

# Tips for Talking to Your Legislator

Missouri Pharmacy Association • Legislative Day 2009

**Fact:** in 2005, 99% of congressional staff said that what influenced undecided lawmakers most was in-person visits from constituents.

## Do:

- Be positive, constructive, friendly, and brief. Relax.
- Maintain eye contact. This shows that you are confident about what you're saying, and it keeps the legislator engaged in the conversation.
- Thank your legislator for a previous vote, sponsorship or co-sponsorship
- Make a specific, measurable, and concise request. Rather than "Please support Pharmacy friendly issues," say "Please vote in support of HB 458 to prevent negative impact of Pharmacy Benefit Managers"
- Introduce yourself to staff members too. Remember, they are often the last people your legislator speaks with before voting.
- Clearly identify the subject of interest including House and Senate Bills, if you know them
- Communicate specific pieces of information relevant to the topic
- **Follow up!** Send a letter, postcard, email, or make a phone call.

## Do Not:

- Be rude or threatening
- Pretend to have greater political influence than you do
- Promise something you cannot deliver
- Be self-righteous or all-knowing
- Be vague about the issue (know and keep in mind the member's position and address their position specifically)
- Bring up past campaign contributions or present a check during the meeting

## Presenting Your Position:

- Present your view with conviction, but don't put him or her on the defensive.
- It helps to cover your issue from the legislator's perspective, tying it in with his or her past votes or interests.
- Listen attentively.
- The legislator's opening discussion with you will often give you clues about how to connect your issue with his/her concerns.
- Don't bluff – If you don't have the answer to a legislator's question, say so. Tell the legislator you will provide the information, and then be certain that you do.
- Give responses to arguments that you know your opposition will raise, but don't degrade your opponents.
- Provide information, both orally and in a fact sheet that you leave with the legislator.
- Include a brief description of your issue in the fact sheet, why it is important to your organization, and the action that you want the legislator to take.
- Give a copy of the fact sheet to the legislative aide as well.

Source: Personal Visits with a Legislator, Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest

## Notes:

**When I am getting ready to reason with a man, I spend one-third of my time thinking about myself and what I am going to say and two-thirds about him and what he is going to say." – Abraham Lincoln**

Sources: American Pharmacists Association Academy of Student Pharmacists, Congressional Management Foundation Report: Communicating with Congress.