

# Working With Your Elected Officials

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# Learning Objectives

- Build skills for talking to officials and influencing their actions
- Learn how your story and our shared stories build a narrative

## **Sharing Your Story: Key Considerations**

- Share only what you feel comfortable discussing
- Ask yourself whether you would be comfortable sharing this with friends, family, or the public
- Your story does not have to be traumatic
- You do not need to be directly impacted to speak about an issue you care about

# Meeting With Elected Officials: General Notes

## Do a little research

Learn about the official and the community they represent

- Understand their background (career, education, interests, values)
- Review their voting record or past policy decisions
- Identify any shared experiences or connections
- Be well informed about **your issue**

## Craft a Clear Message

You may have the goal of:

- **Supporting** a position
- **Inoculating** against opposing points
- **Persuading**
- **Educating**

# Start with an Introduction

- **Explain who you are, i.e.:**
  - *“My name is...”*
  - *“I am a working mother of 3 in North Omaha.” “I am a concerned Nebraska veteran”*
  - Share what city you live in and let them know if you are a constituent of theirs
- **Explain what you are talking about, i.e.:**
  - *“I am here today to discuss the importance of reentry programming and LB 962’s role in supporting that.”*
  - *“I wanted to share my experience with the barriers my family has faced in accessing affordable school meals and how passing LB 966 might help.”*
- **State why it matters to you**
  - *“As someone who knows children that have exited the system, I know how difficult reentry can be.”*

# Share Your Experience/What You Think

- **If you are personally impacted:**
  - You can spend this section diving a bit deeper into your story
  - Share what you've experienced and the impacts it has had on your life
  - Describe your feelings and paint a picture of what life was like when you were navigating this challenge
- **If you know someone personally impacted:**
  - Consider talking more about what the policy does: *"LB 938 makes saving easier for first time homebuyers."*
  - Talk about what it is like to work with/be friends with someone navigating the issue: *"Accessing healthcare can be very difficult in my community due to a lack of avenues to enter into the profession. LB 912 may help provide access to that career track."*
  - Name your values and why you believe others who share that value should care about the issue: *"As someone who believes every person deserves a second chance, it's important that we make sure our laws give people the opportunity to make a fresh start with the coordinated support they need."*

# Conclusion

- This should EXPLICITLY state your stance on the issue and have a call to action
- Ex: “*LB 1067 helps increase the funds available to state, county, and municipal agencies and private partners to resolve the housing crisis in our state.*”

# In Summary...

- **How to prepare a quick version:**
  - Who you are (name, job, are you a parent to/daughter/son of...)
  - Where you live
  - What bill/issue you want to see pass/not pass (specific bills or policies)
  - Why it matters to you (personal experiences and your values that relate to these bills)
  - Thank you

# Additions, pt. 1:

- **Don't be intimidated**
  - The Senators are state representatives. Your taxes pay their salaries and people in their districts vote them in or out of office. They regularly meet and listen to their constituents.
- **Be prepared**
  - Study your issue until you feel pretty comfortable with it. Anticipate questions and practice answers you might want to give. But remember, you do not have to be perfect.
- **Provide information**
  - Explain why you favor your position and why you think the issue is important. If you don't know a piece of information, pivot back to what you know.
- **Keep it personal**
  - Senators can be affected by stories, especially ones that they can relate to. Share your personal experiences, or those of people you have known (use discretion of course). Be alert as to how your story may be affecting the Senator.
- **Let the Senator talk**
  - It will make them feel good that you are willing to listen and, most importantly, it will give you valuable information on their views and whether or not there is any chance of affecting their opinions.

# Additions, pt. 2:

- **ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS**

- Don't worry if you do not know the answer to a question. Tell the Senator you will follow up with them with the answer. **Never mislead or lie to a Senator to make yourself or your organization look better. Don't pretend to know something when you really don't.**

- **DON'T GET INTO ARGUMENTS**

- Be firm in presenting your position and correct inaccurate information the Senator may give, but do so calmly and rationally. You can be clear that you disagree, but don't get into a heated conversation. If the Senator becomes hostile or aggressive it is best to say, "*Thank you for your time*" and end the exchange.

- **COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY**

- Think of Senator conversations in the rotunda as selling ideas rather than coercing the Senator to accept your point of view. **Do not tell a Senator that you will make sure they get defeated.** The Senator will not be impressed by threats.

- **SAY "THANK YOU"**

- Thank the Senator for meeting with you, even if they don't agree with you. Consider following up with a thank you note after the visit, especially if they vote your way or help you in some other way. Stay in touch with the Senators if you can!

# Roleplaying Activity: Engaging with Elected Officials

# Break for Lunch

Capitol Cafeteria

Billy's

Tico's

Delivery Apps

**Make sure to meet here at 1PM**