

## **Communicating Effectively with Your Legislators**

Effectively Express Your Message and Differences of Opinion in the Public Policy Arena  
Disagree Diplomatically

It's easy to get frustrated...

when lawmakers or special interest groups support legislation that infringes on the rights of responsible dog owners and breeders. In order to effectively lobby against harmful laws we must be credible, persuade our elected officials, and demonstrate respect for the legislative process.

Perceptions of problems... produce demands for a public policy response. For example, a dog bite incident may lead to calls for banning certain dog breeds. In these situations it is important to focus on educating our elected officials about what strategies are truly effective and how poorly crafted legislation can negatively impact responsible owners. Remember, our elected officials are trying to do the right thing. This is why it is imperative that responsible dog owners and breeders become a positive resource. The AKC® can provide information and resources, but it's up to you to participate in the legislative process.

### **Credibility is based on knowledge**

- Familiarize yourself with the proposed law as well as the existing ordinances in your community or state.
- Educate yourself about the specific problem in your community and possible solutions:
  - Is a single irresponsible owner creating a problem?
  - Do current laws already address the issue?

### **Persuasion is the Key to Success**

- If appropriate, offer an alternative solution; even provide sample ordinances.
- Effective enforcement of existing laws and providing responsible dog ownership education is often the answer. Share AKC public education materials and pursue options for distributing them in your community.

### **Respect**

- Always be professional and polite in communications with elected officials.
- When you disagree with a position, always focus on persuasive arguments rather than personal criticisms. It is never appropriate to use foul language or derogatory names.
- Remember you represent the purebred dog community when you interact with elected officials.
- Avoid threats and never raise your voice or lose your temper.

### **Prepare for Action**

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### **Tips for Success**

1. Follow your local news carefully. Watch for the kinds of events that may trigger a dog related proposal by your local government. Don't forget to read the public notices section of the local newspaper. This is where important legislative meetings, hearings, and details are usually announced.
2. Take advantage of local information. Your city or county courthouse, your public library, the staff or clerk of the local government, and even members of the media are all equipped to answer your legislative questions. Most phone books list numbers of local and state government offices, and many governments send free informational materials.
3. Familiarize yourself with the local legislative process. What is involved in getting a proposal passed into law in your area? Are public hearings required before the assembly or city council can vote? Are meetings open to the public?
4. Know how you can become involved. How can you get on the agenda to speak at a hearing? Are there rules for speaking? How far in advance are hearings announced, and where are such announcements posted?
5. Get to know your elected officials. Learn who they are, what they support, their personal interests, when they were elected and when they come up for re-election. Arrange to meet with your local officials to introduce yourself and your club's interests.
6. Involve others. Encourage club members to take an interest in legislative concerns. Share your legislative news with them regularly, so that they will not be surprised if you suddenly need their help. Appoint a Legislative Liaison for your club.
7. Communicate with other groups. Talk to groups that share your concern for canine welfare. In addition to other dog clubs, veterinary societies or animal owner groups make valuable allies.

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