

## Tips for Talking with Your Legislator

Keeping in mind that your goal is to develop an ongoing personal relationship with your elected representatives, as well as to influence their position on specific issues or bills, here are a few things to remember when speaking to them:

- Know who your legislator is before making initial contact on an issue.
- Find out what legislative committees your legislator serves on.
- Do not be intimidated. Legislators will view you as the expert on the issue.
- Share your personal story if it helps to make your point.
- Do not assume that your legislator libraries and their impact on the community. Take the time to educate him/her. Do not use jargon.
- Know your issue. Provide facts and figures to back up your position. Refer to the talking points and other materials on the push card.
- Remember all causes are good causes. You must convince your legislator that there is something extra special about yours.
- Don't debate with a legislator or give ultimatums such as "I won't vote for you if you do not support my position." Respect the legislator's right to disagree with you.
- Know your opposition. In tough economic times it can be expected that there will be budget cuts. You are simply asking to maintain current levels of funding – not for an increase.
- Put the legislator at ease by convincing him/her that you are there to serve as resource. Act like a partner, not an

adversary.

- Put broad policy issues in a local perspective. Legislators who know how issues will impact local voters tend to grasp ideas more easily and are generally more receptive.
- Be a good listener and hear out what your legislator has to say on the issue.
- Be sure to thank the legislator for taking the time to hear your position.
- Once a legislator gives you a commitment, it is all right to check back with him/her later. Do not badger him/her with phone calls.
- Do not be disappointed if your legislator sends an aide. Aides are critical to the process.
- Spend your time working with legislators who haven't made up their minds.
- Be brief; prepared; clear; honest; accurate; persuasive; timely; persistent; and grateful.
- Always follow up with a written thank you note, and amplify your main points.
- When your legislator goes the extra mile, you may consider acknowledging his or her efforts by writing a letter to the editor in your local paper.

## Tips for Working with the Media

In many ways, the rules that apply to educating your legislator also apply to members of the media. In each case, it is easy to become unnecessarily intimidated, and you must remember that these "experts" need us to provide the information required for their job. Develop your media relations plan by focusing on establishing relationships and crafting a consistent message and repeating it in all your communications.

- Press releases should be brief, concise and contain name and phone number of a contact person. They should be written in the third person, using quotes if applicable.
- Wait one day and then follow up on your media advisory with a phone call. Be persistent but friendly.
- When speaking with the journalist, ask if this is a good time to talk. If not, schedule a time to call back.
- Keep in mind that many reporters do not arrive at work until 10:00 am. Also, do not call after 4:00 pm as most journalists are up against a deadline by this time.
- Be upbeat, energetic and excited about your event. State the reasons why you think the event is important to their readers and ask if the journalist has any questions.
- Be a good resource to reporters; develop personal rapport with members of the press.
- Include contact information on the media release of someone who is available after 5:00 pm and include a website address.
- If a reporter attends your event, provide him/her with the press release as well as any information that helps them tell the story about public education funding in Pennsylvania.

- Line up a spokesperson and individuals to be interviewed ahead of time.
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know or you aren't sure. Get back to the reporter with the requested information, if you don't have it.
- Greet the journalist when he or she arrives at the event.
- If you are expecting the television media to be present, remember to keep the event visual and think in terms of 7-8 second sound bites.
- Fax or email copies of the release to those members of the media who were unable to attend the event. Follow up with them and invite them to do a related story.
- Small dailies or weekly community newspapers are always looking for local news items. Be sure to send them your press releases. Get to know the editor of the local newspapers.