

MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR IN THE OFF-SEASON

Personal visits are a highly effective way of helping legislators understand your position on an issue or your program. Legislators welcome visits from constituents. They want you involved. Legislators are more available and are better able to keep appointments when the Legislature is not in session, so visits during this time are critical.

Residents of Washington have three state legislators: one State Senator and two State Representatives. Generally, they represent fairly small geographic areas (smaller than your federal congressional district) and they want to get to know the people and the programs they represent. If you do not know who your legislators are, call the legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000 or look them up at <http://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder>

Flexibility is always important when making appointments with legislators. Try to remove any barriers such as time and place. Be prepared for schedule changes; do not take these changes personally, this is just how it is.

Tips for planning your Meeting:

Scheduling the Meeting—

- Be flexible! Negotiate a time and location that works for well for them. By being flexible on time and location you will seem reasonable and have a better chance of getting a meeting.
- Make your appointment in advance.
- Be prepared for delays or cancellations.

Before the Meeting—

- Prepare well.
- Know who you are meeting with and their prior exposure to the issue you are going to discuss. Talk with people who have met with him/her recently
- Research their background
- Decide on your plan of action for the meeting. What do you want to accomplish?

At the Meeting—

- Be on time for your appointment. Be prepared, dress neatly, be polite and be brief.
- At the beginning of the meeting, state who you are, whom you represent, what you want to discuss, and what you want your legislator to do.
- Do not be surprised if your legislator does not know about your issue. Legislators have to know about many issues and may specialize in areas unrelated to your work. Avoid overwhelming the legislator with information and detail.
- If you do not know the answer to a specific question, offer to find the answer and then forward the information to the legislator.

Before you leave the Meeting—

- Try to find out where your legislator stands on your issue.
- Leave a one-page fact sheet summarizing your points; include your name, address and telephone number.
- Perhaps the most critical part of your visit --- Ask your legislator for some sort of commitment, some way that they could help the issue.

You will have to gauge their interest at that moment:

- Are they being polite, but non-committal? How about asking them if they would be willing to read additional information about your issue?
- Somewhat interested? How about asking them to come out to program for a site visit?
- Seem interested in getting more information on the issue? You could invite them to sit down informally with a few other folks who know the issue well (consumers, practitioners, policy analysts) and talk in more depth about the issue.
- Already on board with the issue? You might ask them if they would be willing to share this information with other members of their caucus.
- No matter what the next step is, you must be sure to follow-up! Ask your legislator when you can call him or her to follow-up (e.g. see if they have questions about materials you want them to read, make arrangements for a site visit, see if the other members of their caucus had any questions about the issue, etc.)
- If your legislator needs more information, make arrangements to give them information AND ask them when you should follow-up with them.
- Try to leave the meeting knowing what your next steps should be (e.g. calling their office to set up a site visit, organizing that small informal meeting, providing additional information, etc.)

After the Meeting—

- Follow up the meeting with a thank you note, thanking the legislator for his or her time. Be sure to re-state your position in this note.
- If the legislator asks for more information, please get this information to them. If you need help responding to questions, call the Children's Alliance.