

SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONAL VISITS TO LEGISLATORS

One of the most effective ways to communicate with legislators is in face-to-face contacts with them. The following are recommendations for personal visits with legislators:

1. Before contacting legislators, become familiar with the problem or issue you are concerned about.
2. Call ahead and make an appointment with the legislator(s) you wish to speak with. Let them know what you wish to discuss.
3. Introduce yourself.
4. Make sure to explain your organizational affiliation. If you or members of your organization are constituents of the legislator, emphasize this fact.
5. State the intensity of your concern over the issue you will discuss.
6. State each of your recommendations in simple and concise terms; state the reasons for your position; restate your recommendation.
7. Ask the legislator if he/she has any questions. Take notes on the questions and problems raised; if you are unsure of the answer, advise him/her that you will have another person from your organization provide the information on the question or problem.
8. Repeat this format for each and every one of your recommendations.
9. Conclude by restating and summarizing your recommendations as well as the intensity of your concern over these issues.

10. Ask the legislator whether he/she will support your recommendations. If he/she will not, try to determine the reason for his/her position.

11. Thank the legislator for his/her time and let him/her know you will be watching with interest the legislative decision-making process on the particular issue.

12. Observe these do's and don'ts:

- Be brief.
- Be courteous.
- Be honest and forthright. (Answer only those questions you can answer accurately, and say that you will get information on the questions that you cannot answer.)
- Be assertive (firm) about your concerns and views.
- Give your reason for taking the position you have.
- Get as much clarity as possible on the legislator's position, concerns, or problems and his/her reasons for taking the position communicated to you.
- Don't be argumentative.
- Don't make threats or promises.
- Don't berate or hassle your legislator.
- Don't pretend to wield a great deal of power. (For example, pretend to represent hundreds or thousand of constituents - unless, of course, you actually do.)
- Don't demand a commitment if there is any reticence to acknowledge support.

It is usually best to visit your legislators in small groups - three people are optimum - and to keep your visits as brief as you can. Going alone may be unsatisfactory because legislators may try to out-talk you or you may reach an impasse too quickly. You should convey the impression that these three people are representatives of many more; if each of the three represents a different organization, their potential voting power will maximize your lobbying impact.

-Prepared by SC Association of Nonprofit Organizations