

## Working With Your Legislator

### Committee Testimony Tips:

- Never sit in the front row directly behind the podium at a committee hearing; those spots are saved for legislators and their staff.
- Be quiet when attending a committee hearing; if you need to talk go outside the room.
- When testifying, **always be courteous to every member of the committee.** Never lose your cool. When you have an aggressive legislator, be extremely nice and thank them for their interest in your issue.
- Organize your testimony on an index card, have a conversation with the committee on your issue and open up for Q & A.
- **Always be honest**, never lie or give incorrect information. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to tell them you don't know but you will get back with them.
- When testifying, **never read your testimony.** Give the members of the committee a handout and take them through the document explaining important points.
- Handouts—Keep them simple, well written and easy to understand.
- Deliver the important information prior to the hearing. Meet with members or their staff and let them know what's important.
- Know the members who know the issue. If possible, know your allies and your opponents.
- While in a committee hearing, remember that each room is monitored by TV cameras, your actions in the audience are aired throughout the Internet and televisions.
- Generally, constituents of committee members have the greatest impact as witnesses. If your member sits on a committee that is considering important legislation, then we may contact you to testify.

### Working With Your Legislator's Office:

- Get to know the personality of the member, find out their likes and dislikes.
- Get to know their staff and work with them. Most of the time they have the most influence on the member.
- Meet with your legislator prior to session; let them know your issues.
- When speaking with a legislator, **always be brief and to the point.** Don't waste their time just because you have their attention. They are very busy and will appreciate you being concise.

- When meeting with a legislator, stick to one topic or issue. If you have other issues, return later to discuss other concerns, if possible.
- When you enter a legislator's office **be sure and greet all members of the staff.**
- Never blindsides a legislator; always tell them the entire story.
- When your legislator is in the district, attend their fundraisers if possible. If you don't want to contribute monetarily, take someone with you who wants to contribute.
- Don't go to your legislator and whine about problems at home. Make every effort to fix the problem at home. If it cannot be fixed, then approach your legislator for assistance.
- Listen to the legislator when discussing your issue; you can usually determine their position by their response.
- Walk and talk with the legislator when they are on the move; sometimes it's the only chance you will have.
- **3 minute rule** – make your first 3 minutes count. Emphasize the important parts of your message within the first 3 minutes.
- After presenting your case to the legislator, simply ask the direct question "May I count on your support?" If they agree, thank them and let them know your assistance is available in any way. If they are non-committal, seek out the concerns. Schedule another visit to present new material that will convince your legislator to vote your way. Don't be discouraged, it sometimes takes a series of contacts to win over a legislator.
- If your legislator continues to be non-committal, ask a colleague in the legislator's district to help. Contact from several county officials and constituents could help demonstrate community and constituent support for your position.
- Be understanding, recognize there are legitimate differences of opinion. Show your legislator the thoughtfulness you expect for yourself. If they choose to vote differently from your position, politely express your disappointment and offer a closing argument to support your issue.

#### **Working on Legislation:**

- When you work on legislation, always follow your bill throughout the process. If your bill requires a state agency to implement the legislation, always follow the rulemaking process on your topic. The intent of the bill could be drastically altered in the rulemaking process.
- When a legislator or their staff contact you for information, **respond promptly with accurate information.**

### **Basic Capitol Etiquette:**

- When traveling to the capitol, wear your Sunday best.
- Know the deadlines; the House has different deadlines than the Senate.
- When you plan to go to Austin to testify or meet at the capitol, let your legislators know when and where you will be.
- When you see two legislators talking at the capitol, **never interrupt their conversation**. Many times this will be the only chance they have to talk about issues important to them. Wait around to speak with them after their conversation concludes.
- **Be prepared to discuss your topic anywhere at any time**; you may run across a member who needs information on demand.
- Don't read the newspaper in the house or senate gallery.
- **Turn off your cell phone or put on vibrate** when attending a committee hearing, sitting in a legislator's office or in the house or senate gallery.
- Know that the legislature is a moving target; the committee hearing schedule printed in the morning could change by the end of the day.