

The step-by-step lobbying guide for FNF supporters

How to influence and why it is important?

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What is lobbying?

Lobbying is seeking to persuade a politician to use their position and its influence to support a campaign. The messages politicians receive from constituents, local groups, and the local media are hugely important in determining which campaigns they support and which campaigns they oppose.

What we want you to do and why?

The new coalition government is looking at family justice, so now is the time to put forward our case for shared parenting. This is our biggest opportunity ever. We need you to **write to**, to **meet** and to **persuade** your MPs that a presumption of shared parenting is **necessary** for the well being of children. We are asking all members to write to their MP or to visit them to discuss our **main policy aim of shared parenting**. You may have met with your local MP before, or your MP might have visited your branch to discuss a range of relevant issues. We are asking members to contact their MP specifically about a presumption of shared parenting.

Or you could write to your local newspaper about the importance of shared parenting to add to the local pressure for MPs from the people who mean the most to them, their constituents.

We can support you every step of the way with:

- Draft letters, although it is best to write them in your own style
- Briefing notes, which will give you background information on certain issues and that you can give to your MP.
- Information about your MP.
- Local newspaper contacts by area
- Some draft letters for you to send to the editors

Some general points about contacting MPs

1. Read the briefing notes provided and **find out about your MP** from their website (see www.theyworkforyou.com).
2. Before writing or meeting with your MP consult the FNF find out who we have a relationship with.
3. Have a look at the **EDM 128 document** which lets you know whether your MP is already supportive.
<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=28316>
4. **Don't make it gender specific:** this is about an unfair balance for 'resident' and 'non-resident' parents.
5. Always be polite.
6. Make sure you let them know about how FNF can help their constituents.

Writing to your MP

A letter always carries more weight than an email. Writing is an excellent way of getting your message across to your MP and establishing a good working relationship with them.

Note: Scottish MPs can add their names to EDMs and vote on legislation resulting from the Family Justice Review, but these measures will not affect Scotland, as family law is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Let the FNF Scotland staff know if you are contacting Scottish MPs. They can also advise about the best issues to raise with Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)

You can find **sample letters** written by FNF, but here are some do's and don'ts.

DO

- If possible write in your own words. This makes it much more powerful.
- Keep it short. MPs are very busy so get to the point. One side of A4 is more than enough.
- Consider handwriting the letter to emphasise its individuality.
- Clearly list your concerns.
- Ask the MP to do a specific thing, for example to sign an EDM or ask a parliamentary question and **follow up with them** to find out if they have done it or not.
- Add local examples (from your branch meeting) if possible.
- Explain why the issue matters to you.
- Include your full name and address so they know you are their constituent.
- Ask for a reply.

DON'T

- Don't lobby on more than one issue in a single letter.
- Don't criticise the person you are writing to or make threats.

Meeting your MP

Most politicians hold regular surgeries where you can meet them face to face for discussion. The meetings usually last 10-15 minutes.

DO

- Look presentable: this shows respect.
- Be on time, but be prepared to wait.
- Stay cool and calm.
- Find out how much time you are going to have with them and stick to your agenda.
- Draw on your experiences in a positive way.
- Bring leaflets and briefing notes with you and give them to the MP at the end of the visit.
- Make simple notes if possible.
- Make it clear what action you would like them to take i.e. support shared parenting.
- Indicate to your MP that as a result of them acting, it might result in positive media coverage.
- After the meeting, send a letter thanking them for their time and briefly summarising any commitments made.

DON'T

- Don't just talk about your own situation: that's not why you're there.
- Don't argue with them, this will give a poor impression.

Sample Letters for MPs

MP Sample Letter 1

Your Address
Postcode
Date

Your MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Please write in your own words if possible

Dear Your MP,

I am writing to you because I believe that both parents should be actively involved in loving and guiding their child throughout their childhood, following separation or divorce and that it is crucial to have a legal presumption of shared parenting.

This is when children are brought up with the love and guidance of both parents.

If possible, write a brief paragraph about your particular situation here.

We are now lagging behind many other parts of the world. The Children Act 1989 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 were world leaders in their time, but now Australia, New Zealand, many US states, France and Belgium are among the countries that have recognised the importance of encouraging both parents to remain in a child's life after separation and divorce.

Most children:

- want and value contact with both parents;*
- think of parents as important figures who are still part of the family, and experience the loss of contact with either as painful;*
- value the effort and commitment of both parents in making a family life for them;*
- will have better outcomes in life, as a body of research demonstrates, in a variety of ways: employability, educational attainment, staying out of the penal system and so on.*

We would like to see political commitment to this. In 2005 362 Members of Parliament signed EDM 128, which supported a presumption of Separation Parenting but no action followed. I would be grateful if you could raise my concerns with your relevant colleagues who are responsible for the family justice review. Would it also be possible for you to ask a parliamentary question on this issue? Please can you let me know if you are able to do this?

Kind regards,

Enclosed: Summary of Families Need Fathers response to the family justice review.

MP Sample Letter 2

Your Address
Postcode
Date

Your MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Please write in your own words if possible

Dear Your MP

Shared parenting is when children are brought up with the love and guidance of both parents.

Both parents should still be actively involved in loving and guiding their child throughout their childhood following separation or divorce and so it is crucial to have a legal presumption of shared parenting. In many families this is not the case.

My ex-partner and I separated three years ago, and from that moment on the difficulty started and my wife stopped me from seeing my children. We went through mediation and then eventually I had to go to court. I am a loving, caring and stable parent yet the judge only awarded me contact for one Saturday every month.

This means I can't enjoy any of the caring roles of a parent. My children love spending time with me and I know it would be better for their development if care was shared more equally. A legal presumption of shared parenting is needed, so others don't lose out like my children.

The Coalition Government are now undertaking a review of the family justice review. We are now lagging behind many other parts of the world. The Children Act 1989 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 were world leaders in their time, but now Australia, New Zealand, many US states, France and Belgium are among the countries that have recognised the importance of encouraging both parents to remain in a child's life after separation and divorce.

Most children:

- want and value contact with both parents;*
- see both parents as important figures who are still part of the family even after separation, and experience the loss of contact with either as painful;*
- value the effort and commitment of both parents in making a family life for them.*
- will have better outcomes in life, as a body of research demonstrates, in a variety of ways: employability, educational attainment, staying out of the penal system and so on.*

We would like to see political commitment to this. I would be grateful if you could raise my concerns with your relevant colleagues. Would it also be possible for you to raise your support of a presumption of shared parenting with the relevant ministers?

Kind regards,

Enclosed: Summary of Families Need Fathers response to the family justice review.

MP Sample Letter 3

*Your Address
Postcode
Date*

*Your MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA*

Please write in your own words if possible

Dear Your MP

X years ago our son separated from his wife. Since that time we have not been able to see our beloved grandchildren.

After months of mediation and court cases our son was left with minimum contact with his children. He has since been prevented from seeing his children after disagreement with his ex-wife.

The courts seem powerless to make a difference.

We are writing to ask if you would support a presumption of shared parenting, as there is a crucial review of the family justice system happening at the moment. In 2005 362 Members of Parliament signed EDM 128, which supported a presumption of Shared Parenting but no action followed. The law on grandparents and the wider family remaining part of children's lives, also needs to be reformed.

We would like to see political commitment to this. I would be grateful if you could raise my concerns with your relevant colleagues. Would it also be possible for you to ask a parliamentary question on this issue? Please can you let me know if you are able to do this?

We would be really pleased to meet you in person to discuss this in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Enclosed: Summary of Families Need Fathers response to the family justice review.

MP Sample Letter

Your Address

Postcode

Date

*Your MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA*

Please write in your own words if possible

Dear your MP,

I am a separated parent, who has struggled for many years to see my children.

The family justice system is broken and it needs urgent attention. I am pleased that there is a review of the family justice system currently taking place. I am writing to find out whether you support a presumption of shared parenting? I think it is desperately needed for the children who have to go through the separation of their mum and dad. A third of the children who experience family breakdown will lose out on a relationship with their dad. This has to stop.

I look forward to hear from you.

Kind regards,

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Sample Letter for newspaper editors

Your Address

Postcode
Date

Editor
Your Local Newspaper
Address
Postcode

Please write in your own words if possible

Dear Editor,

Few people realise that a quarter of children living in <<insert location>> live in separated families. Too many of them only see one of their parents after a divorce or separation. My children are amongst them.

Evidence shows that children thrive when they receive the love of both parents and that is why I want to suggest that the law needs changing to make it obligatory for the family courts to presume that, except where there are dangers to a child, both parents should share the parenting. This doesn't mean any set formula, just that both parents, and their families, remain there for the children.

I wonder what other readers think? There is a review of the family justice system taking place at the moment and I would be interested to know your readers views.

Yours,

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