



## Community Social Services – Strike/Solidarity School Lobbying Campaign Toolbox

### LOBBYING ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES – GENERAL INFO

#### Lobbying – General Guidelines

Community and union members form powerful lobby groups. As voters, we are a very influential constituency.

Despite this power, many of us are not confident with the process of lobbying, especially if we've never done it before. We must deal with our hesitations about politicians before we begin the process.

#### Fears About Lobbying Politicians

Many of us believe politicians know more than we do or they wouldn't be in decision-making positions. We worry that we aren't articulate enough, or that we won't be able to answer questions.

Remember: the politician's job is to serve us. That's why they get elected to office. Never forget that the power exists with us – the voters.

Politicians are often very responsive to the voters, the people who can affect their future. This can be especially noticeable in periods before an election is to be called.

Many of our fears about lobbying can be addressed by looking at some groups that have lobbied government on issues that touch the average citizen. Who were their members? What made them credible spokespersons? What approaches did they take? What were the results?

There are probably similarities between these groups and our own attempts to organize a lobby.

#### It's Not a Waste of Time

Another obstacle to lobbying is the view that it's a waste of time—that we, alone, can't make a difference. But if our voices aren't heard, then our opponents will be the only group to get the ear of the decision-makers.

Too often, we measure our lobbying success on the outcome of legislation.



**TAKING A STAND because we care.**

In fact, there are many measures of victory in lobbying. For example: putting our passion for the issue ahead of our fear; having our concerns heard; receiving a response to a phone call or letter; meeting face-to-face with an elected representative.

Even if we don't directly see or speak to the politician because he or she is avoiding us, they do get the message that the issue is important to the community.

## TELEPHONE LOBBYING

Telephoning elected representatives—Municipal Council members or MLAs—can be a very effective form of lobbying.

### Numbers Count

The more calls an office receives, the more evident it will be to the politician that the issue is significant.

Here are some tips for an effective telephone lobby:

- Establish a group of people who will be calling during a specified period of time
- Ensure that every member of your group makes a call
- Ask each member to recruit another friend/colleague/ally to phone

### Reaching an Elected Representative or Administrative Staff

Municipal politicians, based in their communities, tend to be easier to reach than MLAs, who travel between their constituencies and Victoria.

All Municipalities in BC have websites, where council members have their contact information listed.

In larger cities, there will be a city clerk who fields calls from the public; the clerk may transfer your call to the councillor, or may take a message.

In smaller cities or communities, many council members answer their own phones and will make time to hear your concerns or set up a meeting with you.

You can reach your MLA either at their constituency office or in their Victoria office, when the legislature is in session. But it is most effective to make contact at the constituency office, as a constituent—a voter.

If you don't know who your MLA is, the BC government website has an MLA locator: [www.leg.bc.ca/mla](http://www.leg.bc.ca/mla)



**TAKING A STAND** because we care.

If your call is “screened” by a city clerk or constituency assistant, leave a definite message (see **Message Box**), stating your views briefly, and request that the politician return your call. Also, follow-up with another call if you don’t hear back in a few days.

### Speaking Points

Prepare some notes in advance, based on the **Message Box** and the set of **Specific Examples** that you generate during your Strike/Solidarity School meetings.

If you are leaving a voicemail or written message with a city clerk or constituency assistant, keep it brief and general. Explain that you have some concerns about BC’s community social service sector—and its impact in your municipality or constituency—that you would like to discuss with the elected representative.

## LETTER LOBBYING

A key lobbying strategy in this CSS strike aversion campaign involves letter writing: registering complaints with the provincial government. This can be done through letters to the Premier’s office, with the Minister of Social Development (Harry Bloy: [harry.bloy.mla@leg.bc.ca](mailto:harry.bloy.mla@leg.bc.ca)) and the Minister of Children and Family Development (Mary McNeil: [mary.mcneil.mla@leg.bc.ca](mailto:mary.mcneil.mla@leg.bc.ca)), and with MLAs from your own constituency.

If you don’t know who your MLA is, the BC government website has an MLA locator: [www.leg.bc.ca/mla](http://www.leg.bc.ca/mla)

The *CSSFairDeal.ca* website includes a sample letter that can be uploaded and emailed automatically to the appropriate Ministers. You can also erase and replace the content in that section and use the area for a personalized message. Make use of this site as a resource and encourage others to as well.

Here are some tips for an effective letter lobby:

- List the name and address of the elected representative correctly
- Identify yourself, and the fact that you live or work in the municipality or constituency, and describe the type of work you do
- Be brief and concise (less than one page with paragraphs less than six lines)
- Stick to key messages and issues identified in **Message Box**
- Request action, including responding to your letter
- Coordinate other individuals or groups to send similar letters at the same time
- Obtain supporting letters from other unions, groups, and individuals



**TAKING A STAND because we care.**

## IN-PERSON LOBBYING

In person lobbying is an important way for you, as a constituent, to reach municipal or provincial politicians.

It can be helpful to attend meetings with a small group of constituents who share your concerns. A lobby delegation of a few people is large enough to demonstrate the importance of the issue to your elected representative, but still small enough for it to be an informal meeting

### Essential Steps for Effective In-Person Lobbying

1. **Arrange a pre-lobby meeting.** Members of your lobby delegation should meet in advance to discuss what you're going to say.
2. **Plan the agenda.** Decide what you want to discuss and the points you want to make. Practice making your pitch. If you are lobbying in a group, choose a spokesperson and a recorder.
3. **Know your audience.** Keep your politician's interests in mind. Some politicians will be genuinely interested in fair contracts for CSS workers and the wellbeing of the sector. Others will be concerned with their own interests. Stress the impact on the community. Remember to stick to your subject. Your goal is to persuade the politician to support your position.
4. **Know your subject.** Anticipate questions and arguments and be prepared to respond. Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to some points—offer to get back with information and be sure you follow through. Contact your representative on the CSS Bargaining Association if you need more information.
5. **Be clear and concise.** Don't try to cover too much ground. Stick to key issues and examples from the Message Box. Explain your position. Don't assume the politician understands the issue from your perspective. Speak confidently and persuasively.
6. **Be a good listener.** Try to determine areas of agreement. Avoid arguments and don't lecture. If the politician favours your position, ask for help in persuading the government generally and the Ministers of Social Development and Children and Family Development specifically.
7. **Leave the door open.** Try to prevent outright rejection of your position. Emphasize your areas of agreement, not your difference.
8. **Don't get discouraged.** Not every politician will be sympathetic or supportive. Don't allow an early disappointment to stop you from continuing to lobby this politician. Sometimes they need to hear things several times before they understand the issue. Sometimes they don't realize the importance of the issue to their constituency. Their position on this issue means votes.



**TAKING A STAND because we care.**

Here are some additional tips for effective meetings with elected representatives.

- Review all the material you have on the issue before the meeting
- Know what you're going to say and what you want from the politician
- Speak from the **Message Box** and from your own experience as a CSS worker to show why this issue is important to you, your family, or your community
- Keep control of the meeting by sticking to the issues and avoid being sidetracked
- Show your clout in the constituency by letting the politician have a sense of the scope of the lobby. Ask allied groups to follow-up with calls and letters.
- Don't worry if you can't answer all questions at the meeting. You can follow up by email or phone afterwards.
- If possible, try to get a commitment from the politician about what they are prepared to do (lobby Ministers; discuss in Legislature; make public statements)

## WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### How Letters to the Editor Make a Difference

Editorial pages of newspapers, where letters are published, are often the most widely read section of newspapers and reach a large audience.

Letters to the editor are a forum for citizens to comment on community issues and how these issues are represented in the media. Letters can also highlight news stories that haven't been adequately or accurately covered by local papers.

Elected officials often monitor the letters section of newspapers and take notice of constituents' opinions.

Because of the volume of letters received and the limited space available, not all letters to the editor are published. But the more letters a newspaper receives on a specific topic, the more likely they are to print at least one letter. So, organizing letter-writing campaigns can be an effective way to call attention to your issue.

### Letter Writing Tips

Here are a few tips on how to write an effective letters to the editor:

- Be clear and concise.** Most newspapers restrict letters to a specified word limit (generally less than 200 words) and edit letters for space. Stick to the word limit and make a few key points.
- Refer back.** While some newspapers will print general commentaries, most prefer letters that respond to a previous article. If there is an opportunity to do so, start your letter by referring to a previous article and state your agreement or disagreement with its viewpoint.



**TAKING A STAND** because we care.

- **Present your case.** Focus your letter on one or two of the key CSS job action issues (eg: layoffs/job security; fair work practices; recruitment/retention problems; continuity of care and services). Explain, in general terms, how your job and the people you support are impacted.
- **Make it genuine.** Don't hesitate to express your passion for an issue or cause.
- **Stay on message.** For consistency, stick to the key issues about the sector, strike facts, key messages and issues outlined in the message box. Personalize the letter by referencing the specific kind of CSS work you do, how long you've worked in the sector, and how meaningful the work is to you.
- **Be accurate.** Always provide correct factual information to support your position or refute a claim made previously. An inaccurate or exaggerated statistic can result in lost credibility or public support for an issue.
- **Provide contact details.** Many newspapers verify writers' identities before printing letters, so include your name, address, phone number, and email. Usually only the writer's name and city are printed with the letter.
- **Include small community newspapers.** With less competition for space, small community newspapers are more likely to print letters; they also tend to be more permissive with respect to letter length.

### Sample Letter

Here is one example of an effective letter to the editor (less than 150 words):

Re: "No where to turn for adults with developmental disabilities."

<NewspaperName> staff writer <FirstName> <LastName> exposed the tip of the iceberg in the story about the recent closure of <GroupHomeName>. Adults with developmental disabilities, across this province, are paying the price for massive cuts to services and supports across the community living sector. In fact, cuts to many community social services are impacting some of the most vulnerable citizens in our province. For 19 years, I have worked with survivors of domestic and sexual violence. I'm deeply committed to my work and the people I support. Community social service workers have been without a contract for more than 18 months. Instability in the sector is resulting in serious staff recruitment and retention problems and risks compromising quality and continuity of care. Service providers deserve better. And the citizens of BC who depend on these services deserve better.

FirstName LastName  
City, Province

### Newspapers in British Columbia

If you aren't familiar with daily/weekly/community newspapers in your area, consult one of the online directories of BC Newspapers <[www.world-newspapers.com/british-columbia.html](http://www.world-newspapers.com/british-columbia.html)>. Most newspapers have websites where they list an email, postal address, or fax number where letters to the editor can be sent.



**TAKING A STAND because we care.**

## **Mobilizing Community Support**

Issues impacting CSS workers are also impacting individuals, families and our communities. We can respond as union members, as well as individual citizens.

Expanding our communication efforts into the community gives us the opportunity to engage with individuals. In doing so, we learn many ways that community social services touch the lives of people in our communities. This is a powerful way to engage the public and expand our constituency of support.

Here are some tips for public engagement strategies:

**Community Networking:** Go where the people are. Attend meetings of other groups, and go to places and events where people gather. An information booth at a local mall, community event, or festival can be an effective way to network with your community by sharing information and resources.

**Labour-to-Neighbour:** Being a neighbour creates an immediate bond and is the most effective way of making face-to-face community contact. The best times to reach people are usually Saturdays and weekdays, between dinner and darkness. Be sure to wear a name tag when you visit door-to-door.

**Public Meetings/Coffee Klatsches:** Organizing a large community meeting at a central gathering place in your community or smaller gatherings at local coffee shops are other ways to mobilize community support.

Key elements of public engagement include:

**Spokesperson(s):** Someone to briefly summarize the issues and respond to questions.

**Call to action:** Organizers should have a variety of action items available for supportive people to undertake. Assemble a small group to write letters to the editor. Coordinate a lobby delegation to schedule meetings with municipal councillors and/or MLAs. Have a petition or postcards available for people to sign.

**Recognition:** Thank people for their care and interest and provide a small token of appreciation. We will try to have some materials for you to distribute: buttons, stickers, magnets or bracelets.

**Stay connected:** Collect names and contact information (phone numbers; email address), to keep the public up to date on campaign activities.