

Advocacy Tips

U.S.—There are a few ways to effectively reach and influence your members of Congress when they are home. When Congress is in session, you are encouraged to contact the Washington, D.C. office, but, when on recess, the district office is where the action is happening, and staff in this office are best equipped to schedule meetings or inform you of local events. Members of Congress want and need to hear from their constituents, so take this opportunity to invite them to activities that can raise awareness of your platform.

- ◆ Find your legislator:
 - U.S. Representatives:
<http://www.house.gov/representatives>
 - U.S. Senator:
<http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact/>

Michigan—There are several ways to communicate with your legislator. You can visit their office in Lansing but the best way to effectively reach and influence your state legislators is to attend coffee hours, events and town halls in the district. This offers a great opportunity to strengthen your relationship with your legislator and promote your cause.

- ◆ Find your legislator:
 - State Representative:
<http://www.house.mi.gov/mhrpublic/frmFindARep.aspx>
 - State Senator:
<http://www.senate.michigan.gov/fysbyaddress.html>
- ◆ If you plan to visit their office, schedule your appointment in advance and be flexible. Call the district office as early as possible and have a few dates and times in mind. Be as open as possible to alternative dates if they work better for the legislator. Building relationships with staff is advantageous and can begin when making the appointment. If the meeting is with staff, that is an opportunity to have direct and continuous contact.
- ◆ Do your homework! Craft your message, and do your research to support your points. To help you do this, look at the legislator's bio, committees he/she serves on and his/her voting record. This step is not

necessary but helpful. Have a personal story to help the policymaker make a connection to the issue.

- ◆ Be prompt and provide relevancy. The legislator's time is limited, and you must make a local connection to keep the conversation relevant. No matter your topic of discussion, always bring it back to how the current practice is impacting the community/state and how a policy change would positively impact the situation.
- ◆ Be armed with research, information and handouts specific to your district. Have a packet prepared to leave with the legislator. Support all of your talking points with recent and accurate information. You want to back up your argument with fact! The Michigan League for Public Policy's website, www.mlpp.org, has data and information that will be useful in making your case.
- ◆ Know who you are representing. We all wear many hats just remember which one you're wearing for the meeting. As you are building relationships there will be opportunities to share other issues that are important to you.
- ◆ Answer questions truthfully. Listen to what the policymaker says and be sure to keep your cool if you do not like a response, and answer questions honestly. If you do not know the answer to a question, it is fine to say that you don't know the answer. In fact, not knowing the answer and promising to get back to him/her provides you a reason to do our next step.
- ◆ Follow up, follow up, follow up! Be sure to get contact information for the policymaker and his/her staff member who works on the issues relevant to your organization and/or issue. After the meeting, send a thank you message and answer any questions that arise during your meeting. Continue to send the office information including articles on your programs, and stay informed on issues that the Michigan Legislature is working on so you can weigh in on how it impacts your community.

