



Visiting your legislators

A face-to-face meeting with your legislators is an excellent opportunity to discuss issues in person and to deliver your message.

- ❖ Develop and maintain a good working relationship directly with the legislators in your district – then they will know you when an issue comes up where you need their help.
- ❖ Always call ahead for an appointment and briefly explain the purpose of the meeting. Be on time.
- ❖ Be BRIEF, keep your comments to the point and limit your presentation/discussion to the time scheduled, unless the legislator extends the meeting.
- ❖ Tell the legislator why the issue is important to you and to other constituents in his/her district. Put a face to an issue – and explain the local impact. Use bill numbers and titles when possible.
- ❖ Ask the legislator for his/her position on the issue and how he/she will vote. If supportive, thank him/her for the support. If undecided or not supportive, ask if you can provide additional information on the issue.
- ❖ Always be courteous, even if the legislator disagrees with your position on the issue.
- ❖ Leave information for the legislator to review after your meeting. Thank the legislator for his/her time. Send a short letter thanking the legislator for the meeting.



E-Mailing or Writing Your Legislators

There is strength in numbers. A personal, well written, original e-mail or letter has considerable impact on legislators.

- ❖ Make sure there is a return mailing address in the letter or e-mail. Be sure to identify the town/city and county in which you live. Typed letters are easier to read.
- ❖ Be BRIEF, courteous and to the point. Try to make the letter no longer than one typewritten page. Send only the original letter, not a copy. Personalize your letter to strengthen your points. Explain the local impact.
- ❖ State what is being asked of the legislator/governor and request a response. Be factual and support positions with information. If you know the bill number and title, be sure to refer to it in your letter.
- ❖ When the General Assembly is in session contact legislators at their Raleigh office. When the legislators are not in session, contact their home office addresses (and home e-mail if available). A list of Raleigh and home office addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses can be found at www.ncleg.net.



Calling your legislators

Calling your legislators is another effective means for communicating your concerns about the proposed budget cuts for MH/DD/SA services.

- ❖ Before you call, jot down the main points - practice what you are going to say.
- ❖ Ask to speak directly to the legislator. Identify yourself and where you are from (city, county). Be BRIEF and concise. State the purpose for your call.
- ❖ Express your appreciation if the legislator supports your issue. If undecided, offer to provide more information.

- ❖ If you can't reach the legislator directly, leave a phone number where calls can be returned and ask to speak to the staffer handling this issue. Leave a message with the staff person answering the phone.
- ❖ Remember to be courteous and to thank the legislator for his/her time.
- ❖ Send a follow-up e-mail or letter restating the substance of the call and the legislator's position on the issue as it was understood (whether there was direct contact or contact with his/her staff). Say thank you.



Your legislator's viewpoint

Your Senator or Representative....

1. **KNOWS THAT "ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL."** This quote by former Speaker Tip O'Neil, means that officeholders pay first allegiance to their districts and consequently their reelection. That is why contacts by people from their home district are most effective.
2. **WANTS TO DO THE RIGHT THING:** Each of us wants to do a good job, but we sometimes forget that this basic human drive also applies to elected officials.
3. **OFTEN WANTS TO GET REELECTED:** Despite the fact that nearly all incumbents are reelected, they all thrive on their jobs and are constantly concerned with what they have to do to keep it or get a better one.
4. **WANTS TO BE RESPONSIVE:** She/he are in the business of pleasing people and wants to accommodate you—but not at any cost. Other considerations may prevent him/her from doing so.
5. **MAY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT PERSONS NEEDING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS ADDICTIVE DISEASES, MENTAL ILLNESS OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES:** Unless your representative is a member of A Human Resources Committee, your representative probably knows little or nothing about your concerns. Share your knowledge.
6. **IS BESET BY CONFLICTING PRESSURES:** Fund new education programs and cut non-education programs. Don't raise taxes. Don't touch the cigarette or alcohol industries. Provide information about why funds for MH/DD/SA services are so important and need to receive priority from our legislators.
7. **WANTS TO KNOW HOW LEGISLATION AFFECTS THE LOCAL DISTRICT:** This is where you are critical. You can show how appropriations and legislation impacts the people back home. Be specific and use real-life examples.
8. **FINDS IT HARD TO VOTE AGAINST A FRIEND BUT EASY TO VOTE AGAINST SOMEONE WE DON'T KNOW:** Votes in the legislature are taking money from one program to give to another. Unless your representative knows the impact that expansion funds or cuts have on programs in their district, it's easy to accept the argument that those programs can afford the cut or don't need expansion.

