

## How to be an effective legislative advocate

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Lobbying your elected officials is an important way of participating in the legislative process. When you lobby your elected officials, you can let them know what you think about important legislation. Take a moment to review these tips so that you can have an effective lobbying experience!

### Manage your expectations:

- **Go to his/her office and ask to meet with the legislator.** This is not always possible since important meetings and other obligations can come up at the last minute for lawmakers. If you cannot meet with your legislator, meet with his or her aide. Meeting with legislative staff can be just as important and effective as meeting directly with the legislator. Make sure to leave note for your legislator including your phone number so he or she knows you were there and why you came by.

### During the Meeting (a typical meeting will last about 5 – 15 minutes):

- **Start off with introductions** (if you are a constituent, supporter, or member of the same party, say so).
- Explain to the legislator **why you are there and the issue(s)** you'd like to talk about.
- **Use fact sheets** and talking points to explain your position on an issue or proposed bill.
- **Ask the legislator how he/she plans to vote.** Once you have presented your case, try to get a commitment. If he/she is uncertain, ask if more information would be helpful and be sure to follow up.
- **Admit if you don't know the answer.** However, offer to find the answer and get the information to them. Then follow up by contacting the experts for answers and email the legislator with the answer.
- **Do not threaten, pressure, attack or beg** a legislator to get a vote. Always be courteous.
- **Keep the meeting focused on your issues.** Let the legislator make comments, but don't let him/her avoid the issue. Tactfully bring the conversation back on track.
- **Thank the legislator** for his/her time. If you have one, **leave your business card** with the legislator or sign a sign-in book so that the legislator can keep in contact with you.

### After the Meeting:

- **Thank your legislator** for his/her time, both at the meeting and in writing. Regardless of his/her position, courtesy is important. Even if you don't agree on a certain issue now, there may be a time later that you can get his/her vote.
- A **written thank you note** also gives you another chance to make your pitch.