

How to Talk

SO YOUR LEGISLATORS WILL LISTEN



1. Be Prepared

- Know Yourself—Be aware of your own prejudices or biases. Such knowledge will enable you to maintain objectivity by anticipating your own response in a given situation.
- Know Your Organization—Be knowledgeable about LeadingAge PA's positions on major issues. The government affairs team is a resource for helping you prepare.
- Know Your Legislator—Learn about his/her record, party, position, tenure in the legislature, and background.
- Know Your Issue—Phrase the argument in your own words. Don't be surprised if it appears you are more knowledgeable than the individual you are speaking to.
- Know Your Limit—No one can be expected to address every question or matter of concern regarding an issue; however, don't hesitate to admit your lack of knowledge on a particular point. Be willing to pursue the answer and report back.
- Know Your Opposition—Anticipate the opposition's arguments, and if possible, answer them.

2. Be Confident

It is highly likely you know more about long-term care and your community than the legislator. They want to hear from you since you are the expert. Be confident!

3. Share Your Story

Tell why and how you are concerned about our issues and how they affect you and your community. Very few legislators know much about the aging services continuum, so the more examples you can give, the more relatable your arguments will be. Let them know how the legislation or issue will affect you, your communities' residents, and staff.

4. Legislators are Human Beings

Dress respectfully, be punctual, start your conversation with a compliment (if possible), be friendly and polite, and thank the legislator for his/her service and for taking the time to meet with you.

5. Be Positive

Always make your case without being critical of others' personalities or motives. Never criticize another legislator, lobbyist, or the opposition. If you find yourself in a disagreement with your member of the legislature, don't get embroiled in an argument. Your responsibility is to present your case, not necessarily win your case.

6. Be Respectful

Allow the legislator a chance to respond. Listen carefully to their advice and don't interrupt. Be prepared to listen and then speak. Give them an opportunity to voice their concerns and ask questions.

7. Be Honest

If you don't know the answer to something, admit it and try to get the information later. Be credible, honest, and trustworthy. Never lie, exaggerate, conceal facts, or make up information. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know. It gives you the opportunity to follow up and send them more information.





8. Positive Relationship

Maintain a good relationship with your legislators – today’s opponent may be tomorrow’s friend. Never write off a legislator just because of past voting record or party affiliation. Don’t make enemies of legislators – you may need them as friends in the future. Don’t take your traditional friends for granted. Be understanding of the complex pressures upon legislators. They may be in office for decades.

9. Find Common Ground

Even if a legislator does not support LeadingAge PA’s position entirely, there may be some issues where you can find common ground. However, if he/she doesn’t even believe in that, every legislator still has the responsibility of attending to the concerns of his/her constituents. Build a bond, not a gap.

Do’s

- Address your Senator or Representative properly.
- Identify yourself immediately at each contact. Public officials meet too many people to remember everyone.
- Know the status of the legislation. Refer to a bill by number whenever possible.
- Use your own words.
- Be brief and explicit, courteous and reasonable.
- Establish your own credentials or expertise on the subject of legislation under consideration.
- Give legislators succinct, easy-to-read literature highlighting important facts and arguments. Their time is limited.
- Get to know legislative staff and treat them courteously. Their cooperation can make or break your chances of reaching the legislators themselves.
- Always keep off-the-record comments confidential.
- Write to say you approve, not just to criticize or oppose.
- In a letter include your address and sign your name legibly.
- Keep the door open for further discussion in spite of any apparent negative attitudes.

Don’ts

- Don’t begin, “As a citizen and taxpayer” (your elected representative knows we all pay taxes).
- Don’t apologize for taking his or her time. If you are brief and to the point, he/she will be glad to hear from you.
- Don’t be arrogant, condescending, or threatening toward legislators or their staff.
- Don’t argue or back legislators into a corner where they take a definite position against you.

