

ACTION TOOLS: Meeting With Your Legislator



VISITING YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

The most effective way to communicate your message to your legislator is to schedule a meeting to talk face-to-face with your representative or staffer. While these personal visits are the most successful lobbying tool, they also require the greatest amount of planning and time. Here are a few guidelines to help you plan an effective visit.

- **SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT.** Ask to speak to the scheduler when you call the office to set up your appointment. They will know which staff member you need to meet with based on your issue. Call at least a week in advance and make sure they allot you an adequate amount of time for your meeting. **Let the scheduler know you are a constituent.** It is much easier to get an appointment if you or someone in your group is a constituent.
- **EXPLAIN HOW PROPOSED LEGISLATION WILL DIRECTLY AFFECT YOU.** Bring statistics from your local programs, written testimonials, or personal stories from victims. Highlight both the successes your organization has achieved as well as the areas where additional funding and programs are needed. Explain how a cut in funding will affect your organization's services or how a new proposed program will help meet your current unmet need.
- **BRING A WRITTEN STATEMENT.** Prepare a written letter that you can leave with your representative recapping what you mentioned in your visit. Be sure to address why this legislation is important to you, how it will effect your organization's services, and the current unmet needs of your organization. Not only will this letter provide the legislator with a written record of your visit, but writing the letter will help you prepare for your appointment.
- **BE POLITE AND PROFESSIONAL.** Nothing is more counterproductive to a visit than being rude, vulgar, or threatening. Even if you disagree with your representative's position, always be polite. A legislator may make critical remarks about your position or organization. He/she may ask you tough questions. If you do not know the answer, remain calm and tell them that you will get back to them. Always be on time and dress professionally.
- **OFFER TO PROVIDE MORE INFORMATION.** Always offer to provide staffers and representatives with additional information on your issue. NCADV is more than happy to provide you with Fact Sheets on a variety of topics related to domestic violence that you can pass along to your representatives. Also offer to provide more detailed information about your local programs, if necessary.
- **ASK FOR A COMMITMENT.** Your goal is to enlist your legislator's support, so be as specific as possible. Ask direct questions such as "Will you vote for....?" or "Will you support....when it comes to the floor?" to elicit direct answers.
- **BRING A BUSINESS CARD.** Give your legislator your business card at the beginning of meeting. The card should contain all your contact information.
- **FOLLOW UP YOUR MEETING WITH A "THANK YOU" LETTER.** Regardless of how the meeting goes, you should always follow up by thanking the legislator for his/her time and reiterating the points you discussed in the meeting.