

Visiting Your Legislator - Etiquette Guide

Personal contact with legislators helps build relationships and establish lines of communication that ensure the concerns of school employees are heard and addressed.

Before the Meeting

- **Make an appointment.** Arranging an appointment in advance helps avoid long waits or disruptions in the legislator's schedule and ensures that you will have a specific amount of time to meet with the legislator. Lawmakers' schedules fill up quickly when they are in their districts, so make your appointment well ahead of time. Be sure to tell the scheduler how much time you will need and what topics you would like to discuss.
- **Define your goals.** Clarifying what you want to accomplish in the meeting will help you make the most of your time. Make sure you know what key points you want to get across and what action you want the legislator to take (support the Social Security Fairness Act; push congressional leaders to move the bill).
- **Gather your facts.** Don't assume a legislator will know the issue or be familiar with the bill. Providing just a few key facts can help paint a picture and build support for your issue.
- **Plan your group strategy.** Coordinate with other participants attending the meeting. Identify who will take the lead, who will raise particular issues, and who will serve as the primary contact for follow-up.
- **Prepare your materials.** Prepare a short (no more than one page) piece summarizing your issue or highlighting key facts to leave behind following your meeting. Your materials should always include your name and contact information.

During the Meeting

- **Introduce yourself.** Identify yourself as an employee of a particular school district or school and as a representative of NEA or your state Association. Introduce yourself each time you meet with a legislator, even if you have met before.
- **Remain focused.** Tell the legislator why you are there and get quickly to your point. Be friendly and direct. Explain why you support the Social Security Fairness Act.
- **Tell your story.** Make the problem real by telling one or two anecdotes from your personal experience or the experience of other colleagues. Explain the impact of the problem on people in the legislator's district.
- **Get a commitment.** Make sure you get a clear answer from the legislator on action he or she will take. For those legislators who agree to study the issue further, or who will not tell you their position, offer to provide additional information to help them make a decision. For legislators who clearly state opposition to your position, use your judgment as to whether providing additional information will make a difference.
- **Allow time for questions.** Be prepared to answer questions. Admit if you do not know an answer, but offer to look into the issue and follow up after the meeting.
- **Respect the schedule.** Keep in mind that legislators and their staff have busy schedules that often include back-to-back meetings. Make sure to wrap up your meeting on time.
- **Leave behind your supporting materials.** Give the member and staff copies of the congressional fact sheet. Leave your contact information and offer to serve as a resource should the legislator or staff have any questions.

After the Meeting

- **Debrief.** Review the meeting. Did you make your key points? Do you know where the legislator stands on your issue? What do you need to do to follow up?
- **Write a thank-you note.** Send a brief note thanking the legislator for his or her time and reinforcing your key points. Make sure to include any information you agreed to send or answer any questions you were unable to answer during the meeting.
- **Sustain the relationship.** Periodically send legislators and staff information that may be of interest. Invite legislators to visit your school or to attend an Association-sponsored event. Remember to thank legislators who honor commitments or who vote for your position. Also, remember that developing and maintaining a good relationship with staff may be the most effective means to making your concerns heard.