

## ADVOCACY TIPS<sup>1</sup>

### Writing Letters

Letter writing is probably one of the most effective and efficient ways to express your opinions about an issue. Letters also serve as a means to educate decision-makers about your field and how they can assist you. Responding to constituent mail is a number one priority for most legislators.

Letters to policy-makers must be brief and to the point (usually no longer than one page). Any letter should include the following major points:

- Identify the issue clearly (with as positive a perspective as possible);
- State your position and why you care about this issue;
- State how the issue will affect you, your school, and/or your state;
- Tell the decision maker what you would like him/her to do.

### Telephone Calls

As with letter writing, telephone calls are a good way to contact policy makers. Be sure to give the following information during the call:

- Your name, address, and phone number
- The issue that has prompted your call;
- What action you would like to see on this issue.

### Office Visits

Visits can be a useful way to educate policy-makers at all levels. Appointments can be arranged by calling the office to set up a time and to let them know who will be making the visit and the issue to be discussed.

Present a written position (preferably one page) to support your proposal. This will allow the administrator, legislator, and staff to reflect on the meeting at their leisure.

Many officials are often busy with numerous issues and may not be up to date on your particular cause. Take time to explain your views, concerns, and suggestions. Seek to offer a new way of looking at the problem and offer constructive criticism, not just negative preaching or scolding.

End each visit with a question which evokes a commitment to action such as: "Will you support this issue?"

### Testifying

Testifying before a congressional hearing, your state legislature, or the local school board is yet another way in which to let your voice be heard. Hearings give policymakers necessary information to accurately assess, write, and vote on laws and policies.

- Know why the hearing is being called so your testimony is appropriate;
- Meet with committee members and

staff in advance;

- Prepare and provide your written testimony as far in advance as possible;
- Arrive early;
- Be brief—Don't read—Maintain eye contact;
- If you don't know the answer, say so;
- Be courteous and tell the truth.

In most cases, you do not have to be present in order to submit written testimony for the record. Call the appropriate office for details.

### Media Contacts

Local newspapers and radio and television stations will offer publicity for an issue if they are convinced that the issue merits attention, and if you are willing to offer assistance. Remember to utilize your school newspapers and association newsletters as well. Include relevant policymakers on your mailing lists. Publicity may include:

- Press releases on noteworthy programs (your school's National French Week program);
- Notices of meetings (your chapter or state language association's annual meeting);
- Editorials;
- Letters to the Editor.

### Networking

Other organizations can be a source of collaborative strength. Expand your network to include areas where you may never have expected to find support:

- Businesses with trade concerns
- Social organizations with international dimensions (Rotary, 4H, etc.)

By combining resources, skills, ideas, and networking lists, you can generate hundreds of letters and calls, positive support, and effective political action. Through joint meetings, coalitions can focus on common goals and priorities, target specific issues, and develop effective strategies.

<sup>1</sup>Prepared by the Joint National Committee for Languages / National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL/NCLIS), Web site: [<http://www.languagepolicy.org>]. The AATF is a founding member of JNCL-NCLIS.