

TEN TIPS

HOW TO VISIT WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

1. DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Get to know your legislators before meeting. Locate their biographies, background, interests, and voting records. Know what committees they sit on and what bills they sponsor. Preparation leads to success.

2. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

Legislators keep busy schedules. It is important to have an appointment and to be on time for the appointment. Despite best efforts, legislators often assign their staff to constituent meetings. Don't be frustrated (see # 8).

3. FOCUS

Your appointment may be short, so clearly address the issues at hand. Sell the "big picture" and demonstrate how your issues impact the whole community. Provide background materials to refresh the legislator, inform staff and cover details.

4. BE POLITE

Be reasonable and respectful. Remember that you are a diplomat for your concerns. Open antagonism and frustration can jeopardize long-term relationships.

5. BE ACCURATE

Credibility is key if you want to be taken seriously. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't guess. Let the legislator know you will provide the missing information later.

6. MAKE A PERSONAL CONNECTION

Use your firsthand knowledge. Parents, teachers, laborers all bring invaluable experience. Look for opportunities to connect with the legislator, such as a similar upbringing, shared interests, mutual school, common friends.

7. SEEK AN ANSWER

Politely ask your legislator for his/her position on the issue. If you are in agreement, discuss ways you can both forward the issue. If you disagree, seek opportunities to address his/her concerns.

8. DON'T UNDERESTIMATE STAFF

Legislators trust their staff to filter information, provide sound advice and handle many concerns. Staff are invaluable resources because of their proximity to the legislator – don't underestimate their role.

9. FOLLOW UP

Always send a letter of thanks to your legislator. Use this as an opportunity to restate your positions and seek common ground. Of course, thank him/her for any support, and give a gentle reminder of any commitments that were made.

10. REPEAT 1-9

Your initial meeting is only the beginning. If legislators never hear from you again, they may lose sight of your views. Continue to provide them with information and insight. Staying involved is the surest way to make your voice heard.