



## Strategy #9 – Change through Legislation Listening Guide

*Laws shape the way our communities function and reflect the values of the government that creates them. One of the principles of democratic government is that citizens should have a voice in the shaping the laws that govern them. Changing laws is an important strategy for changing society. These are the voices of people who sought to promote change through legislation. Please review the quotations and answer the questions below.*

	Rikki Ott, United States	Anna Lo, Northern Ireland	Margaret Brodtkin, United States	Omar Al-Mashhadani, Iraq
What action was taken?				
What cause was being promoted?				
How did the legislation affect that cause?				
What challenges were confronted?				

*For further discussion:*

How do citizens affect the legislative process?

What are the implications when citizens are excluded from the legislative process?

Provide a contemporary example of a law changing society for better or for worse.

## Change through Legislation Quotations

### **Rikki Ott, United States**

Okay when I ended up in Cordova, the fishermen said, “Look, here’s what we need you to do. You know we need you to use your brain and use your computer.” I had a big desktop computer, okay, to generate legislation for Washington D.C., and for the state of Alaska because now we’re gonna have people moving on it. So I hiked up, got my toboggan, brought my computer down the hill, and set up camp in town at Jack Lamb’s house because Jack Lamb ended up over in Valdez. So it was like this giant hopscotch. I generated legislation and that became part of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, that became part of the state, some of the state laws that passed. I ended up going back to D.C. to testify. That was, like, my role because suddenly the scientist — the fishermen realized we have a use for a scientist after all!

**Background:** In March 1989, the oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* struck a reef in Prince William Sound, Alaska, spilling more than 11 million gallons of crude oil.

### **Anna Lo, Northern Ireland**

There used to be a government unemployment scheme called the ACE [Action to Create Employment] scheme so in 1997 the legislation called the Race Relations Order came about, was extended to Northern Ireland, and the DSS [Department of Social Services] decided to give the Chinese community three-year funding to employ the first Director to help the Chinese community but also to help statutory bodies formulate policies to help the Chinese community and other ethnic minorities so I went as the first director... Well I wanted to make Northern Ireland a better place, a place that’s more inclusive of everybody, a place that is free of sectarianism and racism, a place where young people can grow up and feel free to go anywhere without fear, can take jobs anywhere without fear and a progressive and new Northern Ireland.

### **Margaret Brodtkin, United States**

So basically what I did is write a charter amendment that said every year, the city has to put aside a certain pot of money that is just for children’s services, and it would be 2 ½ % of the property tax, now it’s 3% of the property tax, and in addition to that, we have to calculate how much money we’re spending on kids every year, and we can’t go below that amount. We call it the children’s baseline budget. So one was the Children’s Fund and one was the children’s baseline budget. And we had to stand on street corners to collect signatures to put this on the ballot ... You need a lot of signatures to put something on the ballot. And in this case, you know, I had to rally the whole city to get signatures. We got 63,000 signatures. Maybe it was 66,000, now, I can’t believe I can’t remember, signatures, to put this on the ballot. So the day the signatures were due, we took a whole bunch of kids to city hall, and we put all these signatures in little red wagons. It’s a lot of signatures if you have 66,000 signatures. It was 66. It fills a lot of red wagons. So we had all these red wagons. The kids were pulling the red wagons. We took them into the registered voters’ office with this charter amendment that we were getting put on the ballot, and I don’t know if you’ve ever been to city hall, but if you do something in the rotunda in city hall, people on the second floor come out and see what you’re doing, so people came out and looked and said

what are they doing down there and all of a sudden everybody who was on the board of supervisors, people on the mayor's office, are looking down and saying what's going on here and the press was there and we submitted all these signatures and people were stunned. Nobody expected 66,000 people to sign signatures for this, and everybody had been against it, and all of a sudden, everybody was for it.

### **Omar Al-Mashhadani, Iraq**

We had a lot of orphans in Iraq after the war. Millions of orphans. And during the, actually February, last February I was participating and leading a huge demonstration in Baghdad. It was 1,500 orphans. That's a big number actually, of 7- or 8-year-old orphans, and put them in one place. And we had a big concern about their safety. And you know it's not easy to deal with that amount of kids. But it was a big message to the cabinet and parliament that you have to do something for those because the government shelters couldn't get all of these. The capacity is 3,500 and we're talking about three and a half million, maybe, so it's not that easy. So we are pushing for legislation for those orphans and trying to improve their lives, trying to make some salaries for them or try and build new shelters... That's what we work on and we arranged a lot of media to focus on that and we bring a lot of white, what do you call it, white, not shirt just white boards lets say board and everyone of those kids just wrote his wish and signed. I wish my daddy get out of jail, I wish I had a car, I wish I had clean shirts, I wish I had a Christmas gift, I wish a lot of things. And all of those kids writing that and I took this piece of, its not paper, lets just say paper excuse my language and I take it to the parliament and goes to the speaker of the parliament and this is the wishes of a sample of more than 3 million orphans. Can you do something for them? And after that was a press conference and I believe they got the message. And one of the important blogs in the parliament take it and said ok we're going to do work on it and submit a draft for the law for the orphans.