

ADVOCACY

Children's Advocacy Days 2006

MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

A personal visit is the most effective means of communicating with a legislator. It provides you with the opportunity to:

- "Read" his/her reaction to your request for support;
- Respond immediately-something that cannot be accomplished as well by letter, telephone call, or other means; and
- Become acquainted, an experience that may prove helpful in future contacts as well.

REMEMBER: You definitely should make an appointment in advance.

Introduce Yourself.

Give your name, address, and the organization you represent or with which you are affiliated, if applicable. Do not overdo your comments about the worthiness (or the clout) of your organization.

Remain Focused.

Although you probably gave reason for your visit when you scheduled your appointment, briefly reiterate. If you are visiting on a particular bill, have an extra copy to share. This saves time. Acquaint your legislator with the status of the bill and include any significant committee action that has taken place.

Explain Why You Support/Oppose the Bill. You may use either objective information or data and/or anecdotal information. Convey this in a way that shows you are knowledgeable and committed.

If someone is joining you in this visit, make sure your time is well spent by not repeating each other. Decide in advance who will say what. It is particularly helpful if you can relate personal experiences based on the provisions in the bill and what the bill will accomplish.

Allow Time for Questions.

Be prepared to respond to questions. If you do not know the answer, say so. Follow-up with the answer at a later time.

NOTE: In the course of any day, legislators are confronted with numerous issues, often-times emotional ones. Therefore, be patient if a legislator interjects his/her feeling or opinions on an issue unrelated to yours. You may have to shorten your comments (or even schedule another appointment); however, there are times such as this when being a good listener may be to your advantage.

Ask Whether or Not He/She Will Support/Oppose the Bill.

Although you may be hesitant to this, you need to do so to determine the extent of support the bill has. Tell those who agree with your position how much you appreciate their stand. Those who disagree with you need to know that, although you disagree with them, you respect their stance and even understand their wish or need to oppose your position in some cases. For those who won't give their position, ask whether you can provide additional information to help them make a decision. Whatever you do, do not burn bridges. Today's opponent may be next week's supporter and vice versa.

Conclude and Extend Your Appreciation.

No matter what the outcome, never leave on unfriendly terms.

Write a Follow-Up Thank-You Letter.

Include any responses to question that were asked during the visit which you did not have an answer for at the time.