



IOWA CHAPTER

How You Can Be an Effective Citizen Advocate

The Do's of Personal Visits:

- Dress Neatly. You'll be taken more seriously.
- Bring a copy of the bill with you (this helps if you are not familiar with it) or bring your talking points
- Know the number/name of the bill (if applicable)
- Introduce yourself. Thank the legislator for meeting with you.
- Mention if you live in the legislator's district. They want to be responsive to their constituents.
- In your own words, explain why you support or oppose the bill and why the legislator should do the same.
- Share your personal stories on the issue-this is the best way to be heard.
- Ask yes or no questions, stop, then look into their eyes. Don't falter.
- Request a commitment. If yes, thank them.
- If no, ask why opposed. Or ask "what part of the message can you get behind?"
- What can be done to get their support? If they need more info? Offer to get it to them.
- When you conclude speaking leave them with 1-2-page info sheet main points. (wait until the end). You want them to listen to you, not read the sheet as you are speaking.
- Thank you, goodbyes, reinforce commitment

A Few More Good Things to Know

- Be honest. If you are asked a question and you don't know the answer, say so. Don't lose credibility.
- Polite persistence is the key. You can be assertive
- Become friendly with staff and aides.
- Governance is complex. Don't expect a "yes". You can ask follow-up questions such as "Do you need additional info?" or "Is there anything on your mind as you contemplate this?"
- There are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies. Maintain a relationship with legislators even if they vote against your wishes. Never burn bridges. Build relationships.
- Listen to what they say.
- Be polite. Don't be angry. Don't be hostile (I'm a taxpayer). Don't threaten (You'll pay for this at the polls!)
- Don't leave a lot of materials with the legislator.
- Most public officials are happy when their constituents visit. They'll be friendly.
- You pay their salary. They work for you.
- Cultivate a good rapport with the assistant and staff- they can be very helpful.
- Don't be disappointed if your legislator does not come out to talk to you. You can still leave a hand-written message and include your handout.