

Tips for Communicating With Legislators



Speaking with your legislator can be an intimidating prospect. Here are some tips to help make your meeting smooth and effective.

Tip #1 – Individually written letters are very persuasive lobbying tools. Often, legislators say they introduced or supported legislation because of the volume of mail they received on an issue. President John F. Kennedy once wrote, “Everybody’s vote counts in America, but those who sit down and write letters make their votes count more times. Nothing is more effective than a letter that reflects both an understanding of the question involved and a sincere expression of a personal viewpoint based on that understanding.”

Tip #2 – When communicating with your legislator, don’t threaten, cajole or berate them or their staff. This is one sure way to lose a legislator’s support—forever.

Tip #3 – Know what you wish to ask for prior to communicating with your legislator—if you don’t ask you don’t get.

Tip #4 – Always understand that you are one of many constituents vying for a legislator’s time and attention and that there are many sides to every issue. Always respect that a decision may take time.

Tip #5 – Be confident and assertive in making your case, but don’t dismiss counter arguments—different views can help guide your future efforts.

Tip #6 – When communicating with your legislator on a specific matter, be concise. Legislators are extremely busy and are interested in the “bottom line.”

Tips #7 – Legislators depend overwhelmingly upon their staff for judgment, guidance and advice on the spectrum of issues they have responsibility for. It is impossible for members of the Maine General Assembly to be fully informed on all these issues. Therefore, legislative staff are employed to handle various policy areas and they quickly become experts on the issues over which they have responsibility. In addition to knowing your legislator, take time to get to know his/her staff.

Tip #8 – When communicating with your legislator, stress why the legislation is so important to you, those in your profession, and the citizenry of Maine. Reinforce why the legislator should support or oppose it.

Tip #9 – Always ask for a commitment, but don’t expect one!

Tip #10 – Make adversity your teacher and never give up on your program goals. Perseverance is the key in getting legislation passed or defeated.