

Guide for Meeting with Legislators

- 1. Be on Time and Prepared:** Legislators are very busy and often have multiple appointments and time commitments in a day. Being prompt allows you more time with the legislator to get your points across. Being prepared is essential to getting your message across. Rehearse ahead of time what you are going to say and bring appropriate supporting documents that back up your statements.
- 2. First Impressions:** The first thing you should say is "thank you" to the elected official for meeting with you. The purpose of the advocacy is to gain their support as a co-sponsor or sponsor of legislation, speaking up in conference or writing letters to their own legislative leadership.
- 3. Roles of Advocates:** If you are going to see a legislator with a group of colleagues, try to bring a diverse group of constituents. Someone should be appointed to be the meeting facilitator, to speak first, to introduce folks, to designate certain members to speak on particular issues of expertise and to wrap up the meeting. Another advocate should be designated the note taker, to record what happened at the meeting and the legislator's response. This person should also record any additional information that needs to be sent to the legislator for follow up.
- 4. Meeting Tone:** Advocates are there to educate legislators about the issues and not to berate or lecture them. Remember that honey always works better than vinegar. Never get belligerent or angry.
- 5. Stay on Message:** It is not uncommon for legislators to veer off the intended purpose of the meeting, especially if they do not share your opinion on the issue. Be vigilant and politely bring the conversation back to your message.
- 6. Leave on a Positive Note:** As you wrap up the conversation, make sure you repeat one last time what action you hope the legislator will take and then thank them for meeting with you. Also, make sure you leave them any written material you brought that backs up your point of view.
- 7. Follow-up:** Follow-up is key to successful grassroots advocacy efforts. The meeting facilitator should send a thank you note to the legislator for meeting with them and include any additional information the legislator requested.

Guide to Write to your Legislator

- **Be professional.** Always be polite--write calmly and concisely.
- **Use a formal greeting.** Address the person by job title: Dear Senator____, Dear Representative_____, Dear Mr. President.
- **Be clear.** Put the topic in the first sentence, giving the title and the bill number of the proposed legislative action. Example: "Please vote against House Bill #007 that would open the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge (ANWAR) to drilling for oil."
- **Stay on subject.** E-mail, call, fax or write a letter with only one topic per message.
- **Identify yourself.** Put your name and address clearly in any written communication or leave clear contact information if you are required to leave a voice mail message while calling.
- **Be personal.** Tell why this issue matters to you personally. Be specific about how it affects you, your children, someone you know. Give details of the impact of the issue that make it matter to you.
- **Avoid form and petition letters.** Do not use a form letter even if you think it says it so much better than you could. It will likely be ignored or at best put in a pile to be counted.
- **Give it a personal touch.** Hand address the envelope being sent by postal mail to state and local officials. Aides rarely toss aside hand addressed letters--it might be from a friend.
- **Send mail to state and local officials.** Letters in the mail get noticed at the state and local level. If there is no immediate crisis, a "snail mail" communication will probably be better than e-mail.
- **Email can work.** For most federal officials, e-mail is regularly checked (if not often) so do communicate this way, with thoughtful comments that show you are informed on the issue and not just ranting.
- **A phone call is best.** E-mail is often ignored during a busy session so a phone call will be better if time is of the essence. This holds true for members of the U.S. Congress and state officials.
- **Generate multiple calls from your neighbors and family members.** At the state level, if legislators gets six or eight communications on one side of an issue they are likely to consider it incredibly important as they so rarely hear from anyone on issues facing them for a vote.

Thank you to the NH League of Women Voters for letting us summarize their guidance found online at www.lwvnh.org