
ADVOCACY TOOLS

VISITING YOUR LEGISLATOR

A Step-by-Step Guide to Meeting with your Legislator

Step 1 – To identify your legislator, go to www.EducationVotersPA.org to look up their contact info (available on our homepage). All you need to do is enter your address information. After submitting this information, the names of your representatives will appear. You can click on their names for more information, including district office and Harrisburg contact info and committee assignments.

Step 2 – To schedule a meeting, call their local district office and tell the receptionist that you are a constituent and would like to schedule a meeting at the district office. The staff person or scheduler will ask you what you'd like to discuss; just give them a clear, succinct answer such as "education cuts", "school vouchers" or anything else you wish to talk about.

Step 3 – To prepare for your meeting, go to www.EducationVotersPA.org to download some key points on current education issues. **The key to a successful legislative meeting is to demonstrate why an issue is important to you.** You don't have to be an "expert". You can use the materials that EVPA provides to have a few good facts or statistics ready, but personal stories/experience is always the best approach when you are speaking as a constituent. The most important component is to have a clear "ask" (something specific you'd like them to do); a good example would be: "reject the proposed education cuts and examine additional revenue options, such as taxing Marcellus Shale, smokeless tobacco and ending special tax breaks and corporate loopholes".

Step 4 – Legislators are very busy, so make sure to arrive on time or a little early for your meeting. It is not uncommon that you will end up speaking with staff; if so, just proceed as you normally would because the staff person will report back to the legislator. Check the side bar for a few tips to consider during your meeting.

Step 5 – Follow up: sometime during the first few days after the meeting, send a letter thanking them for their time, briefly recap what was discussed and reiterate any follow up items (ex. send along any additional info you may have wanted to provide but did not have at the time; remind them of/thank them for any important commitments or statements they made).

- **Be prepared:** think of a personal story you can tell to make your point and bring 1 or 2 supporting facts
- **Be friendly:** don't get heated, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar
- **Be open:** be sure to listen, not just speak
- **Be informed:** make sure you feel comfortable with a couple of points about the issue.
- **Give examples:** again, personal stories and experience are very persuasive
- **Don't argue:** just approach this as presenting a case, not necessarily winning an argument
- **Don't apologize:** you can hold your ground while still being polite; do not back down, remember you are speaking for your kids and your school
- **Don't get sidetracked:** stay with the topic at hand and stay on message
- **Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know:** you don't have to be an expert, legislators are not experts on everything either. Find common ground: talk about overarching values if you don't agree on specific actions; if nothing else, you can at least agree that legislator should care about the concerns of their constituents.
- **Don't give up:** follow up and stay in touch