CFUW Ontario Council Speaker Series #1
Leading Change Through Legislation
Oct. 24, 2026 (Notes, reviewed)

Summary

This meeting was a CFUW Ontario Council webinar featuring three speakers discussing legislative advocacy and private member's bills. MPP Peggy Sattler, Shadow Cabinet Minister for Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security; Chief Opposition Whip explained the process of how bills become law in Ontario and shared case studies of paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence, as well as declaring intimate partner violence as an epidemic. Kingston and the Islands MPP Ted Hsu, a former federal MP who returned to provincial politics, discussed his private member's bill regarding administrative justice and tribunals, emphasizing the importance of having clear policy goals before running for office and building widespread political support across the province. Christine King, a former constituency assistant to both federal MPs and provincial MPPs, provided practical advice on effective lobbying techniques, including scheduling meetings, preparing presentations, and the importance of personal connections with elected officials. The session concluded with a question and answer period where participants discussed strategies for writing effective letters to MPPs/MPs, partnering with other organizations, and maintaining non-partisan but politically active advocacy.

Peggy Sattler NDP MPP

Ontario Legislative Process and Advocacy

Peggy Sattler presented on the legislative process in Ontario and shared two case studies involving gender-based violence legislation. She explained how private members' bills become law, including the challenges and deviations from typical processes experienced with bills on paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence, and declaring intimate partner violence as an epidemic. Peggy outlined effective advocacy tools, emphasizing:

- the importance of letters to ministers,
- in-person meetings with MPPs,
- petitions, (written only)
- form email campaigns,
- committee submissions,
- cross-sector coalitions, and
- media attention in advancing legislation.

Private Member's Bill Challenges

MPP Sattler discussed the challenges of getting a private member's bill passed in the Ontario legislature, explaining that the government has declined to declare intimate partner violence (IPV) as an epidemic, instead using the term "endemic," which limits the urgency for resource allocation and policy changes.

Ted Hsu, LIB MPP

MPP Ted Hsu shared his experience introducing a private member's bill focused on depoliticizing the appointment of adjudicators for Ontario tribunals. His key advice for advocates:

- Know why you want to run or advocate before you start
- Be non-partisan but not non-political: encourage members to volunteer for aligned candidates
- Handwritten letters get far more attention than form emails (100 handwritten letters equal several thousand auto-generated emails)
- Props and memorable objects (rubber lamprey, foam chickens) keep organizations top of mind
- Spread club presence across all 124 Ontario ridings: rural, urban, east, west, north
- Budget bill debates are an “omnibus” opportunity to raise almost any money-related issue
- Food “events” at Provincial Parliament is a way to capture time with staff and MPPs

Both speakers highlighted the value of strategic advocacy and the need for organizations to engage politically while remaining non-partisan to effectively influence policy outcomes.

Christine King, retired Constituency Office Assistant

Effective Lobbying Techniques Presentation

Christine King presented on effective lobbying of elected officials, sharing insights from her experience. Her steps for an effective MPP meeting:

- Identify the issue and the correct level of government
- Articulate the ask in a few clear sentences: what, who it affects, how many support it
- Contact the riding office; follow up by phone or in person if no reply within 5-7 days
- Hold a pre-meeting briefing: assign spokesperson, set speaking order, review materials
- Stay on point; don’t be sidetracked by the MPP onto other issues
- Ask for a specific action, not just to raise awareness
- Send a thank-you letter; confirm agreed actions or ask them to reconsider if unsupportive
- Monitor follow-through and keep members updated
- Appointments strongly preferred over walk-ins; in-person visits to book an appointment are noticed
- One original letter represents an estimated 10-100 silent supporters
- Lobby days at Provincial Parliament or House of Commons (e.g., Canadian Labour Congress, Ontario Federation of Labour) are effective models to emulate

Christine also explained the structure of question periods in both federal and provincial legislatures, noting the limited time available for questions and responses.

Lobbying Strategies and Experiences

The group discussed lobbying strategies and experiences. Ted explained the advantages of virtual meetings for MPPs, particularly when scheduling is difficult due to personal commitments. Christine shared her experience lobbying against telephone industry deregulation, highlighting the importance of presenting detailed cost analyses to politicians. The discussion

also covered the effectiveness of personalized letters to MPPs compared to form letters, and Ted suggested that CFUW could potentially partner with organizations like CARP on issue-specific advocacy, noting that having voices from multiple ridings is important for building political support.

Advocacy Tools: Consolidated Takeaways

- Letters to ministers and opposition critics: always effective; copy critics on minister letters
- In-person MPP meetings: push for them; constituency assistants are fine but don't settle
- Print petitions only accepted at Ontario legislature (no minimum signatures required)
- Form emails: useful for volume signal; personalized emails carry significantly more weight
- Handwritten or individually typed and mailed letters: highest impact per letter
- PMBs: valuable even if defeated; put issues on record and can be absorbed into government bills
- Committee appearances: oral submissions especially effective; apply via your MPP
- Cross-sector coalitions: critical for demonstrating broad political support across ridings
- Media: "getting media attention is gold"; can shame or nudge government to act
- Personal relationships with MPPs and their staff: informal connections ease future advocacy
- Building relationships with MPPs, including hosting informal social events like breakfast or dinner receptions,
- Firefighter model noted as exemplary: constituent-to-MPP personal contact at a reception, tied to a vote commitment, secured brain cancer compensation regulation
- The conversation emphasized the importance of personal connections over formal lobbying, pre-meeting preparation, and working collaboratively with other organizations to maximize advocacy efforts across the province.

The conversation emphasized the importance of personal connections over formal lobbying, pre-meeting preparation, and working collaboratively with other organizations to maximize advocacy efforts across the province.

Letterhead and Individual vs. Club Communications

- Club letters: use club letterhead, signed by president, sent on behalf of the club
- Ontario Council letters: Sandra (or designated officer) writes on Ontario Council letterhead
- Individual letters:
    - no CFUW letterhead; write from a personal perspective
    - Cannot reference CFUW membership but may say "when attending a meeting of CFUW Sudbury, I learned…"
    - Do not imply you speak for CFUW
    - Are most effective when you include a relevant story and say why the issue matters to you personally
- Typed and mailed individual letters are acceptable; handwriting not strictly required