

Do's and Don'ts of Citizen Lobbying

Personal Visits

Do:

- Make an appointment.
- Dress neatly.
- Introduce yourself.
- Stick to the subject at hand.
- If you don't know something, say so.
- Be honest.
- Know something about the official.
- Be cordial to the assistant.
- Be on time—but be prepared to wait.
- Call or write in a summary of the meeting.
- Know the number/name of the bill and something about it afterwards.
- Thank the public official for the meeting.
- Enjoy your visit—you are one of the few people making change!

Don't:

- Be angry.
- Be hostile (I'm a taxpayer!).
- Threaten (You'll pay for this at the polls!).
- Be afraid to be assertive.
- Have a lot of material (It will never be read).
- Lose credibility (It will affect everyone who lobbies on the same subject after you).

Points to Know:

- Most public officials are happy when their constituents visit—they'll be friendly.
- Public officials want people to like them.
- You pay their salary—they work for you staff—they can be very helpful.

Common Pitfalls—Don't Let Them Throw You!

- The public official doesn't show up for your appointment
- The public official is late for your appointment
- Constant interruptions during your meeting
- Meeting is cut short
- Public official doesn't have a copy of the bill/proposal and hasn't read it
- Public official takes control of the meeting and you never get to make your points
- Public official asks so many questions that you find it difficult to make a point
- Opposition walks in while you are talking
- Public official says things like: "I always hear from the other side, not yours."
"I'll have to wait until it comes out of committee."
"Don't worry, it'll never come to a vote."
"It's a lost cause."
"I'm not on that committee."

Hints

- Confirm appointment the morning of the appointment.
- Bring a copy of the bill/proposal with you.
- Know exactly what you want to get from the official (yes or no vote, commitment not to vote, etc.).
- Prioritize your points (especially important if the meeting is cut short).
- Know your official's background (voting record, position on the issues, personal history).
- Try to find common ground with the legislator.
- Make yourself available as a resource.
- Thank the assistant or staff person.