

## **VISITING LEGISLATORS**

There are four basic ways for letting your legislators know who you are and what your needs are: person-to-person visits, letters, e-mail, and telephone calls. Person-to-person visits are the most effective way of letting your legislators know who you are and what your needs are. Once they know you, they pay more attention to your letters and calls.

When you get to your legislator's office (call in advance for an appointment), ask to meet your legislator and/or a legislative assistant. Briefly state your name, your NASW-PA affiliation and why you are there.

At the start of the meeting, it is helpful to offer your services to help your legislator in any way possible. Let her or him know the types of problems you are most equipped to handle. Offer yourself as the local expert on a topic so you can maintain contact with the office. Once legislators or staff views you as the "go-to" social worker, they are generally more open to hearing your suggestions about policy changes. Bringing snacks or treats to a legislative meeting could also be a hit!

Give your legislator specific information (including how many NASW-PA members are in the elected official's district/state who are concerned about the issue) and tell her or him how the issue you are concerned about affects you and your friends. Also tell the legislator about how past legislation or governmental action has helped you and your friends, if appropriate.

Your legislator will appreciate hearing about how effective the local, state and or federal government is in your community. You might also ask to be put on her or his mailing list for newsletters, if one exists.

In briefing legislators and other officials, these suggestions may be helpful:

1. Do your homework first. Be versed in the details about the issue(s) you wish to discuss so that you can answer specific questions that your legislator may ask. Focus on NASW-PA's key messages on the issues.
2. Plan your visit carefully and keep it brief. Give your legislators as much chance as possible to ask questions.
3. Supply individual fact sheets on issues (available from the NASW-PA staff in the chapter office) that are urgent and/or complex. Try to boil each issue down to a single page.
4. Demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the official's constituency.
5. Ask for specific support.
6. If you must approach a legislator in the hallway, outside a hearing room or after calling them off the floor, keep your comments to 60 seconds:  
1) state your name and occupation, 2) give the bill number and issue, 3) state NASW-PA's position, and 4) ask if NASW-PA can count on her or his vote.

### **Additional Tips**

1. After your meeting with the legislator, be sure to document the results of the visit and give the information to the advocacy staff in the state office.
2. Attendance at hearings and other events (committee meetings, etc.) held in your state will help you get to know your elected officials better. It will also enhance your understanding of their interests, views, and influences.
3. Make sure to go to local political functions whether it be a town hall, picnic, or barbecue. Being seen around the community, especially by your legislator, is never a bad thing.

4. Try to figure out where the legislator will enter or exit during a function. This could be a good opportunity to influence them one-on-one.

### **Ten Things to Remember when Visiting a Legislator**

- I. Be concise. The entire discussion should last 5-10 minutes.
- II. Be prepared – know your subject matter and know the legislator's background.
- III. Be polite.
- IV. Be specific.
- V. Don't use excessive technical or occupational jargon.
- VI. Don't be intimidated...and don't try to intimidate.
- VII. Leave behind a one-page summary.
- VIII. Follow up visit with a letter or email.
- IX. Work with the staff.
- X. Know the concerns of the opposition.