**A Tip Sheet for Advocacy – Talking to Elected Officials**

1. Meet with elected leaders

* Be brief and concise. Keep it short and simple
* Know why you are there, why they should care and what you want.
* Designate a spokesperson if going in a group. Others can fill in as needed.
* Go with a short list of points you want to communicate.
* Always end by restating your reason for visiting and thanking them for their time.

2. Have your facts straight

* Spend the time necessary to read through materials and make sure you know the issue you want to talk about BEFORE you meet with your legislator.
* Share how the legislator’s constituents will benefit from the action you want.
* If they ask for something you don’t know the answer to, say so and get back to them— don’t guess.

3. Make an appointment; be on time, polite, and patient

* You will lose support for an issue if you are rude to legislators or staff personnel.
* Don’t show up unannounced and expect a visit with your legislator. They may have many committee meetings and just don’t have a lot of time to visit.

4. If you go as a group, introduce your group members and note what connection each person may have to the legislator's district

* Explain your connection to their district, whether you are a constituent living in their district or a person working in their district.

5. Make the issue personal

* How does this issue affect children in your area?
* Is there an impact on the community as a whole?
* Tell stories about how the issue affects the people who live in their district.

6. Be a resource

* Leave a one page fact sheet with your key message.
* Make sure to have your contact information on it so they can contact you with questions or a notice of upcoming action.

7. Before you leave, say thank you

* Be direct and ask if they will support your cause. Their answer will help you in your future communications with them.

8. Continue the relationship

* When you get home, send a note thanking them for their time and providing any information that they may have given to you.
* Invite them to an event at your school if you are a position to do that. Make sure your principal knows when legislators are invited to an event.

**Send a letter**

1. Include your name, address, phone number and your email address if you have one.

2. Don’t use letterhead if you are advocating personally.

3. Use the proper form of address listed below:

1. Senators and Representatives:
	1. To The Honorable [First Name Last Name]
	2. Dear Senator/Representative [Last Name]
2. The Governor:
	1. His/Her Excellency [First Name Last Name]
	2. Dear Governor [Last Name]
3. Members of the House/Senate leadership:
	1. Dear Mr./Ms. Title [e.g., "Dear Mr. Speaker"]

4. Your letter should answer an important question. Are you a constituent?

5. Indicate the topic you are writing about. If writing about specific legislation, include the title of the bill, the bill number or specific section of a current piece of legislation that you are referring to.

6. Be specific about the action you want your legislator to take. Why is it important for them to do what you are asking?

7. State your position in a short and concise way. Give personal examples.

8. Do your research in advance and give statistics if possible.

9. Share how this will affect your community, your school or your family.

10. Close your letter by offering to provide additional information.

11. Sign your letter by hand.

 **Email your legislator**

This is the easiest way to get your comments into legislator’s hands.

Follow the same rules as for a letter except for the personal signature.

Be sure to include email contact information for the legislator.

**Call your legislator**

There are some issues that only a phone call will adequately address.

Calls will generally be answered by an aide.

Treat the aide as you would the legislator, with respect.

Get their name for future calls.

Identify yourself by name and if you are a constituent.

Make your comments brief as you explain the specific reason you are calling, your position and what action you would like the legislator to take.

Ask if the legislator has a specific position.

Ask if you can send information