

Visiting Your Legislator

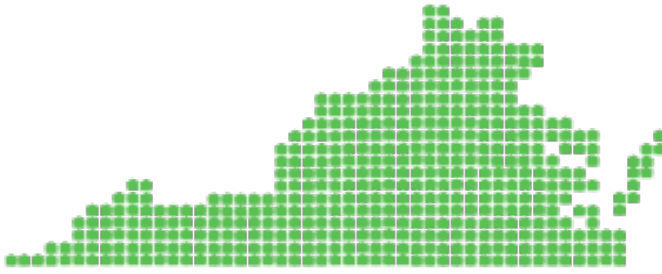
One of the most effective ways to develop a relationship with your legislator is through face-to-face visits. Meeting with a legislator in their home district before session is best, but during the General Assembly they're also usually willing to find the time to meet with constituents. By taking the time and effort to meet with a legislator- especially if it requires that you travel a long distance- you are proving that you care a great deal about the issue in question.

Before the Meeting

- Arrange the visit with as much lead time as possible by contacting the local or General Assembly office
- Prepare materials that are brief, easily readable, and include visual elements
- Choose times to meet during slow periods for the legislator. The timing and the length of the session are critical. Always conform to the schedule of the legislator.
- Practice your presentation before going to the meeting. Simulate the session with other advocates. If possible, videotape the practice session and critique it.

During the Meeting

- Arrive five minutes before the scheduled time
- Meet and greet the receptionist. Be sure to provide your business card.
- Begin the meeting with "news" from back home, e.g. some activity occurring or some general concern developing in the community. If you can, deliver greetings from a personal friend of the legislator from home.
- Have a single spokesperson present the substance of your message.
- Use a separate individual to provide illustrations to exemplify the point.
- Have an assigned person conclude the presentation and ask what you want the legislator to do.
- Show connection of your issue to the public interest. Legislators care about what voters think.
- Show interest in the legislator's statements as well as your own. **BUT DO NOT LOSE FOCUS. Stay on message!**
- Try not to take notes during the meeting. Instead, make them immediately afterward while the flow of the conversation is still fresh in your mind.
- End the meeting on a personal note, evoking a positive memory or connection to back home. Even if the meeting included an exchange on some point where you believe the legislator and/or staff was not supportive, it is still important that you conclude the session on a positive note.
- Be certain to leave behind your business card and at least one printed document that includes the group's name, address, phone, and fax numbers, as well as a description of your objectives.



Virginia Housing Alliance

Expanding Housing Opportunity and Ending Homelessness

Advocacy Best Practices

After the Meeting

- Send any follow up information you promised to provide as soon as possible.
- Mail a handwritten thank you note to the legislator recapping the important points of your meeting and detailing any next steps. Courtesy is important regardless of his or her position. This is also another opportunity to make your pitch.
- Be sure to report your discussion and any commitments made by the legislator back to the relevant advocacy group or team leader.
- After the bill has run its course or the issue has been fully vetted in the legislative body, check back in with your legislator. If they voted favorably, express your gratitude. If they didn't vote your way, let them know you're keeping up with their record. Both positive reinforcement and accountability go a long way.
- Once you have established a channel of communication with a legislator, keep it open by periodically writing with new information on the current and other pertinent issues.

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