

TMA Tips for Effective Lobbying

The legislative environment is chaotic, so it's important to have the right expectations when visiting lawmakers for Doctors' Day on the Hill.

During session, **15 minutes is a realistic time frame for your meeting.** Your visit is subject to interruption for any number of reasons (committee votes, calls, other legislators, etc.). Accept these interruptions gracefully and don't get flustered by stopping and starting conversations.

TIPS:

- Start by introducing yourself, your organization(s), and purpose of the meeting. If you or a member of the group has a personal connection with the legislator be sure to mention it.
- When meeting as a large group (five or more), designate a lead physician to run the meeting. This individual should be knowledgeable about the policy and talking points, and be able to keep the group on message to maximize time with the legislator.
- Try to start and end the conversation on a positive note. Even if the legislator cannot support your position on a particular issue, you never know when you will need their support on a future issue.
- Stay on topic and speak in a concise manner. You don't have to speak on every issue if you cover one or two thoroughly.
- Leave time for questions. Don't assume every legislator will be well-informed on TMA issues. Remember, over 1,000 bills are filed on average per year. No single legislator could possibly be informed on every issue.

You should account for the prospect of delay, but don't take it personally if your legislator cancels last minute or doesn't show up to a scheduled meeting. Lawmakers and their staff are under tremendous time pressures during session. It is not uncommon for one delayed meeting or other business to disrupt their entire schedule for the day.

TIPS:

- Be patient and prompt. Use waiting time to relax or chat with a staff member who offers conversation. If the legislator misses the meeting, politely ask if there is another time you can stop by that day.
- Always be courteous when waiting to see your legislator. They do not take it lightly if their staff members report a guest's impatience.
- Don't be put off if an assistant refers you to a legislative aide. They are interested in what you have to say, both as a constituent and a physician, and will relay your message to the legislator.

Stay on message. Plan carefully who is going to say what. Don't have a confusing scene in the legislator's office about which bills to discuss and avoid side discussions within the group.

TIPS:

- Choose the three strongest talking points that will be most effective in persuading a legislator then bolster your position with relevant anecdotes or personal experiences.
- Don't overwhelm a legislator with details. Conceptualize the bill into a broad sentence or two, then provide additional facts if the circumstances call for it. A legislator will encourage more information from you if they need it.
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know something about a bill. You are not expected to be a policy expert. **Your credibility can sometimes be enhanced by saying, "I don't know but I will get back with you."**
- Don't contradict one another. If there are points of dissension among the group, leave it out. TMA works hard to build the credibility of physicians on Capitol Hill and it's difficult to convey a strong case for a position when our membership disagrees.

