

# What is Advocacy? And How is it Different from Lobbying?

**“Full participation in government and society has been a basic right of the country symbolizing the full citizenship and equal protection of all.”**

**-- Charles Rangel**

In the quote above, former Representative Rangel (D-NY) is referring to one of the five basic freedoms under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that states “Congress shall make no law respecting...the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

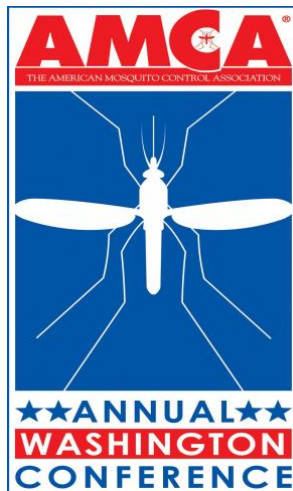
In other words, you have a Constitutional freedom of association and the right to advocate for public policy and educate lawmakers about issues affecting your profession.

There is a growing frustration from mosquito control professionals who feel as though they have no control over the laws and regulations that affect them every day because they are worried speaking up will be considered lobbying. *Lobbying gets a bad rap.* You have the right to speak (and not to speak) if you are an American citizen. If you are an international member, you also benefit from our advocacy in the United States, because many international regulatory bodies take their lead from U.S agencies such as the EPA or CDC.

Legislative and Regulatory (L&R) advocacy is a primary benefit of your American Mosquito Control Association

(AMCA) membership and is financially supported by the Sustaining Members. Advocacy is necessary to achieve our mission, which is “to enhance health and quality of life through the suppression of vector-transmitted diseases and the reduction of mosquitoes and other public health pests by providing leadership, information, collaboration, tools, and education. To squash fears of getting involved and/or supporting AMCA’s efforts, we must first understand how the Association manages Legislative and Regulatory issues.

Our membership consists of many public employees who have lobbying restrictions under state laws. However, non-profit organizations and local government employees are not prohibited from aiding in advocacy. Investing in advocacy through the AMCA helps your organization avoid legal issues related to lobbying because Sustaining Membership dues are calculated based on your organization’s budget (small budget = small fee). Federal law mandates your organization cannot spend a significant amount of your budget on lobbying. By purchasing a Sustaining Membership in AMCA, you get a lot of advocacy for your buck without worrying about overspending on these legislative matters



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**While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying.** Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education, regulatory work, litigation, work before administrative bodies, lobbying, nonpartisan voter education, and more.

Direct lobbying is defined as communication about a specific piece of legislation or expressing a view on that legislation with a legislator, an employee of a legislator or legislative body, or any executive branch or government employees who may participate in the formulation of legislation. It's okay to lobby, but public officials should know the limits set by their state or employer.

**AMCA relies on the expertise and experiences of our members to advocate for public health mosquito control. And when we identify a need for changes in the laws, AMCA uses a registered lobbying firm to strategize, create content, and communicate directly with policymakers to influence legislation.**

Our lobbying firm is paid a retainer each month by the Association. For that retainer, highly qualified personnel in Washington, D.C. pay close attention to actions involving public health pesticides and alert AMCA leadership when a new law, regulation, or lawsuit might impact our members.

## *Examples of Advocacy*

- Providing information about who is affected, number of people served, budget or proven impacts, and accomplishments
- Using social media to get the word out about a cause/issue
- Meeting with a government official to explain how a particular problem/issue is affecting a particular group or their organization
- Paying dues to an Association
- Receiving information on legislative issues
- Providing technical expertise in support of lobbying efforts
- Conducting or attending general meetings
- Gathering information or doing research for legislation
- Expressing a position about the legislative goals of the Association
- Providing basic information about a particular organization or issue
- Inviting legislators or regulatory agencies to visit your site and get firsthand knowledge of your service and its impact
- Providing a fact-driven pamphlet or materials to the public about a particular topic
- Giving a fact-driven presentation about a topic to a legislator



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## *Examples of Lobbying*

- Asking your member of Congress to vote for or against, or to amend or introduce specific legislation
- Providing value judgments or asking people to take a particular stance
- Emailing your staff or members of the public asking them to contact their member of Congress in support of or opposition to legislation or pending regulations
- Generating an online petition asking members of your organization (direct lobbying) or members of the public (grassroots lobbying) to contact their legislator(s) to support or oppose particular legislation
- Contacting government officials, members of congress, or employees of the legislature to affect legislation including letter-writing campaigns, phone calls, or face to face meetings
- Writing legislation or suggesting legislation
- Suggesting the public vote one way or another on a particular referendum or initiative
- Suggesting the public support or oppose a political candidate

## **Examples of AMCA advocacy:**

Our statement on Endangered Species Act (ESA) Considerations - “The current risk assessments failed to incorporate the best available science. Actual risk should be the universal standard, not problematic assumptions based on outdated data and exaggerated use patterns. The AMCA does not question the need for ESA, but clearly recognizes that the current interpretation and implementation of its contents needlessly jeopardizes the health of humans and wildlife by restricting mosquito control methods.”

AMCA’s position paper on enhancing vector control capacity states - “\$4.5 billion in annual funding is needed for CDC, state, local, tribal and territorial core public health Infrastructure to pay

for such essential activities as disease surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, all-hazards preparedness, and response; policy development and support; communications; community partner-ship development; and organizational competencies.”

## **Examples of AMCA lobbying:**

In June, letters were sent to Members of Congress from AMCA’s lobbying firm The Normandy Group asking them to fully fund the [Kay Hagan TICK Act](#) and the [SMASH Act](#). The Normandy Group created the content of the communications, and within the emails they suggested legislators reach out to their local mosquito control professionals for details (advocacy / education) on how their citizens would benefit from the legislation.



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**The bottom line:** Nonprofit organizations like AMCA have every right to express their views through lobbying legislators and mobilizing their supporters. *If we do not express our views, an important voice will be missing when the policy is formed.* Lobbying is perfectly legal as long as you're not investing a significant amount of time or money into it. If you do a lot of lobbying, make sure you are filing the proper paperwork with your state and/or the Internal Revenue Service.

The line between advocacy and lobbying can be a complicated issue, but the act of telling our policymakers how to write and change our laws is at the very heart of our democratic system. AMCA appreciates and thanks the members of the L&R Committee and our Sustaining Members for supporting AMCA's mission and protecting the future of mosquito control.

## Tips for staying in the advocacy category, just in case:

- When you talk to Congressional staff, educate them about your program, don't ask them to support a specific bill or piece of legislation.
- Do not ask the general public to contact their legislator about specific legislation.
- Do not ask policymakers to vote yes or no to a specific piece of legislation.
- Share communications that are prepared by AMCA, not your own content.
- Support AMCA's L&R work through Sustaining Memberships and don't hire a lobby firm for your district or program.

## Need a letter of support?

Contact John Goldberg of the Normandy Group. He will be able to provide you with a letter of support clarifying the advocacy (not lobbying) work that AMCA members do at the Washington Conference event. You can email John at: [jgoldberg@thenormandygrp.com](mailto:jgoldberg@thenormandygrp.com).

## Additional Links you may find useful:

[U.S. Constitution 1st Amendment](#)

[US House of Representatives: Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance](#)

[NIH Ethics in Lobbying](#)

[National Council of Nonprofits Lobbying Statement](#)

[Lobbyit: Advocacy vs. Lobbying](#)

[AFI.org General Lobbying Rules for Nonprofit Organizations](#)

