Getting Your Voice Heard
Meeting With Legislators and Legislative Staff

Brief Staff Ahead of Time
• By briefing staff ahead of time, you can gather valuable information about their concerns and questions. This will allow you (and them) to be better prepared for the meeting.
• Make sure the staff responsible for your issue understands your advocacy request and has sufficient information to prepare the legislator and him/her before your meeting.
• It is critically important to convince staff of the validity and urgency of your request. Staff may end up negotiating on your behalf as bills are developed and conferenced.
• Keep staff fully informed and fully prepared. Never let them walk into a meeting unprepared.

Clearly State Your Purpose and Request Early in the Meeting
• Make the most of the first five minutes of the meeting. Open graciously, but get to the point.
• Be sure they understand what you are requesting, why you are requesting it, and why it is important to their constituents.

Listen Very Carefully
• Know exactly what the legislator or staff say they would do.
• Know when they said they would do it.
• Know what they request from you.
• Do not make assumptions or inferences beyond what is actually promised.

Dialogue, Not Monologue
• Get as much information out of a meeting as you convey in a meeting.
• Answer questions, then address the reasons why they might have asked those questions. If you don’t know why they are asking a question, ask them to explain their concern.
• If all else fails, ask “what is your best advice on who to see and what to do to get this issue addressed?” and “what would you do if you were us?”

Clarify What is to Happen Next and Who Will Do It
• Don’t leave the meeting without a clear understanding of what all parties are to do next, when you’ll be back in touch, and who the key contact are on both sides.
• Restate any commitments made to confirm your understanding.

(Adapted from Virginia Ainslie, Technical Assistant to Public and Nonprofit Organizations, 2002)