

Notes from The Southcoast Food Policy Council Legislative Advocacy Training 7.7.22

Hosted by Liz Wiley, Executive Director of the Marion Institute, and Christine Smith, Program Manager of the Southcoast Food Policy Council, a program of the Marion Institute.

The Southcoast Food Policy Council: <https://www.marioninstitute.org/programs/sfpc>

Presenter: Rebecca Miller, MA Food System Collaborative rebecca@mafoodsystem.org

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative was founded in December 2015 following the completion of the MA Local Food Action Plan. The Collaborative works toward policy change that will contribute to a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient food system by building broad support for advocacy campaigns and providing training and other resources to allow partners to participate effectively. We bring together players throughout the food system in an effort to demonstrate the breadth of the food system, and facilitate opportunities for stakeholders to work collaboratively. Through these networks, we lead advocacy campaigns around items in the Plan that emphasize cross-sectoral collaboration; support equity, sustainability, and resilience in the food system; and have the potential for significant impact through coordinated grassroots efforts.

Becca Miller is a program manager at the Collaborative, where she manages the Campaign for Healthy Incentives Program funding, co-facilitates a coalition of urban agriculture stakeholders that was formed during the pandemic to build relationships and share skills, manages a 2022 elections engagement project, and will be working on a new grassroots policy advocacy training project in the coming months. She is always happy to clarify the mystery of Beacon Hill for advocates!

Presentation:

Slide 4: Describes Policy

What is Policy? Policy is a set of rules that bound our society, outlining what a government should and should not do. Most policies express societal values, such as, "The Budget is a moral document." Banning, regulating, creating new institutions, creating education like PSA, design equity in mind, or enforcing the status quo. You can pass a policy to avoid chemical spills that lead to brown sites.

Slide 5: Three types of Policy

There are three types of Policy: state constitution (highest form policy and lays out rights), general laws statutes that describe programs), and regulations (how the state administers a program – public able to give feedback on regulations).

Slide 6: Responsibilities of MA municipalities

Passing local ordinances, creating local revenue, and various structures under the state constitution.

Slide 7 and 8: Legislature

They are responsible for creating state laws, changing existing laws, and passing a balanced budget. Similar to Federal, there are two bodies, House (160 Representatives) and Senate (40 Senators). Leadership: <https://malegislature.gov/Legislators/Leadership>. They are elected every two years and are very reachable.

Slide 9: The Administration

Governor, Lt. Governor, Executive Office (Energy and Environmental Affairs) s, State Agencies (Ex: Dept. of Agricultural Resources and these staffers are pretty reachable)

<https://malegislature.gov/Legislators/Leadership>

Slide 10: Passing a Law in MA

1. You have an idea, speak to State Representative first and explain why it is essential to you, and together write a bill. The Representative (Sponsor) will propose it and find a co-sponsor (another Rep or Senator).

2. The bill will be assigned to a committee that works on issues related to your issue. Those Committees hold a public hearing that allows input from the community, oral or written testimony. Committees accept written testimony any time before the hearing. They will decide to amend it, move the bill forward, reject the bill or send it to study. The bill can be sent to a second committee because the topic matter may cross multiple Committees.

3. The second committee will repeat this process #2.

4. If the bill started in the House, it would be voted in the House; if it began in the Senate, it would be voted in the Senate. Once approved, it moves to the other Chamber.

5. If there are two different versions of a bill passed in the House and Senate, a Conference Committee will be put together comprised of 3 members of the House and 3 members of the Senate.

6. The Governor can sign the bill, amend it and send it back to the Legislature, veto the bill, and veto line items. Once the Governor signs, it is the law.

- Outside forces can work on how quickly a bill moves, such as decisions from the federal level, as we saw during the height of the pandemic.

Slide 11: Video I'm Just a Bill: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1ty6F-2neYfwE8xc1A72Q>

There are thousands of bills a session, so some bills are passed, some die, and some need to go through the entire cycle again to become law.

Slide 12: The Budget (GREEN is when YOU can ADVOCATE and to whom.)

MA has an annual state operating budget and many opportunities for advocacy.

- Fall: Department heads talk with the Secretaries of Executive Offices, who then talk to the Administration Finance Office of the Governor's Administration and talk about what they need.
- In early January, the Governor proposes a budget to the Legislature.
- January through March, the House Ways and Means (where the Budget and taxation begins) holds public hearings, which may or may not be similar to the Governor on specific items. **You can write to the House Ways and Means Committee here to advocate.**
- April, the House Ways and Means releases a budget proposal to the full House, and House members offer amendments, debate the bill and the amendments, and vote on the Budget. House members often amend to insert local spending needs from their constituents- over 1,000 amendments are filed in a typical budget. They vote by large bundles of amendments. **In April, you can again write the House Ways and Means and your legislators to advocate at this time.**

- May, the Senate Committee on Ways and Means goes through the same process. You can write the Senate Ways and Means in May.

Slide 13: Budget cont.

- In June, the Senate Ways and Means releases its Budget version for Senators to file amendments, debate, and then vote. Co-sponsors will offer similar amendments to a bill to ensure it gets passed in both Chambers. In June, you can write the Senate Ways and Means and your own legislators for the Senate Budget.
- June: a Conference Committee of three House and three Senate members is formed to reconcile the differences. Both Chambers then vote upon the Budget with no ability to make amendments.
- At the end of June/early July, the Governor signs, vetoes line items, suggests changes to the Legislature, files the Continuance Budget and gives till the end of July to fund the government. You can advocate to the Governor to ensure your priorities are in the Budget.

Slide 16: Differences between Advocacy and Lobbying

Advocacy is explaining, educating, and promoting an idea, cause, or organization. In practical terms, it means you can sign onto another organization's campaign. If you are a municipal staff and asked to present information to a legislator and not asking for anything from the legislator, you are simply teaching or explaining; that is advocacy, not lobbying. If you were to try to take a side and ask the legislator to take a side or position and persuade the legislator, that is lobbying.

Slide 17: Lobbying specifics

Non-Profit lobbying information is specified on the slide. If you are asking a legislator to take a position and vote a certain way, that is lobbying. For example, asking your legislator to support HIP funding, that is lobbying. If you are explaining or teaching and not asking for a legislator to take a side, that is advocacy. If you are a municipal staff or public employee, you can lobby on your own time, but not as a workplace representative. Your expertise in your voice is needed so, please use your own time.

Question: Is this lobbying? Raising issues with government officials that do not involve a specific policy ask. For example, giving public testimony on an issue to inform potential legislation, participating in a listening session led by a government official (e.g., MDAR staff and commissioner)? Are these lobbying or not?

Answer: No, that is advocacy because you are not persuading or asking them to take a position, just sharing information. If you join a listening session to share information and not ask someone to take a position, that is advocacy, not lobbying.

Slide 18: Advocacy Activities

- Asking for a meeting with legislator
- Writing or sending an email
- Making a phone call, leaving a voice message
- Sharing an ask in a newsletter
- Asking people you know to contact their legislators
- Posting an ask on social media and tagging legislators #HIPworks #maleg #mapoli

Harvard Law School: Advocacy & Lobbying 101 for food Policy Councils

<https://clinics.law.harvard.edu/blog/2019/03/flpc-releases-advocacy-and-lobbying-guide-for-food-policy-councils/>

Slide 19: State-level advocacy timing

You can do any advocacy activities in Slide 18 depending on your needed timing and tactics.

- Each legislative session is 2 years long.
- February 19, 2021- Legislation is introduced (Bills can be introduced late)
- February 2, 2022- Year 2 of the 2-year cycle is the deadline for a bill to move out of its first committee (public calendar on legislature website). Sometimes there are extensions on deadlines.
- July 31, 2022, In the 2nd year of a 2-year session, is the end of the formal session –a rush of activity
- Fall of 2022- Informal session- in the fall of the 2nd year of a 2-year cycle. Very few bills will pass because most legislators are not in Chamber because they are up for election and running a campaign.
- Committee hearings for bills- various times in the year
- When votes are taken by the House and Senate- at different times in the year
- Annual budget process- laid out earlier in the spring in each year of the legislative session.
- If a bill does not pass in the 2-year cycle, it is often one of the first issues to tackle in the next 2-year cycle.

Slide 20: Getting Buy-in from your organization

- Share why the campaign or ask is vital to your organization with your supervisor, director, or whoever makes the decisions in the organization for them to sign onto a larger letter.
- Share the importance with your membership, your colleagues, outside partners, and clients of a social service agency
- The entire organization needs to understand and share with beyond administrative staff.

Slide 21: How to respond to a call to action

- Find who your legislator is: <https://malegislature.gov/search/findmylegislator>
- Make a phone call- leave a message, or speak to a staffer. Follow up the phone call with an email and ensure they have the information.
- You can email your legislator- ***share your unique story in the advocacy*** (why important, how it impacts your community)
- Post the call to action on social media- use a photo- best practice-illustrating impact through picture stays in lawmakers' minds. Tag in campaigns #HIPworks #maleg #mapoli. Twitter subscribes to hashtags.
- Lawmakers will have data and need to hear from their constituents about WHY an issue matters to you and them and HOW a policy impacts you and them.

Question: Is blending qualitative and quantitative examples when advocating advised for maximum impact? Yes! Data (research and studies) + Personal Story = Maximum Impact

Slide 22: Relationship Building

Reach out to lawmakers as people. Developing a Campaign or Ask:

- 1.) Think about how policymakers voted or supported previous bills similar to your ask. Be prepared to thank them for past support on similar or the same issues.
- 2.) Does your proposal have a cost? How would that cost be offset, so our taxes/state budget are not paying for it?
- 3.) How does your issue impact the constituents of this policymaker?

- 4.) What other policymakers support your position?
- 5.) What organizations or people oppose your position? How can you address the opposing concerns in your ask?
- 6.) What process will your Policy go through? What action steps are required? How can the policymaker help you?
- 7.) What other questions would the policymaker or staffer have on this issue?
 - When conversing with staffers or lawmakers, when you are asked a question and do not know, do not guess. It's okay not to have all the answers. Say, "I do not know, and I can get back to you on that question." Go back to the campaign's originator and ask them for the information.

Slide 23: How to make the ask and use this format when creating the campaign ask

- 1.) Demonstrate the need, the ease of fixing it, the credibility of the information (authority of the ask-whom you are representing)
- 2.) Be clear, specific, and directed at the correct person, agency, department
- 3.) Build a relationship with allies; they can make an ask, and more allies lend credibility to your ask.

Slide 24: Ways to meet with legislators

Mostly, the smaller the office, the easier to get a meeting.

- Policy briefings
- Lobby Days
- Invitations
- Office hours
- Drop-in or scheduled meetings
- Meet with staffer

Slide 25: When in your meeting with a legislator

- Be on time
- Know staff names and their positions
- Have handouts to leave behind: clearly state your ask, state facts that support your ask, and include your contact information
- Ask if they are familiar with the issues, so you know how much background information to share with them
- Do not read from your handout. Share compelling stories and reasons why this would impact the policymakers' district's people, businesses, and institutions.
- Ask directly whether or not they support the position.
 - ✓ If they support it, thank them, and ask what you can do to help them get their colleagues on board.
 - ✓ If they do not support it, ask what their concerns are and how you can alleviate them.
 - ✓ If they ask a question you do not know, do not guess. Write down the question, tell them you will get back to them, and go to the original advocacy organization and ask them this question.
- Follow-up and maintain contact with them regularly. Send them thank you emails, Social Media, and notes.

Slide 27: Mass Food System Collaborative projects:

- Campaign for HIP Funding - email Becca, rebecca@mafoodsystem.org to get involved
- Equity in Agriculture - email Norris Guscott, norris@mafoodsystem.org to get involved

- Elections - email Becca, rebecca@mafoodsystem.org to get involved
- Food Waste - email Brittany Peats, brittany@mafoodsystem.org to get involved
- Food System Literacy - email Brittany Peats, brittany@mafoodsystem.org to get involved
- Network of local food policy councils - email Brittany Peats, brittany@mafoodsystem.org to get involved

Slide 28: Campaign for HIP Funding

- Ask: Fund the Healthy Incentive Program (HIP) (additional money for SNAP participants) to operate year-round without interruption, reach new SNAP Households, and add new farmers.
- In the FY 23 Budget, we are advocating for \$20 million for HIP. S.108/H.250 An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentive Program.
- More info: www.HIPMA.org

Slide 29: Equity in Agriculture

- The Agriculture Equity Network is made up of and led by MA farmers who identify as Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).
- S.502/H.860, An Act Promoting Equity in Agriculture. The Network crafted a bill to address areas of equity in the MA Agricultural landscape. The bill will create a commission comprised of BIPOC farmers to look at:
 - Policy recommendations support racially equitable investments/practices, provide resources and program accessibility of the current programs, and create recommendations to existing laws and regulations.
 - Norris@mafoodsystem.org

Slide 30: Elections

- Collaborative partnering with other food system organizations in MA during the 2022 election cycle to educate state-level candidates for Representatives, Senator, and Governor about issues facing the local food system. They have sent a questionnaire to all candidates and have 30 responses. Contact Becca to run a Candidate Forum. rebecca@mafoodsystem.org

Slide 31: Food Waste Campaign

- The MA Food System Collaborative facilitates a network of organizations that are helping to reduce food wasted in MA, including food rescue organizations, composting organizations, farms, and environmental groups. This Network shares information and builds relationships across the sector.
- S.954/H.1702 An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need.
- H.2326 An Act relative to the promotion of food donation.
- S.1338/H.2327 An Act decreasing food waste by standardizing the date labeling of food.
- brittany@mafoodsystem.org

Slide 32: Food System Literacy

- The MA Food System Collaborative is leading a campaign to ensure that all students in grades K-12 have access to food system education in school so they can learn about agriculture, nutrition, food justice, and culinary skills.
- The Collaborative wrote a brief report: <https://mafoodsystem.org/projects/campaign-for-food-system-literacy>
- They will pull together a coalition around this.

- brittany@mafoodsystem.org

Slide 33: Additional State level campaigns:

- Universal School Meals (Project Bread) <https://feedkidsma.org> To Join: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeH1qiMTF4-fasE3ulclPhYiHNc6UuYm2LYASvYO4kAttdatw/viewform>
- Close the SNAP Gap (MLRI) - join here https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf5fFme1_5p4rCfHnp1em7DTqGg7uBtl63GYLCxiNjuxA1epQ/viewform?c=0&w=1
- Hunger Free Campus <https://www.hungerfreecampusma.org> (Food banks, nonprofits, & public and private colleges or universities) - email Molly Kepner, Senior Govt. Relations Coordinator, mkepner@gbfb.org to join!
- Farm to school grants (<https://www.massfarmtoschool.org/get-involved/advocates> Mass Farm to School) - join here <https://mafoodformakids.org/join-the-coalition>
- MA Food Trust (<https://mapublichealth.org/priorities/access-to-healthy-affordable-food/ma-food-trust-program> MPHA, others) - join here <https://mphaweb.wufoo.com/forms/join-us-in-supporting-healthy-food-financing-in-ma>
- Lift Our Kids MA - join here <https://www.liftourkidsma.org>
- Pesticides (NOFA-MA) - <https://www.nofamass.org/policy> Reach out to Policy Director Marty Dagoberto at marty@nofamass.org to get involved!

Is there an adequate database and/or listing of food resources for the state?

- <https://www.abundanceboston.com/>
- Boston neighborhood food access food resource list: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hrU8yokrljEEGXVjvyscbFViBTjKmbDEEIRh9RmN_84/edit
- <https://dtafinder.dtadash.ehs.mass.gov>
- <https://www.marioninstitute.org/southcoastfoodfinder>
- <https://massnrc.org/farmlocator/map.aspx>
- <https://www.vitalcxns.org>
- FINE has a searchable resource database with more than 400 resources on farm to institution in NE. "Food access" is a searchable term. We welcome any suggestions for resources to add! <https://www.farmtoinstitution.org/resources>

To join the Southcoast Food Policy Council or to sign up for the Southcoast Food Alert, email sfpc@marioninstitute.org.