

How to Advocate to Your Lawmaker

UNDERSTANDING LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

For any request, you need to be sure you're asking people at the right level of government.

Local officials include your city council, mayor, county commission, and your public housing authority. Examples of government activity at this level include zoning, building permits, management of police, or the establishment of warming centers.

State officials include your governor, your state legislators, and state agencies. Policies discussed at this level generally impact the entire state or large portions of it. Examples: management of state parks, management of Medicaid, decisions about whether to accept certain types of federal money, and many decisions about what is and isn't a crime.

Federal (that is, national) officials includes members of Congress (made up of two chambers—the Senate and the House of Representatives), the President, and agencies like the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Government activity at this level is generally very broad in scope. Examples include the funding of housing vouchers, funding of grants for affordable housing, and many others.

Your state is divided into districts. Your district has 1 Representative in the US House of Representatives, and you can look them up [here](#). Each state also has 2 Senators for the whole state, and you can look yours up [here](#).

It's also important to understand what lawmakers can and can't do.

Lawmakers Can	Lawmakers Can't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• introduce, vote for, or vote against legislation• support legislation introduced by another lawmaker• send a letter to an agency about a concern you have• send a letter to another legislator in an influential position, such as a member of the Appropriations Committee• send a letter in support of a grant application	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• take a specific legislative action in favor of your organization• support legislation that is not in their jurisdiction. That is, House members cannot vote for a bill pending in the Senate and vice-versa. Likewise, federal lawmakers cannot vote for state-level legislation• demand that a federal or state agency award you a particular grant