VISITING WITH A POLICYMAKER

Meeting face-to-face with a policymaker lets you fully explain your concerns, allows them to ask questions and develops a better understanding of the issue for both of you.

- Call their office or public home number to ask for an appointment. Leave a number where you can be reached. Legislators' home numbers are listed in the blue pages of your phone book. They expect people to call them; but as the phone may ring in their home, don't call late at night.
- Choose a convenient place where you can talk without being interrupted – e.g. a library, their office, a diner. Be sure you and they have directions and know where to park.
- Let them know what issues you want to discuss and what motivated you to call.
- You can take one or two other people with you, but it isn't necessary. Keep the group small.
- Prepare for the visit – define your goal, brief yourselves on the issue, plan what you want to say, even practice with a friend – it isn't necessary to become an expert, but have a general understanding of the issue.
- Be sure to leave your contact information – name, address, phone and email (if available). It is good if you can bring a fact sheet to leave with them, preferably one page. The sheet should contain your most important points, what you want them to do, and your contact information.
- Arrive on time but understand that they may not be. Be patient and understanding.
- Introduce yourselves – describe your interest in the issue, any organization you are representing, and if you are a constituent, say so.
- Be friendly and courteous. A little small talk is fine, but get to the point. Be respectful of their time.
- Say your piece, but be sure to listen to what they have to say. You can disagree politely, but don’t argue or interrupt.
- Be sure to remember the point of the meeting – what it is you want them to do.
- They may ask a question that you don’t know the answer to. It happens to everyone – you can’t know everything about any issue. Don’t make one up. Say that you don’t know, but you will get back to them.
- Get back to them. If it is taking you a long time to find the answer, call to let them know that you are still working on it.
- It is often helpful to take a few notes immediately after the meeting, so you remember any concerns or questions they asked. Share your feedback with any coalitions or organizations you are working with.
- Follow up with a thank you note. You’d be amazed at how often people forget this and how much legislators appreciate it. Tell them how much you appreciate their time and interest in your issue. Invite them to call you.
if they need more information and repeat your contact information. Include any updates or additional information they might appreciate.

- Be sure to thank any staff who helped schedule the meeting.

Don’t be intimidated. Elected officials expect, even welcome, these meetings. They cannot do their job without input from the public. Administrators also understand that they work for the public and that advocates often make their job easier. Both would much rather hear your concerns in person than read about complaints in a letter to the editor.