



## Helpful Hints for Advocating with State Legislators...

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### Meeting with Your State Legislator

The best way to begin to build a relationship with your state legislator is to schedule a meeting in his/her district office or, even better, inviting your legislator out to visit your program site.

Meeting with you face-to-face gives your legislator an opportunity to engage with you as a person and a concerned constituent. Remember that elected officials are just people and they have a job to do. You are in a position to help them do their job better.

#### Making an appointment

- Who are your legislators? To find out the names of your State Senator and State Representative, go to <http://maps.legis.wisconsin.gov>. This website will provide the names and contact information for your legislators.
- Who will come to your meeting? Consider arranging a meeting that includes a group of people (providers, clients, families, board members). Arranging a meeting that includes two or three people from the legislator's district increases the value of the meeting and the variety of stories/information shared.
- Contacting the office. Call your State Senator's and/or Representative's office to ask for an appointment. If you would like to meet with your legislator in Madison, call the Madison office. If you would like to meet with him/her in the district, then use their district phone number, if one is listed.
- When you call the office, introduce yourself and say that you are a constituent and you would like to schedule an appointment with Representative or Senator (name). A standard window of time for meetings with legislators is 15-20 minutes, but if you feel you will need more time, you should confirm this when you schedule the meeting.
- Be prepared to give the scheduler a summary of the topic(s) that you would like to cover in your meeting.
- Meeting with legislative staff. If you have a pressing issue and the legislator's schedule is uncertain, the scheduler may offer the opportunity to meet with a staff person or to schedule a time for a phone conversation. Either one of these options is a valuable way to begin to build a relationship with your legislator. Do not be disappointed by a meeting with legislative staff. Legislative staff are important sources of information and may have substantial influence in the crafting and passage of bills.

#### Meeting your legislator and/or legislative staff person

- Do your homework. Before going to the meeting, research your legislator's position on your issue and consider this in framing your arguments. You can learn about your legislator's areas of interest by viewing their webpage at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov>. Your legislator's webpage includes biographical information, lists of bills sponsored by the legislator and committee assignments. It is good to know where your legislator comes from, their party affiliation, what his/her interests are and where he/she may stand on your issue of concern.
- Be on time. If you cannot avoid being late, call the office to alert them.
- Be courteous. Approach the meeting as you would a business meeting. Dress professionally and maintain civility in the conversation.

- Prepare an agenda and be brief. Before going to the meeting, think about what you will say and have three or four key points in mind. If you are going into the meeting with a group of people, make sure that everyone has the agenda in advance and that you have a general plan for what each person will say in the meeting.
- Tell your story. You may not be an expert on public policy, but you have first-hand knowledge of the issue you care about that makes you a credible source of information. It is important to share your personal experience with the issue and then connect it to the public policy change that you are supporting/opposing.
- Build credibility. If they ask you a question that you don't know the answer to, tell them that you will check into it and follow up. Take notes, so that you can remember the discussion and any questions that the legislator/staff asked.
- Send a follow-up letter. Restate your message and thank your legislator for his/her time.

### Telephone Calls

- Be concise – keep your call to 2-3 minutes.
- Be organized. Write out the two or three points you want to make beforehand. Be prepared to keep it brief and practice what you will say.
- If you cannot reach the legislator, ask to speak to the staff responsible for your issue. Do not be disappointed with this.
- Clearly state whether you are requesting support or opposition to a specific bill.
- Thank them for their time.
- Follow up with a letter restating your points and thanking them for their time.

### Letter Writing

- Be brief (one page or less), and use your own words.
- Begin with the appropriate heading and address (see box).
- Be specific. State the bill number and issue, and state your opinion in the first sentence.
- Relate your experience with the issue. Use personal examples. Your interest and concern about the issue is what counts, not your expertise.
- Ask the legislator to specifically commit to supporting or opposing the legislation you are writing about. Ask for specific reasons they are supporting or opposing the proposal.
- If you are sending a letter to a committee member who is not your legislator, always send a copy to your own representatives.
- Sign and print your name and include your address.
- If you have pertinent materials and/or editorials from local papers, include them.

### E-Mail

- An e-mail sent to a legislator should be considered a professional letter, follow the above guidelines concerning letter writing.
- Be sure to include your full name and address in the body of the message.

#### **SENATE LETTER**

The Honorable (Name)  
 Wisconsin Senate  
 PO Box 7882  
 Madison, WI 53707-7882

Dear Senator (Name)  
 Sincerely yours,

#### **ASSEMBLY LETTER**

The Honorable (Name)  
 Wisconsin Assembly  
 PO Box 8952 (for names A-L)  
 PO Box 8953 (for names M-Z)  
 Madison, WI 53708-8952 (for names A-L)  
 Madison, WI 53708-8953 (for names M-Z)

Dear Representative (Name)  
 Sincerely yours,

#### **E-MAIL**

[Rep.lastname@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Rep.lastname@legis.wisconsin.gov)  
[Sen.lastname@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.lastname@legis.wisconsin.gov)

#### **OTHER RESOURCES**

**Legislative Hotline:** 1-800-362-9472

**FAQ on the Wisconsin Legislature**  
<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/about/faq/>