

How to Visit Your Legislator

(and other Decision-Makers too!)

1. Call your legislator's office to request an appointment.

Be prepared to say:

a. Who you are: name and descriptor

A descriptor is a role you play in your community

Examples:

Role in your family: father, mother, care-taker, grandparent

Role in your community: president of your neighborhood association

Role at your work: manager of a small business, an employee of...

b. Whether or not you are a constituent

Are you registered to vote in the legislator's district? A constituent is a voter in a district represented by an elected official; legislators usually pay special attention when a constituent calls. Their office will usually ask that when setting appointments.

c. Who you represent

If you represent other people through associations or coalitions, make sure to let them know that you are calling on behalf of a larger group of people.

2. Prepare for your appointment.

Before your visit, review your issue. What are you asking for and what is your legislator's position on the issue? Prepare for difficult questions. You may find it helpful to write down a few notes as talking points and review these before your meeting.

Note: It's always a great idea to connect with an advocacy organization that champions children's issues. A child advocacy organization can help you by:

- a. Sharing background information and data that may help prepare you for your visit;
- b. Providing you with answers to any tough questions that might arise during your visit;
- c. Offering you an opportunity to contribute to broader advocacy efforts by sharing what you learned with other advocates!

3. On day of appointment:

- a. Dress professionally and arrive on time.
- b. Notify the front desk that you have arrived and who you are there to see.
- c. Sometimes your legislator will not be available and a staff member will meet with you. That is OK! Educating staff is very important for influencing policy because they are the

ones who elected officials rely on for information. Developing a relationship with staffers can be of great value.

4. *When speaking with your legislator:*

- a. Introduce who you are, your descriptor, and who you represent.
- b. Speak from the heart.
- c. Tell them what you want.
- d. Ask if you can count on their support.
- e. If they ask a difficult question, it is okay if you ever have to say 'I don't know.' Just let them know that you will get back to them. If needed, contact a child advocacy organization to help you get the information you need. Be sure to follow up with your legislator once you have the information!

5. *Wrapping up:*

- a. Say thank you.
- b. For extra impact, mail a thank you card after your visit! Include a brief reminder of who you are and what you spoke about.
- c. Call the advocacy organization you have a relationship with and share what you learned from the visit!
- d. Feel free to call your legislators frequently to follow-up on your request or to ask for progress updates on the issues you care about. Remember your elected officials work for you!