



## Tips on Meeting With Your Elected Officials

From your local city council to your Senators and Representatives in Washington, meeting with your elected officials about civil liberties issues is a lot easier than most people think.

Remember, your elected officials work for you! The Restore the Vote Coalition is asking that you schedule an in-district meeting with your State Representative AND your State Senator in your area while they are on break. You can attend this meeting by yourself or you can invite other people from your area to attend the meeting with you.

**What is a lobby visit?** A lobby visit is merely a meeting for you to tell your legislator what you think about a certain issue and to try to get him or her to take action on that issue.

### PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING:

- **Be prepared.** Before meeting with them make sure you know about your elected official and are prepared to talk about the issues at hand. Read through background materials, and familiarize yourself with the issues. It's also good to have a leave-behind that covers the main points you will be speaking about.
- **Plan out your meeting:** Time is limited. If you are in a group, be sure that your group lays out the meeting beforehand, including who will speak to each issue, and who will take notes.
- **Be aware of what we want to achieve.** What is it you want your elected official to do – vote for or against the bill? Make a commitment to introduce legislation? Be sure to consult our materials and stay focused on the goal for each meeting. Asking your elected official or his or her staff member to do something specific will help you know how successful your visit has been!

### DURING THE MEETING:

- **Be prompt and patient.** Elected officials run on very tight schedules. Be sure to show up on time for your appointment, and be patient – it is not uncommon for legislators to be late or to have your meeting interrupted by other business.
- **Keep it short and focused!** You will generally have 20 minutes or less with a staff person, and as little as 10 minutes if you meet with your elected official. Make the most of that brief time by sticking to your topics.
- **Bring up any personal, professional or political connections that you may have to the elected official.** Start the meeting by introducing yourselves and thanking the elected



official for any votes he or she has made in support of your issues, and for taking the time to meet with you.

- **Stick to your talking points!** Stay on topic. Having a focus is helpful to ensure that our point of view and request(s) is clear. Remember to leave behind the one page Restore the Vote fact sheet we have provided.
- **Provide personal and local examples of the impact of the legislation.** This is the most important thing you can do in a lobby visit.
- **Saying “I don’t know” can be a smart political move.** You need not be an expert on the topic you are discussing. It is fine to tell your elected official that you will get that information for him or her. Never make up an answer to a question – giving wrong or inaccurate information can seriously damage your credibility!
- **Set deadlines for a response.** Often if an elected official hasn’t taken a position on legislation, they will not commit to one in the middle of a meeting. Ask when you should check back in to find out what your elected official intends to do about your request.

#### **AFTER THE MEETING:**

- Right after the meeting, briefly compare notes with everyone in your group.
- Each person who took part in the meeting should promptly send a personal thank you letter to the elected official.
- Follow up in a timely fashion with any requested materials and information. If you need help with the follow up, contact a leader from the Restore the Vote Coalition so they can follow up with the legislator.
- If the legislator or staff member doesn’t meet the deadline for action you agreed to during the meeting, ask him or her to set another deadline. Be persistent but flexible!