Hill Tips Guide to Scheduling and Executing a Successful Legislative Meeting

How to Schedule a Legislative Visit

- Schedule your appointment in advance/as early as possible
    - Drop-ins = not effective
- Email the legislator's scheduler/staff or call the U.S. Capitol switchboard (202.224.3121) and ask to be connected to your Senator or Representative
- Understand that you're not the only person/group on that legislator's schedule
    - You may have as little as 15 minutes to present your information
    - Brevity and organization are key—hit your key issues first and stick to your talking points

Tips for Talking to Your Legislator

Recognize that you will likely meet with the Legislative Assistant (LA) covering child support – **not** the Legislator

Before Your Meeting:

- **Don't underestimate** their power or influence on their boss
- Keep it simple—the LA is responsible for numerous issues and, if at all familiar with the program, knows only the basics
- You are there to help them help their boss
- The Legislator relies on staff for information—the LA often serves as a gatekeeper for information and access to the Member

During Your Meeting:

- Introduce yourself and thank them for their time
- Make sure they have your contact information (email, phone and work address)

- Be clear on who you represent and why you are there. There is a fine line between lobbying (which is **not permitted** in a federally-funded program) and providing information and background on key issues
- Be clear that you are **NOT** representing the entire child support community or NCSEA, even if you share some of NCSEA's documents with the legislator or the staff member
    - NCSEA's Policy Manual explicitly restricts who may and may not speak on behalf of the Association
- **Don't** assume that your legislator, or their staff, understand the details of the child support profession—do NOT use workplace jargon. Examples:
    - TANF
    - FFY
    - Imputation
- Don't be surprised if the staffer and/or legislator may think you are there to discuss child welfare
    - Be prepared to explain the difference and then move on with educating on the child support program
- Make sure the legislator understands the significance, importance and bipartisan nature of the child support program. Share some key statistics (national/state/county), but don't overwhelm them with stats
- Know your issue—if you do not know the answer to a question, **don't guess**. If you make an educated guess, make sure that they know that you will follow up with a definitive answer
- Approach the meeting as if you were briefing your governing board
- Be a good listener and hear out what your legislator has to say on the issue(s)
- Don't debate or give ultimatums—listen to their questions/concerns, recognize them and answer with facts

- Share local case-related stories to help make your point and invoke real-world, constituent impacts
- Remember—all causes are **good** causes. You must convince your legislator that there is something extra special about yours
- Be confident & don't be intimidated—legislators and staff will view you as the expert on the issue
- Emphasize the main points of your conversation in a follow-up letter and make sure to thank the legislator/staff for taking the time to meet/hear your position

After Your Meeting:

- As the meeting closes, summarize what follow-up you'll be providing *(always provide follow-up)*
- Report back to NCSEA on the meeting outcomes using the ***Legislator Meeting Report Form***, and include if NCSEA needs to follow-up with the legislator's office