

By Personal Visit

The most effective way to lobby a legislator is face-to-face. Legislators have offices in Austin when the legislature is in, but even then you can arrange to visit with them at home. Because of the hectic legislative pace, it is difficult to predict a legislator's availability when the legislature is in session. Nevertheless, if legislators know that their constituents have traveled to Austin, they will generally try to see them. It is always best to call first and make an appointment. However, don't be offended if your legislator is unable to see you even if you made an appointment. Ask to meet with the staff person who is the expert in the area you are concerned about. Legislative staff are well informed in their assigned areas and will relay your information to the legislator. Remember that you have one representative and one senator; maximize your efforts by contacting both. The following are recommendations for visiting with legislators:

- **Be on time for your appointment.** But don't expect legislators to be on time; they often have hearings or meetings they cannot anticipate and cannot leave.
- Before the appointment, practice a **three-minute statement** of all the information you want to present. This will force you to think about what you want and why you want it.
- It is usually best to **visit your legislator in small groups** - three to five people are optimum. Keep your visits as brief as you can - never plan on staying more than 10 to 15 minutes. You should convey the impression that people in your group represent many more; if each represents a different organization, their potential voting power will maximize your lobbying impact.
- If you are a **constituent** or if you have any family, social, business or political ties to your legislators, it may serve as identification when your point of view is considered.
- Let your legislators know if you are **working with others** on the issue, if you are active in the community, or if you are representing members of your organization.
- A **short, written statement** of your position should be presented to your legislators to explain why they should support your viewpoint. Give a copy to the staff also, preferably before the appointment. If you are dealing with a specific bill, have a mock-up of any language you suggest.
- Be clear about your position and **what you would like your legislator to do**. Identify your bill by name and number whenever possible. Give the legislator some key words: "This is the bill to prevent discrimination against children in housing." Otherwise, your legislators might be embarrassed to admit they don't know what "HB 2368" is about.
- **Be courteous** in dealing with your legislators. Never let your disagreement lead to harsh or personal remarks. It is important not to alienate them - you may need their support on other issues.
- **Be firm about your position.** Do not try to force your legislators into changing their minds or committing themselves when they don't want to, but it is fair to ask how they stand on the issue.
- Follow up your visit with a **thank-you letter**. Use it to restate your position.