

## **Meeting with your Member and/or their Staff<sup>1</sup>**

One of the best ways to get your message on an issue to your Senator or Assembly Member is to schedule a meeting. This usually happens through our LPIU offices with attendance at the meeting also including LPIU staff.

### **1. Meeting with an aide vs. meeting with the Member**

You will likely end up meeting with a legislative aide. Make sure to get their name, as you will probably want to contact them in the future. Treat them with respect. If you meet with the Member, be succinct in your explanation of the issues as you may only have about 10 minutes with him/her.

### **2. Preparing for a Meeting**

Spend time preparing. Determine what you will say and how you will answer any anticipated questions. Focus on your key message. Never meet with a Member or an aide unprepared. Expect the Member or aide to ask questions about your issue. You establish credibility, are viewed as an expert, and seen as a future resource if you are prepared.

Leave the Member and staff person a fact sheet that provides background and includes recommendations on what you want the Member to do on the issue. Keep the language simple. Do not provide too many documents as the Member and/or staff will not have time to read them.

### **3. Common pitfalls**

- **Staying “on message”.** The Member or aide may try to shift you “off message” with “off topic” questions. Shift the conversation back to the message you are trying to deliver. Members of your group may also stray. Rehearse in advance and make sure all understand the importance of staying on message. Work out a subtle signal to use if someone strays off message.
- **Questions that are too detailed.** An aide may ask questions that are more detailed that no one can answer. Direct the meeting back to the areas you know. Politely point out that you have no answer now, but would be happy to get back to them with the information. It is also appropriate to say that you do not know. Never lie. Talk about aspects of disability policy you do know.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from materials provided by the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

- **Not identifying what you want the Member to do.** During meeting, a Member or aide may seem agreeable and concerned. That does not mean they have agreed to do what you want of them. Therefore, it is critical that you communicate a clear understanding of what you want the Member to do.
- **Not being time efficient.** Be cordial, but move through introductions quickly and get to the main points of the meeting. Legislative meetings are short. Make sure you get your points made and that the aide or Member understands your message and what you need from them.
- **Being too casual.** Treat an aide with the same respect you would reserve for a Member. When referring to a Senator, always call them either "Senator Smith", or "The Senator" when referring to them in the third person.
- **Not wrapping up the meeting effectively.** Recap anything that you think the Member or aide agreed too. Offer to help in anyway possible providing additional information.

#### **4. After the Meeting,**

Fulfill any promises you made during the meeting. If you agreed to get more information, do it as quickly as possible, and then get it to the aide or Member. If you met with an aide who promised to deliver your message to the Member, it is fine to call in a week or so to find out what happened.

## DO's and DON'Ts WHEN DEALING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

### DO

1. Make an appointment.
2. Be on time for the visit.
3. Be positive and friendly.
4. State the reason for your visit.
  - Be concise and specific.
  - Introduce yourself and briefly identify what/whom you represent.
  - Briefly describe the issue(s).
  - Limit the number of issues to be discussed
  - State your position and recommendation on the issue(s).
5. Personalize the issue(s).
  - Tell how the action will affect people with disabilities. Provide reliable data/facts to support your position.
6. Provide the names of people who can be resources for the Member and give him/her additional information.
7. Leave a written summary of your position.
8. Write a thank you letter.
  - Thank the Member/aide for the visit Summarize the visit.
  - Identify follow-up steps
  - Ask for the Member's commitment.

### DON'T

Arrive unexpectedly and expect to see the official. Be upset if your Member cannot see you personally.

Be late for the visit.

Be confrontational.  
(Do not ever threaten or berate the Member or aide.)

Try to discuss several different issues.

Talk only in terms of numbers and statistics. Give incorrect information or try to answer questions that you do not know.

Forget to write a thank-you letter

Ignore the Member for the rest of the year.