

MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS: DO's AND DON'T's

DO

- ◆ Get to know your own Representative and Senator. No one has more influence with a legislator than a voting constituent!
- ◆ Remember that personal communications with your legislator are the most effective. In-person contacts, telephone calls, hand-written notes are the most likely to get the legislator's attention. Some respond to emails, others don't.
- ◆ Be sure your legislator knows who you represent, or what group you are a member of when you contact him/her about an issue. This is particularly important when contacting a legislator from a district other than your own.
- ◆ Be polite, be brief, be specific (using the bill number if possible) in your communications. Offer to answer questions or to get more information if you are asked a question. It is much better to say that you don't know the answer, but will get back with it, than to give a wrong answer or misleading information!
- ◆ Be a good listener and hear what the legislator has to say on the issue.
- ◆ Respect the legislator's right to disagree and to vote against your issue.
- ◆ Know how the process works: the committee system, the timetable, how bills come for a vote, etc. Let the legislator know that you have done your homework!

DON'T

- Be pushy. If you are told that a legislator cannot see you, ask to make another appointment or leave a note and follow up at a later time.
- Be sarcastic, critical or threatening. And don't embarrass or continually argue with a legislator. Don't say to a legislator, "You promised me...." If anything, say "I understood you to say...."
- Extend your visit beyond a reasonable amount of time.
- Be misleading with a legislator – either about the facts, the extent of the issues or the opposition to your position.
- Try to tell the legislator how to vote on a bill. Instead, point out how a vote one way or the other will affect the issue...and the legislator's constituency.
- Show anger or resentment toward a legislator who votes against you. The legislative process is a long and on-going one, and chances are that you will need to gain the support of that legislator another time on another issue!
- **Forget to say "Thank You!" to the legislator or policy-maker and to the staff...and don't forget to follow up with a hand-written Thank You note!**