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MAKE SURE YOUR COMMUNITY IS SENIOR-FRIENDLY. LET YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS KNOW WHAT YOU WANT!

How to Lobby: Tips for Citizen Activists

Visiting your legislators is one of the strongest ways you can participate in and show support for democracy. Our legislators represent us, but the only way they can know what we want is for us to tell them. Most legislators pay attention to any reasonable-sounding constituent who cares enough about an issue to come in person to talk about it. The following tips will help your visit be a success:

- Be prompt and patient. Show up on time for your appointment, but be patient - it is not uncommon for legislators to be late for meetings or to be interrupted by other business.
- Be courteous to the legislator's assistant. These folks have tough jobs and, incidentally, a lot of control over the information their bosses see and hear.
- Start the meeting by introducing yourselves – everyone in your group – and thanking the legislator for taking time to meet with you. Bring up any personal or professional connections that you and the legislator may share.
- When you are introducing yourselves, stress that at least one of you is a constituent or represents an organization with constituents in the legislator's district.
- Stay on topic! Share personal and local examples of the impact of the issues you came to talk about. Leave a copy of the factsheet. Keep the meeting short and focused.
- Be a good listener. Let your legislator ask questions as you go along. You don't have to agree with his or her views, but you should show that you are willing to hear them.
- Saying "I don't know" can be a smart move. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell your legislator that you will get that information for them. Never make up an answer to a question - giving inaccurate information can seriously damage your credibility!
- If there is opposition, attempt to identify its source. It is appropriate to ask the elected official what it would take for them to change their mind.
- Be resolute, but not argumentative. It may take several meetings by different citizens to shift a legislator's position. As your meeting begins to wind down, you can ask for a commitment of support on your issues. If they say no, smile anyway.
- End the visit on a positive note. Thank the elected official for their time. Ask that you be put on their mailing list, and leave your contact information.
- Outside the office, quickly jot down notes from the visit while they are fresh in your mind. The information you collect on a visit is as important as what you impart.
- After you return home, write a quick thank you note to the legislator, and include any needed follow-up information you said you would get them.

Good luck and have fun!