

## Make Your Voice Heard!

In July, attendees of the Homes for Horses Coalition conference in Denver, Colorado were treated to a panel discussion on Lobbying for Tax-Exempt Organizations, featuring Chris Heyde from the Animal Welfare Institute, Keith Dane from the Humane Society of the United States, and Beverly Jones from the ASPCA. For those who were unable to attend, we present a few important takeaways from their presentation.

It is key to understand the difference between lobbying (attempting to influence legislation) and political activity (an attempt to influence a political campaign or election). Some lobbying is permitted for 501(c)(3) public charities, so long as those activities are tracked and reported. Political activity, on the other hand, is absolutely prohibited for 501(c)(3)s.

On the federal level, the specific rules that govern how much lobbying you can do, and how you must keep track of your organization's lobbying activity, depends on whether you are governed by the "no substantial part" test or whether your organization has chosen instead to be governed by Section 501(h) of the Internal Revenue Code, which will mean that you're governed by an expenditure-based test. If you're unsure which applies to your organization, consult your accountant or tax advisor.

In addition to the federal rules, states (and some municipalities) also have their own rules about what constitutes lobbying, and their own systems for registration and reporting. Make sure to check your state's or municipality's website for more information about the rules that apply to you!

It's important to remember that as animal welfare advocates, we can make our voices heard by communicating with legislators at the federal, state and local levels. At each of these levels, some of the outreach that we can conduct include direct contact with legislators (such as phone calls, letters, in-person meetings, attending town hall meetings or providing testimony), indirect contact (think letters to the editor, or posting comments in social media) and events and activities (perhaps you could host an open house at your rescue and invite legislators and the media?)

Speaking up on issues that matter to us, and on issues that can improve the lives of animals, is an important way that you can step up your game in the fight against animal cruelty. Make your voice heard, and make a difference!