

10 Informal Rules: Legislative Advocacy

- 1. Remember, you're an information source.** Legislators and their staff have limited time and interest in any one issue. They can't be as informed as they might like on all the issues – or the ones that concern you. You can fill the information gap. They want and *need* to hear your stories, your lived experience.
- 2. Tell the truth.** There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give exaggerated, inaccurate, false, or misleading information to a legislator or legislative aide. Trust and relationship building takes time. Always speak truthfully.
- 3. Research and be prepared to tell legislators who else is on your side.** It is helpful for a legislator to know what other groups, individuals, state agencies and/or legislators are working with you on an issue. If unclear, be sure to contact others to confirm – with certainty – who you can tell legislators who else supports your position.
- 4. Know the opposition.** Anticipate who the opposition will be – organized or individual – and to the extent possible, *why* they are in opposition. Be prepared to tell your legislator what the opposition arguments are likely to be and provide them with answers and rebuttals to those arguments.
- 5. Make the legislator aware of any personal connection you may have.** No matter how insignificant you may believe it is, if you have friends, relatives, and/or colleagues in common, LET THEM KNOW. Outside of testimony and the legislative drafting process, *most* of our legislative advocacy is very informal. Personal connections create common ground, and it just might make the difference on the level of engagement you can achieve with a legislator and/or their staff.
- 6. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.** If the legislator wants information you don't have, or asks something you don't know, tell them, and then offer to get the information they are looking for. If you make that offer, be sure to follow up in a timely manner.
- 7. Be concise and specific about what you are asking for.** If you want a vote, information, answers to a question – whatever it is – make sure you ask directly and get an answer.
- 8. Follow up.** It is very important to find out if your legislator did what he/she said they would. It is very important that you then thank them if they did, or ask them for an explanation as to why they did not vote as they said they would, etc...
- 9. Don't "burn any bridges."** It is very easy to get emotional over issues you feel strongly about. That's fine but be sure that no matter what happens you manage yourself, conduct yourself in a professional and reasonable manner, and leave your interactions with legislators and their staff on good enough terms that you can go back to them. Remember, your strongest opposition on one issue may be your strongest ally on the next.
- 10. Be courteous, but don't be intimidated.** Remember, your legislators are responsible to you and nine times out of ten, legislators are grateful for your input.

Real change. Enduring change. Happens one step at a time.

~ Hon. Ruth Bader Ginsburg