



Care and Choice at the End of Life

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING and BASIC LOBBYING for C&C and CCAN

Volunteer Action Network Toolkit

Grassroots Organizing and Basic Lobbying

Compassion & Choices deeply values the volunteers, partners and supporters who join in grassroots organizing and lobby legislators and other public officials to support end-of-life options, including medical aid in dying. Before you undertake any type of organizing or lobbying activities, please contact the Compassion & Choices staff working in your state or a local Action Team leader to coordinate efforts that may already be underway.

Lobbying includes any basic communication with our government: community members (voters) like you visiting, calling and writing your elected representatives to explain what you think of certain policies and how you would like to see them vote to influence the positions they take. It's democracy in action — and you can be a part of it. In addition to legislative visits and communication, other forms of lobbying include testifying at public hearings and participating in lobby days.

Grassroots Organizing is putting the power of people in action. One person can lobby. One person can organize others to lobby and have an exponential impact. This toolkit takes you through the basics of getting involved in your state legislative process, though much of it applies to the federal political process as well.

Legislative visits can be done remotely using technology, at the district office, local state office or before/after legislator-hosted meet and greets, town halls, etc. Legislative visits can include your state legislator, who work in your state capitol legislature, or federal legislators, who work in D.C.

Lobbying your state legislators can be one of the most impactful actions you take to support authorizing, improving or protecting medical aid in dying and other end-of-life policy issues or legislation in your state. This toolkit will walk you through the basics.

TIP: Know your state and our strategy.

Every state is different in terms of legislative efforts and overarching strategies planned by Compassion & Choices. Please work with the staff in your state or a local Action Team leader when scheduling legislative visits.

Writing Letters to Public Officials

Writing letters to your state representatives and other officials is a great first step and a good way to build toward a legislative visit. That's why we dedicated an entire toolkit to that subject. Click

here for the [Communicating With Your Legislators and the Media Toolkit](#). You can also visit the Compassion & Choices [Volunteer Resource Center](#) page on our website.

Preparing for a Legislative Meeting

Whatever the nature of your visit — supporting specific legislation, promoting the drafting of new legislation, protecting existing legislation or soliciting support to improve end-of-life care — these basic steps will help ensure a successful meeting with a lawmaker or their staff. If you're not sure who represents you, use your address and this [Find Your Legislator](#) tool to find out.

- 1. *Make an appointment.*** Meeting with community members and local issue groups is a part of your legislator's job. It is the primary responsibility of their staff so they will very likely accommodate you. Most meetings will last about 15 minutes and it is common for the appointment to be with staff and not the lawmaker.

TIP: Meetings with staff

If it's possible to meet directly with a legislator, that's fantastic. If the legislator is unavailable, use this meeting as an opportunity to introduce the issue to your legislator's office staff. Give them as much time, attention and respect as you would the legislator.

- 2. *Prepare your points.*** At the beginning of the meeting, summarize your ideas and concerns. Plan two to three key messages you want to convey and then deliver each point with concise supporting information. Consult the Compassion & Choices staff working in your state and/or our website for talking points. Afterward, let the legislator or their staff ask questions which you can answer with additional supporting evidence.
- 3. *Do a little research.*** Look up your lawmakers voting record and bills they've sponsored or co-sponsored. Review the committee(s) they serve on and how that committee(s) vote on other legislation. Look them up and follow them on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) Instagram and/or BlueSky to gain more insight into how they vote.

TIP: Stick to one issue

Resist the temptation to spend time discussing other issues or legislation. Use the time you have face-to-face to make the greatest impact by staying focused on one topic.

4. **Include a personal story, even if it isn't yours.** Personal stories are effective because they put a human face and emotion to what may have been an abstract policy position to a lawmaker. If you don't have a personal story, consider sharing one of someone close to you or even a story you were moved by in the media. It can be helpful to print the story or bring a news clipping to share. If you can't find a story to share, you may use one of Compassion & Choices' Storytellers whose stories can be found on the [Stories page of our website](#).
5. **Bring Compassion & Choices materials to share.** Consider bringing copies of our magazine, brochures, polling and fact sheets to the meeting, many of which can be [downloaded from the resources section of our website](#) and printed or emailed. Contact the Compassion & Choices staff working in your state or the A/O Volunteer Manager at volunteer@compassionandchoices.org, if you need a large quantity for a broader legislative outreach. Please allow two weeks for delivery.
6. **Dress as if this is an important meeting – because it is.** This is a business meeting. Even if you know your representative personally, make a good impression by wearing business professional attire. If you are uncertain about the culture of your state capitol and what to wear, check with the Compassion & Choices staff working in your state. The same applies if you're meeting at a district office or at a coffee shop.
7. **Confirm twice and be on time.** Depending on the timeframe, confirm your appointment a few days prior AND the morning of (or the day before if it is a morning meeting). It's important to send the right message about your commitment by being punctual and then patient. Legislative offices are busy, and you will probably have to wait. Not all legislators have their own office so be prepared to be flexible. At the beginning of the meeting, confirm how much time you have (likely 10-15 minutes) and adjust accordingly.
8. **Set a goal.** If you have an established rapport with your legislator, your goal(s) may be different if you are just beginning to establish a relationship. For example, if there is a bill with an impending vote versus you want them to co-sponsor a bill in the future. Is legislature in session or not? Many factors will drive the goals you set. Keep it simple, but set an intention.

TIP: Deliver petitions in person

To add emphasis to your legislative visit, you can personally deliver a stack of signed petitions, postcards or letters to the lawmaker you are meeting with. It will increase the impact of your visit and add weight to the signatures. Always make a copy of petitions and send them to: Compassion & Choices' Processing Center PO Box 485, Etna, NH 03750-0485 or directly to the Compassion & Choices staff working in your state.

9. **Be courteous and respectful.** It can be difficult encountering someone who doesn't share the same perspective as you. While most legislators and staff are polite listeners, some may

become defensive or aggressive if they are staunchly opposed to medical aid in dying. No matter their position (or disposition), patiently listen to their concerns and respond calmly, sticking to the facts and to your personal experiences. Remain calm and reasonable, professional and diplomatic in the face of misinformation and contention.

- 10. *Send a thank-you note.*** Send a short email or hand-written note to the legislator and/or staffer with whom you met. You can also use this as an opportunity to mention anything you may have forgotten in the meeting, or recap any action points or promises made by the staff member. You might also raise new facts or evidence based on what you discussed. Be sure to send or provide any materials, articles or polling data that were discussed or requested.
- 11. *Stay in touch.*** Send an occasional message with a news release, link to an article or other success story from the movement. Become a subject matter expert so that your legislator can look to you as a trusted resource on this issue.

Appearing or Testifying at a Legislative Committee Public Hearing

Once legislation has been introduced in any state, the legislative process can be complex, and each state is unique. Compassion & Choices has teams of experienced staff members working to help guide legislation through the process of becoming law. Committee hearings, held by the legislative committees responsible for a particular bill based on its content, are one key step in the legislative process. Hearings are also an invaluable opportunity for a bill's supporters (and opponents) to marshal their best arguments and to turn out key champions to either help move the bill forward or block its progress. Passing legislation needs the visible support of volunteers and activists at committee hearings, which are almost always open to the public. Here are some guidelines for legislative committee hearings:

- 1. *Show up – whether the hearing is about an existing law or new legislation.*** There is power in numbers. It's critical to express broad support both for proposed medical aid-in-dying legislation and for protecting or improving existing legislation. The best way to support the process is to attend the hearing, and bring a friend! Some states may have a requirement that you register to testify if you are testifying via Zoom. Most states have a streaming platform for viewing public committee hearings live, online.
- 2. *If you plan to speak, be prepared.*** Hearings usually include an opportunity for public comment. Anyone interested in speaking at a hearing is asked to make a brief (usually no more than two to three minutes) statement. Compassion & Choices staff working in your state can help craft your message, fact-check the content, advise on effective messaging and ensure that you keep to the time limit. Practice with a timer so you are not rushed, and have time to finish. Some people may bring a sign or a picture of a loved one.
- 3. *The same dress code guidelines for a legislative visit apply – this is an important occasion.*** Be sure to wear business professional attire. Advocates sometimes wear our yellow t-shirts,

when appropriate, to create a visual image of solidarity. Yellow, blue or teal scarves, ties, sweaters or shawls are welcome as well!

4. **Conduct yourself with dignity and grace.** Avoid side conversations during the hearing. Shouting, booing, cheering, applauding, or even sighing and eye-rolling are not appropriate for a legislative hearing. Compassion & Choices advocates are known to be calm, graceful, respectful and intelligent. You may appear on camera if the hearing is being televised, streamed or recorded. Keep in mind that public hearings are part of the public record.
5. **Sign in.** In most states, there is a public record sign-in sheet in the hearing room where you will print your name and whether you are FOR or AGAINST a bill.
6. **Follow up and thank the committee.** If you are asked to provide any fact sheets, polling information or other materials, be sure to send them as soon as possible after the hearing. Send a thank-you email to the committee members.
7. **Stay in touch.** Send an occasional message with a news release, link to an article or other success story from the field.

TIP: Each state has a unique process.

Different rules and policies apply in different states, capitol buildings and hearing rooms. You may need to go through a metal detector, show ID or complete other entry requirements. Signs, banners and other visual props may *or may not* be appropriate or allowed. Outside food and drink is discouraged in public hearing rooms with the exception of drink containers with sealed lids. Plan for parking availability and fees when thinking about punctuality and logistics.

All About Lobby Day

While individual meetings with a legislator or legislative staff are an important way to take action, for even greater impact, consider gathering a group of people and scheduling as many meetings with legislators and/or staff as possible in a single day. Done well, a lobby day can significantly elevate awareness of support for medical aid in dying in the community. Follow these simple tips to hold a successful lobby day in your state capitol. Work with the Compassion & Choices staff in your state to complete your lobby day planning. In some situations, there are good reasons to hold multiple lobby day events over the course of a legislative session. You may plan a lobby day in conjunction with a public hearing or in association with a specific date or other events.

TIP: Lobby day and legislative meetings guidelines are the same

Points 1-9 above in the Legislative Meeting section of this toolkit all apply to lobby day visits as well! Make an appointment, be prepared, do some research, share a story, bring materials, dress appropriately, confirm the appointment, set a goal for the appointment.

- 1. *Schedule your meetings in advance.*** All other tips for legislative meetings above apply to a lobby day meeting as well. Remember, meeting with staff is also a win! Schedule key lobby day efforts around the legislative calendar and avoid times when the floor is in session, or during regular committee meetings and other scheduling conflicts.
- 2. *Check in.*** Know where the central volunteer check-in and reporting home base or headquarters is in the capitol building. Compassion & Choices staff or other volunteers maintain a space in a central location for people to check in, report results, replenish materials, etc.
- 3. *Buffer a few minutes between meetings.*** Offices are not always close together, some meetings may run longer than expected, and others may not start on time.
- 4. *Be prepared to adapt your meeting location.*** Not all legislators have private offices, so be prepared to hold your meeting in another location (including a hallway or stairwell!). Stay flexible and cheerful even when logistics are stressful.
- 5. *Bring enough materials.*** Carry a folder that includes a basic letter outlining your position and the appropriate Compassion & Choices branded materials to offer to each office you meet with. You can also create a “leave behind” folder to leave with the lawmaker or their staff.
- 6. *Draft a strong, basic point to deliver and story to share.*** This can be the same point(s) outlined in your letter and/or testimony. Keep your opening remarks brief to ensure time for questions and discussion. When possible, include a personal story. Stick to one issue.
- 7. *Report your results!*** If you get affirmation that a legislator is supportive, opposed or undecided on medical aid in dying, let your Compassion & Choices field staff know. The information becomes part of our ongoing legislator tracker. Make notes about anything pertinent immediately after the meeting.
- 8. *Follow up.*** If the legislator has concerns or questions, follow up with them right away with an email providing answers to their questions and effective talking points for their concerns. Stay in touch and send an occasional message with a news release, link to an article or other success story from the movement.

One of the most important things to realize about lobbying lawmakers is that it is an ongoing dialogue and relationship. Send occasional emails with links to articles and other online news. You will become a trusted adviser on this issue, or perhaps change someone’s perspective over the course of time. Remember, lobbying is the simple act of participating in democracy — you are a constituent who votes, and has ideas and opinions about end-of-life healthcare policy that affects the lives of the people in your community and your state. Legislators work for their constituents, and part of their job is to listen to the people! That means YOU!

FUN FACT: The term “lobbying” originated because conversations about legislation

often took place in the lobby of the state house, hotels, and other venues where legislative events were happening.

Thank you

Once again, we're so grateful that you've chosen Compassion & Choices as a place to invest your time, energy and talent as a volunteer. Volunteers make change happen!

Resources

Sample Letter to a Legislator

Dear **YourLawmaker**,

Citizens of **YourState** should be free to choose how they live — and when the time comes, how they die. This private, personal decision should belong to all of us, free from government interference.

BillName# would allow a terminally ill, mentally capable adult to request medication from a doctor that the person may self-ingest at a time of their choosing, should suffering become unbearable.

Eleven other states and Washington, D.C., (22% of the population nationwide) have authorized medical aid in dying, and the time is now for **YourState** to provide this option for the dying. Too many suffer needlessly, endure unrelenting pain or resort to violent means at the end of life when medical aid could help them die peacefully.

Please vote yes on **BillName#** and allow people who are terminally ill and of sound mind to consider this end-of-life option.

Our laws need to evolve so that we protect the decisions and freedoms of patients and citizens at the end of their lives. The time has come for the citizens of **YourState** to have access to this compassionate option. I urge you to vote YES on **BillName#**. Thank you for your service to our state, **YourLawmaker**.

Sincerely,
YourName

Sample Testimony for a Public Hearing

Good morning, Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is **Your FirstName LastName**, and I'm from **YourCity**

Citizens of **YourState** should be free to choose how they live — and when the time comes, how they die. This private, personal decision should belong to all of us, free from government interference.

BillName# would allow a terminally ill, mentally capable adult to request medication from a doctor that the person may self-ingest at a time of their choosing, should suffering become unbearable. My wife Joellyn died a protracted dying process from cancer, and suffered needlessly at the end. A law like **BillName#** would have eased her suffering tremendously.

Eleven other states and Washington, D.C., (22% of the population nationwide) have authorized medical aid in dying, and the time is now for **YourState** to provide this option for the terminally ill. Too many suffer needlessly, endure unrelenting pain or resort to violent means at the end of life when medical aid could help them die peacefully.

Please vote yes on **BillName#** and allow people who are terminally ill and of sound mind to consider this end-of-life treatment option.

Our laws need to evolve so that we protect the decisions and freedoms of patients and citizens at the end of their lives. The time has come for the citizens of **YourState** to be able to consider this compassionate option. I urge you to vote YES on **BillName#**.

I thank the committee for hearing me today and for your service to our state.

YourName

PLANNING A LOBBY DAY

Strategize and coordinate with the Compassion & Choices staff working in your state to plan a lobby day. Use Mobilize.us to create your event, send out invitations and grow the volunteer base needed to pass a law to authorize, protect or improve medical aid in dying legislation

Things to Consider

- What is the goal?
- Who are your target lawmakers/committees?
- How many advocates will show up?
- Will Compassion & Choices staff attend?
- Is the lobby day connected to a public hearing on a medical aid-in-dying bill or other events?
- Will there be a presentation/speaker to kick it off or wrap it up?

Logistics

- Ensure your lobby day is scheduled for a day that legislators will be at the capitol; be sure to schedule it for a time of day when they are not on the floor or in committee.
- Are other groups lobbying on the same day?
- Is there a room that can be reserved, or will the headquarters be in the cafe or other designated public area?
- Is there/do you need internet or wifi?
- What is the parking situation?
- Do capitol police need to be notified?
- Are there any special considerations such as going through a metal detector or particular entrance?
- Is the central location/headquarters handicap accessible?

Volunteers

- Consider a pre-lobby day webinar training or meeting for people who have signed up.
- Ensure people make appointments with their legislator in advance.
- Determine who will visit legislators if no advocate from that district is in attendance.
- Conduct day-of-event coaching on communicating with legislators.
- Send them this toolkit!
- Make assignments for volunteer roles for the day: Lobbying, runner, sign-in sheets, results sheets, refreshments, etc.
- Create target legislators list, participants list, name tags, sign-in sheets and results sheets.
- Assemble folders and materials to leave with legislators and their staff.

Media

- Will you schedule a press conference in conjunction with the lobby day?
- Do you have a prepared storyteller, physician, clergy, etc., for interviews?
- Will you do a Facebook Live event?
- Will you need a volunteer or professional photographer?

Promotion

- Have Compassion & Choices email supporters with your lobby day details.
- Have Compassion & Choices create an event to put on the events calendar on our website.
- Promote your lobby day on the state Facebook page.
- Alert your personal network on social media and email.

Materials and Supplies

- Get fact sheets, magazines, folders, yellow t-shirts, pens, bags and any other Compassion & Choices branded material. *Order through Compassion & Choices field staff working in your state or the National Volunteer Program manager at least two weeks in advance.*
- Provide bottled water, energy bars and other refreshments for volunteers.
- Provide a map of the capitol building and office locations.
- Bring signage, a tablecloth or a banner if needed.

A lobby day can be planned well in advance or on the spur of the moment. With ready volunteers and a little organization, you can plan a successful lobby day in a few days or weeks, but if you have the luxury of time, a lobby day can be planned over the course of months.

Remember the Mission, Vision and Values of Compassion and Choices in your communications, whether written or verbal. Letters to legislators, committees, and to the editor of publications are excellent material to develop testimony (written or verbal) and vice versa. Choose your primary point and develop it. Compassion & Choices may have talking points and messaging for some states.

Mission

Compassion & Choices improves care, expands options and empowers everyone to chart their end-of-life journey.

Vision

A society that affirms life, accepts the inevitability of death, embraces expanded options for compassionate dying and enables everyone to choose end-of-life care that reflects their values, priorities and beliefs.

Values

Compassionate in our commitment to dying patients having access to needed care at the end of life and being free of unwanted treatment, suffering or interference.

Respectful of the autonomy of individuals to decide what end-of-life options are best for them and their loved ones.

Courageous in our willingness to confront the toughest end-of-life health challenges, disrupt the broken status quo and protect an individual's right to self-determination.

Credible in all our education, advocacy and partnerships — our efforts are grounded in objective research and demonstrable facts.

Resilient in our capacity to respond to opportunities and threats in the movement, so that we can achieve our vision as quickly as possible.