

Legislative Advocacy ToolKit: Helpful Hints for...

Personal Visits

- Have three or four key points in mind. Write them out beforehand.
- Research your legislator's positions on your issues, and consider these in framing your arguments.
- Be on time. If you cannot avoid being late, call the office to alert them.
- Dress professionally. Your appearance is important.
- Have an agenda prepared.
- Be brief. You can expect 15-20 minutes.
- Be sure to get your concerns on the table before engaging in small talk.
- Send a follow-up letter. Restate your message and thank your legislator for his/her time.

Personal Hearings

- Do your homework. Understand the bill or issue, the status of the bill, and the impact on you and your community.
- Write out your statement in direct, easy to understand language. Have enough typed copies for the committee members and a few extra copies for others who are interested.
- Dress professionally – your appearance may be as important to some legislators as what you say or how you say it.
- Begin your testimony by greeting the chair and committee members. (“Good afternoon Senator Smith and members of the committee...”) Introduce yourself and, if appropriate, your organization or group.
- Begin with a clear and concise statement of our position and what you want. “I am opposed to (in favor of) this bill and urge you to vote against it.”
- Be brief – plan to speak 3-5 minutes.
- Speak clearly and directly. Remain courteous and do not argue with committee members or members of the audience.
- Powerful testimony is a combination of personal stories and accurate, current statistics. Speak from your heart.
- Follow-up on the bill's progress. Contact legislators personally, or write a follow-up letter.
- After your testimony, ask for questions. Don't be afraid to say you do not know an answer. If other members of your group can provide answers you don't know, point them out to the committee. Write down questions you do not know, and tell committee members you will get back to them with a response. Send the response in writing to the chair.

Legislative Advocacy ToolKit: Helpful Hints continued...

Telephone Calls

- Be concise – keep your call to 2-3 minutes.
- Be organized. Write out the two or three points you want to make beforehand. Be prepared to keep it brief.
- Practice what you will say.
- If you cannot reach the legislator, ask to speak to the aide responsible for your issue. Do not be disappointed with this.
- Clearly state whether you are requesting support or opposition to a specific bill.
- Thank them for their time.
- Follow up with a letter restating your points and thanking them for their time.

Letter Writing

- Be brief (one page or less), and use your own words.
- Begin with the appropriate heading and address.
- Be specific: State the specific bill number and issue, and state your opinion in the first sentence.
- Relate your experience with the issue. Use personal examples. Your interest and concern about the issue is what counts, not your expertise.
- Ask the legislator to specifically commit to supporting or opposing the legislation you are writing about. Ask for specific reasons they are supporting or opposing the proposal.
- If you are sending a letter to a committee member who is not your legislator, always send a copy to your own representatives.
- Sign and print your name and include your address.
- If you have pertinent materials and/or editorials from local papers, include them.

E-Mail

- An e-mail sent to a legislator should be considered a professional letter, follow the above guidelines concerning letter writing.
- Be sure to include your full name and address in the body of the message.

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