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Tips for Success with Your Tennessee

State Legislators

**Keep in mind that your goal is to develop an ongoing personal relationship with your elected representatives, as well as to influence their position on specific issues or bills.**

* Know who your legislator is. The state website at: [capitol.tn.gov](http://www.capitol.tn.gov) can help you find out and tell you a little about who they are.
* Find out what committees your legislator serves on. Are they relevant to your issues?
* In addition to your own state representative and senator, you may want to think about establishing a relationship with other legislative leaders who chair relevant committees or serve other leadership roles.
* Prepare ahead of time. Write down key points to discuss in the meeting as well as any questions you might have.  Practice what you want to say. Appointments move quickly, sometimes lasting only 5 to 15 minutes. Be prepared to make your case simply and efficiently.
* Limit your topics. Focus on a single issue or bill, two at most. Don’t risk confusing your legislator or weakening your case by bringing up too many issues at once.
* Your legislator may not know about the needs and experiences of those with disabilities. Be patient if they make a mistake and take time to educate him/her in plain language. Do not use jargon or acronyms.
* Do not be intimidated. Legislators will view you as the expert on the issue.

**In your Meeting**

* **Courtesy** - Always be courteous to legislative staff members and legislators.
* **The Introduction** - When speaking to a legislator or staff member, quickly identify yourself, the issue you would like to discuss, and the fact that you are from his or her district.
* **Share Your Personal Story** - It will help you make your point.
* **Respect Time Limits**- Be brief; prepared; clear; honest; accurate; persuasive; timely; persistent; and grateful.
* **Don’t Forget to Listen** - The appointment is for both of you to talk and share ideas.
* **Agree to Disagree** - Don’t debate with a legislator or give ultimatums such as “I won’t vote for you if you do not support my position.” Respect the legislator’s right to disagree with you.
* **Thank You** - At the end of the meeting thank the legislator and/or the staff for their time. Follow up with a written thank you note and remind them of your main points.
* **HAVE FUN!**Take pictures, shake hands, and make memories.  With each meeting you will become more confident and effective.  If you took a picture, you might want to send a copy with your thank you note.

*“The lifting power of many wings can achieve twice the distance of flying alone.”*

*Phone: 615-383-9442 Email: ddh@tndisability.org*

*Online: www.tndisability.org*