

HOW TO MEET WITH YOUR FEDERAL OR STATE LEGISLATORS

Legislators like to meet with their constituents to learn their views on issues of importance to them and the district/state. The BEST TIME to request a meeting is when they are in their district office, prior to or in between sessions. During session, the meeting will generally be scheduled with their aide who handles the particular issue you will be discussing. Many states have legislative visits/days scheduled through the Catholic Conference where training is provided on specific bills/issues and legislator/aide meetings are scheduled during session.

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT INGREDIENT FOR SUCCESS. As Catholics, we have consistent principles that legislators know we will not compromise.

BEFORE THE MEETING:

- 1) Make a list of bills or issues of interest to you or your group. It is best to limit the list to no more than three or four. If it is a bill, refer to the bill number.
- 2) Prepare "talking points" to make your point. Know what the opposite side of the issue is so you can explain why your position is preferred.
- 3) Have a list of facts to leave behind so the legislator has a reference point. Be sure to include a contact name and phone number they can call if they want more information.
- 4) Call the legislator's District/Capitol Office for an appointment. They will ask what issues you wish to discuss with the legislator/aide. Tell them who will be attending the meeting.
- 5) Do not engage in a discussion of details on the phone as your purpose is to schedule a face-to-face visit. Ask for a 30-minute meeting to allow time for adequate discussion.
- 6) Confirm the meeting time at least 24 hours prior to the visit.

AT THE MEETING:

- 1) Arrive on time, but preferably early, in case he/she is free to meet prior to the scheduled appointment time.
- 2) If more than one person is attending the meeting, agree ahead of time who will speak to each issue. Describe the issue/bill in detail if the legislator is not a sponsor or co-sponsor. Legislators deal with hundreds of bills and do not know all the facts on each one.
- 3) If you do not know the answer to a question, say so and tell him/her that you will find out the answer and call or write back with the information. Your credibility is at stake so do not guess at the answer - get the facts.

- 4) Do not argue if they disagree with your position. Listening respectfully will keep the door open to future communication. Leave behind the information which supports your position.
- 5) Ask the legislator how they intend to vote. As a constituent, you have the right to know their position. Be polite, but firm.
- 6) Only stay for the amount of time scheduled unless the legislator/aide continues the conversation. They usually have back-to-back meetings scheduled so they will appreciate your thoughtfulness.
- 7) Write a thank-you note after the visit. This gives you one more opportunity to summarize the reason for your visit. It also puts your name before them again so they will be more likely to remember you the next time you call or visit.

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RESOURCE FROM THE NCCW LEGISLATION COMMISSION - SHEILA S. HOPKINS, CHAIRMAN