

CATHOLICS *at the* CAPITOL

How to Have an Effective Visit with Your State Legislator

Meeting with your members of the General Assembly is one of the most effective ways that you can influence the legislative process. Members are more likely to support positions that their constituents feel strongly about, and there is no better way to display your passion for an issue than by taking the time to have a face-to-face meeting.

Here are some tips to ensure you have a productive meeting:

1) MEETING PREPARATION

- **Identify your main message.** Before the meeting, determine what your main message is that you want to convey to your legislator. For instance, “please continue your support for parental involvement in our children’s lives” or “please continue your opposition to HB ___ or SB ___.”

2) DURING THE MEETING

- **Dress nicely.** Business attire is appropriate. Don’t let your appearance detract from your message or impair your credibility. If you are meeting in Springfield, or even in the district office, business attire is normally required.
- **Introduce yourself.** Tell your legislator or staff person your name, where you are from, and that you are a constituent. If you represent an organization, note its name, where the group is located, and the size of its membership. If you are associated with a specific institution, identify it.
- **Start with a compliment.** If possible, thank the member for a good stand he or she recently took on an issue and/or mention if you voted for the member. At a minimum, thank them for taking the time to meet with you.
- **Take the initiative.** State clearly and **concisely** what issue you want to discuss, what your position is, and what action you want the member to take. Follow this with facts about why he or she should take your position.
- **Bring a “leave-behind” document.** Give the legislator the one-page legislative agenda that outlines all seven of our legislative issues.
- **Be a good listener.** After you make your pitch, allow the legislator to respond. Bring the conversation back to the issue at hand if he or she goes off on a tangent or tries to evade your position.
- **Don’t answer what you don’t know.** It’s okay to not know all the answers. Answer questions to the best of your ability, and if you don’t know the answer, **admit it.** You can also tell the legislator that someone from the Catholic Conference of Illinois will follow up with him or her.
- **Ask a direct question.** Ask a question to which the legislator can respond “yes” or “no.” For example, “Can we count on you to vote no on HB ___ or SB ___?” Press politely for a commitment, unless the member is clearly Opposed to your position or to making a commitment.
- **Thank the legislator.** Always thank the legislator for his or her time at the end of the meeting, even if he or she did not agree with you position.

3) AFTER THE MEETING

- **Write down your impressions.** Immediately after the meeting, write down any information you learned about the legislator’s position or concerns on the card provided and return to the Catholic Conference of Illinois staff. If the legislator had questions needing follow up from Catholic Conference of Illinois staff, indicate that on the card.
- **Follow up.** Always follow up with a prompt thank you letter. In the letter, reiterate your key points and any commitments the legislator made to you. Include all follow-up information you promised to provide.