

TIPS ON MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

Legislators value personal meetings with constituents and advocates who have valuable information on an issue. The following tips can help you make the most out of a discussion with your elected officials:

- Try to schedule meetings with legislators rather than “dropping in”. When scheduling an appointment, call the legislative office and ask for the person who handles the Representative’s/Senator’s schedule. **Let them know you are a constituent** and that you would like to schedule a meeting on “xyz” issue.
- Be respectful of the legislator’s schedule: **be on time for your meeting**. Also, be prepared to be patient as they may be late or get interrupted during your meeting.
- Treat the gatekeeper like a best friend. Legislative staff have a vital role in the legislative process and often do much of the work for legislators on introducing and supporting issues. **Always treat the legislators’ staff with respect and friendliness.**
- **Keep the meeting brief and to the point.** Excess information may deter the legislator from gaining an understanding of your core issues and concerns. Plan what you are going to talk about in advance: what are your key points to explain your issue?
- If a legislator asks you a question you cannot answer, **it is OK to say you do not know**. If you can get the information to answer their question, tell them you will get it to them later.
- **Listen carefully to the legislator’s questions and concerns about your issue.** Do not become partisan or defensive if they seem opposed to your position. **Keep the meeting positive**, respectful, interesting and full of information.
- **Give examples of the impact proposed legislation will have on your business.**
- If you feel comfortable doing so, **ask the legislator directly if they will support your issues**. This will give you a better understanding of the level of support your issue has.
- If possible, **prepare a single-page handout with key information that can be left with the legislator** for her or his future use in either framing a debate or proposing legislation in support of your issues.
- Before leaving, **thank the legislator for their time**. Their time is in great demand and your courtesy will be well received.
- **Follow up your visit with a thank you letter.** Thank the legislator for their support, if support was indicated, or for the opportunity to present your view. Also, send any additional information that may have been requested about your issue or your organization. If you had been unable to answer a question during the visit, find the answer and include it in your letter.