

**Genetic Counselor Licensure: Hiring a Lobbyist**

**Questions:**

1. Who are lobbyists?
2. Do we need a professional lobbyist?
3. How can a professional lobbyist help?

**Answers:**

1. Who are lobbyists?

* The definition may vary by state, but a lobbyist is generally anyone who is paid to petition the government or contact members of Congress to voice an opinion on behalf of a group.
* Some genetic counselors who work for the state and/or other specific institutions may be prohibited from lobbying, because of their employment.  However, these genetic counselors still have the right to lobby as private citizens, a member of a genetic counselor organization such as NSGC, or a member of the genetic counselor community.
* Professional lobbyists are also called **government relations professionals**.  In general, government relations professionals/lobbyists research and analyze legislation or regulatory proposals, attend congressional hearings, and educate government officials and corporate officers on important issues. Lobbyists also work to change public opinion through advertising campaigns or by influencing “opinion leaders.”

1. Do we need a professional lobbyist?

* You should first consider whether you need to hire a professional lobbyist.
* In some cases, your legislature may be initiating genetic counselor licensure and you may be able to obtain a licensure law without a lobbyist.  Starting with institutional lobbyists is always best.

1. How can a professional lobbyist help?

* By Setting Goals: Your end-goal is licensure, but your lobbyist can set short-term goals to get you there.
* By Establishing Strategy, Timing, and Focus: A lobbyist can help develop a strategy and focus efforts where they’ll be most successful at the proper time.
* Through Education: A lobbyist can educate you on the specific state government processes and regulations.
* Through Representation: A lobbyist can represent you and your interests to the government, so you don’t have to be there in person or doing it yourself most of the time.
* Through Relationships: A lobbyist can help you develop relationships with individuals within the government that can help you achieve your goals.
* Through Champions: A lobbyist can find and support “champions” within the government who are willing to push for your objectives from within.

**Your lobbyist cannot and should not do everything on his/her own**.  You should monitor your lobbyist to ensure that he/she appropriately represents you.  Be sure to educate your lobbyist about the genetic counseling profession and the need for licensure.  You need to be physically present and make your voice heard at the state capital so that the legislators and their staffs develop a personal and direct understanding of who genetic counselors are and why licensure is necessary.