

TIPS ON TALKING TO YOUR LEGISLATOR IN PERSON

Talking to an elected official may seem intimidating at first, but it is important to remember that it is a normal part of their job. Especially if you live in their district, they want to know what you think and how they can help. Below are some tips on how you can increase your effectiveness in communicating with your legislators with the goal of establishing a long-term relationship.

In Person

Prior to the Meeting

- *Do Some Homework*
 - Try to know the basics about a piece of legislation you are going to address. If there isn't any specific legislation, be able to articulate what you are concerned about and why. Practice your "elevator speech" before you go into the meeting with the legislator or the staff member who works for the legislator. An "elevator speech" is a 1-2 minute speech that explains what you want and why you want it. It is named this because it is supposed to be short. You may have more time to make your points, but you always need to be prepared to make your pitch quickly.
 - Think about the points that will be brought up against your point of view. The legislator always wants to know who will be against any issue. Be honest. Tell them who or what organization may oppose it, but then give your reason why you think your view is what he/she should support. Be sure and speak of the opposition in a professional way.
- *Call the office and ask to speak to the person who schedules the legislator's time. Ask them to schedule an appointment for you with the legislator. Ask them to tour your communities.*
 - If the legislator is unavailable, ask to schedule an appointment with the staff member who handles their legislative issues. Don't feel slighted if you don't get to speak to the legislator every time. Legislative staff members work very closely with the legislator and they are good allies to have.

What to Take with You

- Business Cards
- One-page document that lists the key information about the issue you want to discuss

How to address your legislator:

When addressing a member of the state legislature use the following protocols:

- Senator: "Senator (last name)"
- Member of the House of Representatives: "Representative (last name)"
- Governor: "Governor (last name)"
- Lt. Governor: "Governor (last name)"
- Speaker of the House: "Mr./Madam Speaker"
- Chairmen or chairwoman "Chairmen (last name), or Madam Chair "(last name)"

Be Personal

- Tell them a little about yourself—where you live, what you do for a living, if you are representing yourself or an organization (your assisted living facility, LALA or another organization).
- Be sure to tell them that you live in their district (if you do).
- Connect your talking points to your story (how it has impacted your residents and their families).

Provide Data

- If possible provide at least one piece of data that will support your point of view. Don't drown them in data, you can always provide them a short brief on your topic. Select one key piece of data that helps sell your point of view. If in your communities, introduce them to members of your communities who can help to reinforce your message.

Be Focused

- Remember they have only a few minutes to share with you so stay on topic. Also, don't let the legislator change the subject either. Be polite, but be firm.

Be Positive

- Don't be argumentative. You may not agree with the stand your legislator is taking on this particular issue but it is important not to burn any bridges. Little is gained by arguing with your legislator. Keep reminding them how this issue affects residents and families in their district.
- Don't be defensive. They may ask tough questions. They are probably asking the questions that will be asked of them. Give them solid information that will help them justify why they should support your issue. Always remember that the legislative process involves compromises, but you always have the right to participate in the process. Just be positive while you firmly state your positions.
- Remember your goal is to have a long-term relationship. You won't always agree with your legislator. You are looking for common ground on the issues in which you are interested.

Make the Ask

- Don't leave without asking them to support your issue. If there is a bill associated with the issue, be specific and ask them to support the bill. You can ask them, "Will you support this legislation?"
- Ask them if they have any questions or need any additional information

End the Meeting

- Don't stay too long
- Thank them for their time and attention

Follow-up

- Send a thank you note and anything else you promised.
- Consider inviting them to your facility or to a gather with residents and families to let them see and hear first-hand what is needed for the assisted living community.