Tips for Your Congressional and Other Advocacy Visits

The following tips may help you effectively communicate with your decision maker:

➢ Basic Etiquette

- **Dress professionally.** Traditional business attire is expected.
- **Use proper titles.** When speaking with a Member of the House, use "Congressman," "Representative," or simply "Mr." or "Ms." When speaking with Senators, use "Senator."
- **Be Prompt.** If you are not on schedule or going to be late, let the office know as soon as possible.
- **Be flexible.** Do not be offended if you speak with congressional staff. Legislators are busy and it is customary for congressional staff to discuss issues with constituents. Help them be fully aware of the issues that concern you. Also, be willing to discuss issues quickly or while walking down the hall to the next appointment.
- **Be prepared.** Explain who you are and why you are there. Many members are often busy with numerous issues and may not be up to date on your particular cause. Use this visit to explain your views, concerns, and suggestions. Seek to offer a new way of looking at the problem and offer constructive criticism, not just negative preaching or scolding. Present your view in as positive a manner as possible.
- **Relax.** Congressional offices are organized to make visitors—especially constituents—feel welcome and at home. If you are not made to feel welcome, it is their oversight, not your mistake.

➢ Selling Your Position

- Present a written position (preferably a "one-pager") to support your proposal. This will allow the administrator, legislator and staff to reflect on the meeting at their leisure.
- End each visit with a question which evokes a commitment to action such as: "Will you support this issue?" or "What can I report back to_____?"
- Leave a business card or something with your name, address and telephone number on it and ask for theirs.

➢ Follow Up After Your Visit

- Before leaving the office, be sure to thank your member of congress and/or congressional staff for his/her time.
- Follow up the visit with a letter to the staff person with whom you spoke.
- Report to your local state group or organization regarding today's congressional visit.

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