

Tips for Interacting with Elected Officials

Introduce yourself. State who you are and the issue about which you are concerned.

Summarize why you have initiated contact and set priorities. Personalize your story, specific to your district, or address a particular bill -- how it affects your job or district and your recommendations. Do not dilute your message with a long list of requests or pass along a form letter.

Limit to one page. Be concise if sending a letter and include your complete address on letter, envelope or in email.

Do your homework. Be informed about all pertinent issues you wish to discuss and about issues that concern you. Closely follow the action in the Legislature as things change on a daily basis. Read newspapers and appropriate websites.

Prepare for your meeting. Develop a concise document that you can leave with your elected officials for future reference.

Be reasonable, courteous and respectful. Do not overstate your case or you risk losing your credibility. Do not deliver ultimatums or threats. Understand that they are also likely hearing from constituents with opinions that differ from yours.

Meet your legislator in his/her home district, if possible.

- a. Make an appointment. Do not drop in; elected officials are busy people.
- b. Always introduce yourself. Officials meet many people.
- c. Be brief and direct. Do not bring a laundry list of requests.

Follow up with a "thank you for your time and support" letter and re-emphasize your request in writing.

If you have an established relationship, a telephone call may work, but follow up with a written description of your request.

Listen to what an elected official tells you - write it down. If they make a request, be sure to provide the information, follow up and do not hesitate to go back to them on the same or other issues.

- a. If promise of support is positive, make sure you thank them.
- b. If response is negative, ask if there is any information they need to make a different decision.
- c. If their reaction is negative, thank them for their time and for considering your request.

Always show respect for and empower an elected official's staff. Staff members can be critical in achieving your goals. They can easily influence their employer's attitude toward you and your issue. Always thank them for their help.