



ADVOCACY FUNDAMENTALS

Jewish Community Relations Council | 2019 - 2020



“If I am not for me, who is for me; and if I am (only) for myself, what am I. And if not now, when?”

– Hillel, Pirkei Avot, 1:14

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PURSUE JUSTICE!

– Deuteronomy 16:20

ABOUT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

Who We Are

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) is a convening body for local Jewish agencies involved in advocacy and public affairs. Greater Philadelphia's JCRC is part of a national network that works to provide a Jewish voice on national public policy, as well as having our voices heard locally and in our State Capitol. We are a non-partisan organization engaged in issues of importance to the Jewish community.

What We Do

We work with diverse stakeholders to develop consensus positions on issues of concern and to advocate for these positions – both within the community and at the policy-making level. Locally, we are the hub around which diverse groups can come together to air concerns, find common ground, and raise public awareness. Through dialogue and advocacy we work for a more just, inclusive world.

Lead and Convene

We address a wide range of policy concerns from gun violence prevention and voting and civic engagement to combating anti-Semitism and the organized efforts to delegitimize the state of Israel. Our portfolio also includes advocating for protection of the safety net including hunger relief, protecting our aging community, and Medicaid and Medicare. We issue action alerts and informational documents that provide ways to get involved.

“If Moses could lobby Pharaoh, you can lobby your [government]”

— Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, President, RespectAbility

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

We advocate any time we make our voices heard, educate, argue or act for a cause or position that matters to us. Civic engagement and legislative advocacy are important responsibilities in a democracy. Lobbying – seeking to influence a politician or public official – is an important form of advocacy.

For decades, the Jewish Federation system has been at the forefront of matters affecting Jews around the world, using our voice to influence important public policy debates. We continue to advocate because elected officials and their staffs need to hear from their constituents regarding their actions and their votes. Furthermore, we are inspired by our Jewish values to repair the world (*tikkun olam*). And our history has taught us that our actions truly make a difference.

It is critical that Jewish leaders meet face-to-face with elected officials or their staff on the local, state and federal levels as a way to not only affect legislation but to build and maintain meaningful relationships with those in government who can make a difference. There are many ways to advocate and each of us has an important role. Every voice makes a difference.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS OF EFFECTIVE JEWISH ADVOCACY

Courtesy of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Any advocacy effort, whether lobbying, writing letters, or media outreach, must answer four basic questions:

1. Why is this good public policy?

Every issue has consequences on local, national, and international levels. It is important to address these issues, and explain why immediate action is crucial to the health and well-being of our communities, nation and world.

2. Why is this issue important to me as an individual?

The best advocates are the ones who can personalize their message. Doing so will show your elected officials that you personally took the time to consider an issue's impact on your life. Additionally, personalizing your message conveys a confidence and openness that will bring emotion and validity to any letter or lobby visit.

3. Why is this issue important to me as a member of the Jewish community?

The Jewish voice is both unique and essential. To be a Jew is to care about the world around us, to hear the voice of the prophets in our head and be engaged in the ongoing work of *tikkun olam*. Both the Jewish tradition and the public policy arena rely on this voice to communicate the needs and desires of the Jewish community.

4. What is my legislative ask?

From zoning permits to sewage treatment plants to power plant emissions, your elected official works on a number of issues. It is important to be specific when speaking or writing to them to ensure that their actions match your intentions.

By addressing these issues, organizations, congregations and individuals will make their advocacy efforts personal, persuasive and pointed.

ADVOCACY HOW-TO'S

Contacting Elected Officials

Adapted from the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford

The most effective ways to contact your elected officials are by personal visit, letter, phone or email. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Governor is the chief executive. Our legislature is known as the General Assembly and is comprised of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The General Assembly makes the laws that direct the executive branch; it is one of the few state legislatures that is considered full-time, although practically speaking, session does not take place during July and August, when legislators work from their district offices.

The various counties also have their own governments. In Philadelphia, there is a Mayor (executive) and City Council (legislative). The surrounding counties have County Executives or Commissioners.

To contact state officials, you may contact either their Harrisburg office or their local office. As with federal officials, your most effective means of communication with your elected state representatives are personal visits, phone calls and letters. To find your state legislator and their contact information, go to legis.state.pa.us.

“One person can make a difference, and everyone should try.”

— John F. Kennedy

Personal Meetings

To schedule a meeting with a member of Congress, it's best to go through the Washington, D.C., office. If you want to invite your member of Congress to speak with you or an organization in your neighborhood, you may call the local or the Washington office. The same is true of State or County elected officials. For in-district meetings, contact the local office of the elected official. To meet in the State Capitol, City Hall or County office, contact the office in Harrisburg or the appropriate city/county office. If the meeting is with the elected official rather than staff, you may be given more time when the official is in his/her district office; however, with Members of Congress, most policy discussions with staff, may take place in DC as the District Offices are usually focused on constituent services.

ADVOCACY HOW TO'S (CONTINUED)

Before The Meeting

Preparation is key for your legislative meetings, whether it is with the elected official or their staff. Before you go, make sure you're ready.

Decide On Your Issues

If you are going with a group, decide on the issues ahead of time and disseminate them to the group.

Do Your Homework

Participate in calls or meetings regarding the bills/issues on which you will be advocating. Make sure you read materials on the issues that are provided, including background papers and newspaper articles. Whenever possible, bring to the meeting information and materials supporting your position. Legislators are required to take positions on many different issues and may sometimes lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. It is therefore helpful to share with them information and examples that clearly demonstrate the impact or benefits associated with a particular issue or piece of legislation. It is also helpful to have an informational document or material to give to the legislator and/or staff person.

Learn About The People With Whom You Will Be Meeting

Knowing about your “target” makes it easier to engage. Look up their biography. Does that elected official have a record of support for the issue? What is the best way to approach that individual? For example, for some elected officials, making the ask personal (why the issue is important to you) is the way to go; however, if the elected official is a fiscal conservative, personal stories may not resonate. Also, don't be offended if you meet with a staff person instead of the elected official, or if a staff person is present at the meeting. Legislators make decisions largely based on the recommendations of their staffs, so the legislative assistant will often guide the issue to completion.

Be Professional

Dress appropriately for the meeting (comfortable shoes are advised if you are going to the Hill) and make sure you make eye contact and give a firm handshake.

Practice

If you are a novice at advocating, practice what you are going to say, either with the group with whom you will be advocating or in front of a mirror. Remember, legislators represent you and they are interested in what their constituents have to say.

JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL STAFF

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“On reaching the shores of the United States, Jews found a safe haven. The rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights have allowed us the freedom to practice our religion without interference and to live in this republic in safety.

A fundamental principle of Judaism is *hakara hatov* – recognizing benefits afforded us and giving expression to our appreciation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Jewish citizen to participate in the democratic system, which safeguards the freedoms which we enjoy. The most fundamental responsibility incumbent on each individual is to register and to vote.

Therefore, I urge all members of the Jewish community to fulfill their obligations by registering as soon as possible and by voting. By this, we can express our appreciation and contribute to the continued security of our community.”

— *Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, 1984*



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of Greater Philadelphia

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