

Meeting with Your Legislator

Meeting with your elected official is a positive experience; it does not have to be intimidating. Remember, you hold a great deal of influence as a registered voter. Elected officials are anxious to meet with their constituents and will almost always remain courteous, attentive, and responsive during constituent visits. Below are some helpful hints to make your visit a success.

- **Take the initiative.** Be clear and concise when stating the issues you want to discuss, your point of view on the issue, and the actions you want your elected official to take. This is your opportunity to state any facts about the issue you feel may help your legislator or that have been omitted from the debate.
- **Bring information.** Present the legislator with a brief fact sheet or information packet. This brief can explain your position, the pros or cons of a bill (if discussing current legislation), and/or controversial points.
- **Outline widespread support.** Mention any other organizations, individuals, government officials, or legislators that support your position/legislation. If you are part of a large coalition or group, mention the number of members and your work in local communities.
- **Bring it home.** Show how the issue affects the member's state or district. Share a relevant story to make the issue more personal.
- **Close the deal.** After stating your position, ask your legislator whether they will support the issue/legislation. Press politely for a commitment, unless the legislator clearly opposes your position and remains steadfast in their convictions.
- **Give thanks.** Always thank them for their time, whether meeting the legislator or their staff. Even if they oppose your position your visit will have a lasting impression and it's important to remain professional.
- **Write it down.** You can take notes during your meeting so that you record all relevant information. After the meeting the lead should fill out a lobby day report while the visit remains fresh in everyone's mind. Turn in the lobby reports to a HOW staff member.
- **Follow up.** Follow up your visit with a thank you letter, as well as any information they requested during your visit. This is yet another opportunity to make your point and make an additional ask. If they made a commitment remind them in your letter.

See other side for Things to Remember.

Things to Remember

As the saying goes, a lot rides on first impressions. As a representative of your community, your organization, and the HOW Coalition, your actions during a lobby visit will have an enormous impact on future cooperation and correspondence with the legislator. Here are a few simple things to remember:

- **Dress professionally.** Business attire is best, but there is no need to be overly formal. Suits, dresses, khakis with button down shirts, and clothing specific to your organization are all appropriate. Avoid wearing heavy perfume or cologne.
- **Select a spokesperson.** Each delegation will choose a spokesperson to take the lead during the office visits to keep the meeting on track. Everyone attending the meeting will have the opportunity to offer up information or share personal stories. The spokesperson should change for each visit to give each meeting participant experience leading.
- **Be prompt.** It's common for legislators to arrive late to meetings, but you should plan on arriving *at least* five minutes prior to the meeting's starting time. Make sure to allow enough time between visits to arrive at each one on time.
- **Be polite.** Positive body language, good demeanor, and good rapport will help maintain open communication between you and the office. Non-verbal communication speaks loudly, so be mindful.
- **Listen.** Pay attention to what your legislator or their staff say, they will have valid concerns that need to be addressed. If they know you aren't paying attention they will retain little of your information.
- **Be honest.** If you don't know the answer, don't make it up. You will not be able to answer all of their questions. It's perfectly acceptable to respond to a question with "I'm not sure, but I can find out." Make sure you send them responses to any questions.
- **Stay on message.** This is very important. Often, times in an effort to skirt the issue, your legislator may change the subject or bring up irrelevant points. Politely bring them back to the conversation and remain in control. When/if your legislator brings up nonfactual information or points, take the opportunity to educate them and bring them back in focus.