

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

Be Prepared. Plan what issues you intend to focus on and where the legislator stands on each. Think about the types of questions you may be asked and prepare how to respond. If the legislator has supported our issues in the past, begin with thanks for past support. If you know any personal facts or local connections about your legislator, use them!

Be prompt and be patient. Legislators run on very tight schedules. Show up on time for your appointment, and be patient – it's not uncommon for legislators to run late or to be interrupted by other business. Don't be discouraged if you meet with staff. Most legislators rely on their staff to learn the issues and to advise them. Expect each meeting to last 15-30 minutes.

Be yourself and tell your story. Make it personal and district-specific. Tell the legislator about your work with victims and families in your community. Discuss how each issue impacts the people you work with. Give specific examples whenever you can.

Keep it short and focused. Stress what's important and don't digress into interesting but not necessarily persuadable information. Clearly and directly make your "asks."

Keep your cool. Legislators have strong opinions. At times, they may make critical or uninformed remarks about domestic and sexual violence. You cannot change their mind in one visit. Remember you are building a relationship that has to last. Attempt to find common ground and be sure to engage in respectful dialogue. Ask questions to try to understand what concerns are. If the legislator is simply unresponsive to your issues, thank them for their time and leave.

Get a commitment. If the legislator immediately expresses support, ask them to try to do something concrete to demonstrate their support. Ask if they can educate other members or if they can help to convince less supportive members. They can also help persuade leadership (the Speaker of the Assembly or the Senate Majority Leader) and members serving on committees the bills have been referred to, especially committee chairs.

Be honest. It's okay if you don't know the answer to questions you are asked. Be polite and explain that you will find out the answer and make sure they get the information they need. Be sure to let a member of NYSCADV know who to follow up with and why. This is a great opportunity for us to continue to build a relationship with their office.

Leave Information. Don't forget to provide the legislator with the packet of information and, if you have time, walk them through the materials. And provide your contact information or business card.

Follow up! Send a thank you letter or email, and follow up with their staff to let them know how they can take action. Be sure to send any information that you promised. And update NYSCADV on your meeting by filling out a Follow-Up Meeting Form.

Your conversations are critical to our mission!