



Meeting with Your Officials – Making a Difference

Never be discouraged if your meeting is with an assistant to the legislator. Don't be fooled-----it is actually the assistants who are the policy experts and are the instrumental forces in the legislative actions of the elected official. You can rest assured that your voice will be heard by the elected official. In fact, many pivotal meetings take place with the assistants.

Know what you want to accomplish. In the setting of this particular advocacy day, we will be advocating for quality early care and education. Basically, smart investments in our youngest children. On the day of the event- a list of very specific legislative asks compiled by a policy committee will be distributed to you and can serve as talking points during the meeting.

Do your homework. In general, you want to be well prepared and well versed on the topic you are advocating for. This does not mean that you have to have all the answers or be an expert. In this case, reading the "Best in the Nation" which lays out policy recommendations around early education and care as well as reading the attached two pager about how pre-k (and early education) benefits children and society will give you a good start.

Prepare something to leave behind. Legislators and their assistants meet with many people. You want to ensure that you leave them with a summary of your issues and any other supporting materials. In this case materials to leave behind will be provided for you early next week. We will send you a special Docs For Tots document to leave behind.

Have your contact information readily available. If you have business cards, bring several to leave behind. If you do not, prepare a paper with your name and contact information so the office can reach you in follow up.

Know that you are building a relationship. While your meeting on this day has a very specific purpose, always be aware that you are establishing yourself as a dedicated, concerned constituent with a passion and an area of expertise. Set up a trusting relationship and you may become a resource for the elected official moving forward.

Be prompt and patient. Elected officials run on very tight schedules. Be sure to show up on time for your appointment, and be patient - it is not uncommon for legislators to be late or to have your meeting interrupted by other business.

Dress professionally.

You can practice by role playing.

Keep it short and focused! You will have twenty minutes or less with a staff person, and as little as ten minutes if you meet with your elected official. Make the most of that brief time by sticking to your topic.

Bring up any personal, professional or political connections to the elected official that you may have. Start the meeting by introducing yourselves and thanking the legislator for any votes he or she has made in support of your issues, and for taking the time to meet with you.

Stick to your talking points! Stay on topic, and back them up with no more than five pages of materials that you can leave with your elected official.

Provide personal and local examples of the impact of the legislation. This is the most important thing you can do in a lobby visit. As a Pediatrician you are in a great position to tell stories about families struggling to find quality care or the poor outcomes for children who do not get off to the right start in terms of early learning and school readiness. You have tremendous experience to draw from. Think in advance about one specific personal (short) story to tell.

Saying "I don't know" can be a smart political move. You need not be an expert on the topic you are discussing. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is fine to tell your legislator that you will get that information for him or her. This gives you the chance to put your strongest arguments into their files, and allows you to contact them again about the issue. Never make up an answer to a question - giving wrong or inaccurate information can seriously damage your credibility ----it really is OK not to know- just make sure you follow up with the information

After the meeting, be sure to follow up with a thank you note and a reinforcement of your issues. Also, resend any contact information as a reminder that you are an important part of the process.