

TIPS ON TALKING WITH YOUR SENATOR AND REPRESENTATIVE

Talking to an elected official may seem intimidating at first, but it is important to remember that it is a normal part of their job. Especially if you live in their district, they want to know what you think and if they can help. Below are some tips on how you can increase your effectiveness in communicating with your senator and representative with the goal of establishing a long-term relationship.

Prior to the Meeting

- *Do Some Homework*
- Try to know the basics about the topic you are going to address. Be able to articulate what you are concerned about and why. Practice your “elevator speech” before you meet with your senator and representative or the staff member who works for them. Begin by thanking them for what they do. An “**elevator speech**” is a 1-2 minute speech that explains what you want and why you want it. It is called this because it needs to be very short. You may have more time to make your points, but you always need to be prepared to make your pitch quickly, especially if you are meeting them “at the ropes”.
- *Call your senator’s and representative’s offices and ask to speak to your legislator. Be sure to tell them you live in the legislator’s district. If they are not available than speak with their staff member who schedules the legislator’s time. Ask them to schedule an appointment for you with the legislator on February 27th.*
 - Don’t feel slighted if you don’t get to speak to the legislator. Legislative staff members work very closely with the legislator and they are good allies to have.

How to Address your Legislator:

When addressing a member of the state legislature use the following protocols:

- Senator: “Senator (last name)”
- Member of the House of Representatives: “Representative (last name)”
- Governor: “Governor (last name)”
- Lt. Governor: “Lt. Governor (last name)”
- Speaker of the House: “Mr. Speaker”
- Committee Chairman or Chairwoman “Chairman (last name), or Madam Chair “(last name)”

Be Personal

- Tell them a little about yourself—where you live, what you do for a living, if you are representing yourself or an organization
- Be sure to tell them that you live and/or work in their district

Refer to Fact Sheet for Legislators handout

- If possible, refer to at least one piece of data that will support your perspective. Select one key piece of data that helps sell your perspective. Don’t drown them in data; your handout can provide them with additional data.



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Be Focused

- Remember they have only a few minutes to spend with you so stay on topic. Also, don't let the legislator change the subject either. Be polite, but be firm.

Be Positive

- Don't be argumentative. You may not agree with the stand your legislator is taking on this particular issue, but it is important not to burn any bridges. Little is gained by arguing with your legislator. Mention how this issue affects children and families in their district.
- Don't be defensive. They may ask tough questions. They are probably asking the questions that will be asked of them. Give them solid information that will help them justify why they should support your issue. Always remember that you have the right to participate in the education of your legislators.
- Remember your goal is to have a long-term relationship. You won't always agree with your legislator. You are looking for common ground on the issues in which you are interested.

Make the Ask

- Don't leave without asking them to support your topic.
- Let them know you are always willing to help them with information any time. Ask them if they have any questions for you.

End the Meeting

- Don't stay too long
- Thank them for their time and attention

Follow-up

- Send a thank you note and anything else you promised them.
- Consider inviting them to your facility or to gather with children and/or parents and/or families you serve to let them see and hear first-hand what is needed for the community.



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