and policy notes.
- **AMENDMENTS:** Multiple readings are possible.
- **HEARINGS AND TESTIMONY:** Multiple readings are possible.
- **SECOND CHAMBER:** Amendments can cause the bill to return; it can go back and forth.
- **GOVERNOR** has 30 days to veto.
- **LEGISLATION** may try to override the veto in 3/5 majority immediately (if vetoed late, it may have a special session, or be postponed to the next session).
- **RECORDS:** Folders for past bills are available at the Department of Legislative Services library in Annapolis. These contain testimony as well as the financial reports.

Doing the Research

- Amy Woodrum, Marie LaFerriere

The Maryland General Assembly has a nice website: bills, tabs on schedule, calendar, committee schedules for both house and senate, legislature listing and contacts by district, voting records,

legislators' biographies (helpful in identifying connections and favorite topics), videos of testimony, documents with amendments, study groups.

Note: Large fiscal notes indicate things that might fail. Some study groups sponsored by committees are not open to the public.

KNOW YOUR HISTORY: This can be done for a large part with web research. Look at existing laws, attempts to pass bills in previous years, and people interested in topic.

IDENTIFY YOUR ENEMIES (ANTICIPATE PUSHBACK): Identify the common arguments and misconceptions and prepare to fight against them.

FIND YOUR COALITION: create email lists, try to have conference calls, rallies, meetings to hammer out strategies, events to inform public

CREATE YOUR STRATEGY: create a set of talking points, create a list of allies in the legislature, reach out to supporters in legislature, gather groups to speak to legislators on the fence and train them in talking points and interests of legislators.

Facilitator-Led Breakout Sessions: "The Elevator Pitch"

- Marie LaFerriere

Hypothetical example:

- You have four people voting yes for funding historically black colleges equally and they live in districts that have historically black colleges.
- Find out how many of each district's students are going to school at historically black colleges in other counties.
- Contact alumni relations at the colleges and encourage them to visit their legislators in support of the bill.
- Look for a group that might lean toward supporting your bill and contact them.

Writing and Giving Testimony from Talking Points

- Briayna Cuffie (Public Policy Institute)

Bill Hearing: Any bills filed by the deadline get a hearing. There are deadlines to sign up for testifying at a hearing.

- The sponsor speaks first, followed by testimony by Proponents (often a lead advocacy organization organizes the witnesses) followed by Opponents.
- There is a great benefit to working with coalitions, since they can get everyone organized.
- The public can testify (1) in support, (2) support with amendments or (3) oppose. You usually get 2-10 days for hearings. Most hearings start at 1pm, but they may go in an unpredictable order and could run as late as 7pm.
- You are on camera, so learn to look professional and friendly and concise. Don't give exasperated sighs even in the audience. A presentation can be arranged ahead of time with staffers, especially if there was a lead sponsor; otherwise, don't expect it to show up

on a screen. Don't spend time on stuff that won't help your point (e.g. who are you might only matter in some cases).

- Be prepared for a 2-3 minute timer.
- A well-organized coalition will plant some questions with the sponsor and committee members, and can extend your time to talk up to 10 minutes. Don't make up an answer, but say you can find out and get the information to them (credibility issue).
- A well-organized coalition will try to get different points made by different people speaking. Try to get people that represent different interest groups and tell individual stories. Personal stories are good (e.g. personal recovery from abuse, girl scout with life changing event, etc.). But some people are very data driven, and if you can show both, that's perfect.
- You can submit things in writing instead of speaking.

The support with amendments could be formally drafted with a committee member already having agreed to sponsor the amendment, or it could be more casual.

Almost every decision on a bill happens at the committee level - this is the place to focus your attention and these are the legislators to focus on.

Forming relationships: you can use fund-raising events, ribbon cutting, school connections, a local coffee or bagel place as an opportunity to talk to legislators. Invite them to visit about a bill outside of legislative season.

Paul Keegan made point: Watching videos you get a feel for people's politics, can make eye contact for particular points.

By 4:30 or 5pm many legislators are answering their own phones.

Don't use a form for emails. Make it personal.

Chairs and subchairs of committee will keep stuff from everyone if you make it clear you are writing to them as a chair.

Who to speak to: your representative, someone who has shown prior interest in your cause, legislators who have power, heads of committee, leader of senate (president) and leader of house (speaker). You can ask the sponsor of bill who to speak to.

Be very polite to office workers and everyone you meet.

Meetings will take about 10-15 minutes.

Research the common ground on the person, figure out how to connect with them (colleges, spouses)

Meeting Request from Constituent should be the subject line of the email. If you leave a phone message, leave both your phone number and email address. It's good to leave your "snail mail" address as well.

Legislative Outreach, Getting the Meeting

- Ann Ciekot

Practice ahead of time with the talking points.

Think about the order of the points.

Prepare a folder with a sheet for person (who are you, how do you feel about issue).

Practice your pitch if you met a legislator for same topic at an earlier session.



Thanks to Jenny Zito for these notes!