

Legislative Advocacy Tips

Face-to-face visits to legislators and staff are the most influential method of advocacy. You will find that state and county legislators are much more accessible and approachable than U.S. Representatives and Senators. Most state legislators have usually only one part-time staffer. Unlike Washington, in Annapolis you may find your legislator in her office alone, without "gatekeepers." As local representatives, they want to hear from their constituents, who just happen to be their neighbors.

Research

- Limit the issues – one or two only
- Get the facts. Try UU sources:
 - [UUA Washington Office](#)
 - [UU Service Committee](#)
 - [UU's for Social Justice](#)
 - [UU Legislative Ministry - Maryland](#)
- Knowing the bill number is helpful but not critical; the issue is more important than the bill number or title as there are so many bills and amendments; a legislator is likely to vote on an issue
- Find out how your legislator voted on this issue or similar issues in the past
- Take some handouts that you might be able to leave at the legislator's office
- Create a personal message that includes your relevant work, professional background, expertise and experiences. Always address the problem in terms of your Unitarian Universalist faith and values
- Call the office and schedule a meeting.

Face-to-Face Contact

- Dress neatly
- Arrive on time
- Be polite
- Relax

- Give your name, home location (in the legislator's district); remember to identify yourself as a Unitarian Universalist and your organization
- After introductions, it is a good idea to compliment the legislator about something she has done
- State the reason for your visit or contact. "I'm concerned about..."
- Take note of the legislator's reactions (e.g., pro, con, disinterested, confused)
- Briefly state your position on the issue; avoid reciting facts and figures unless relevant to your story;
- Tell your story; remember your personal message
- If asked a question to which you don't know the answer, agree to find the answer; don't guess
- Ask the legislator for a pledge or action (vote, introduce, co-sponsor, speak to colleagues)
 - "How do you feel about this issue?"
 - "Can you support us [our position/this measure] on this?"
 - [If no] "What concerns you about our position?"
 - "How far can you go to support [our position/this measure]?"
 - "Can we get you more information about this?"
- If the legislator declines, ask her what she can or will support
- Send a thank you note or make a thank you phone call
- Let your parent organization know about your contact

Writing Letters, Email Messages

- Keep it short, not more than one page or what can appear on one screen without scrolling
- Limit the message to one issue
- The letter or message must include your name, address, phone number and email address (if email), your position and why you hold it, urging the legislator to support or reject the bill or amendment, co-sponsor it, etc. Also include thanks for some action the legislator took in the past.
- If the note is handwritten, please make sure it is legible and neat

- If you are constructing a letter or message from a web site, pasting suggested paragraphs, add a few personalized sentences in the beginning. Legislators get many form letters and you want yours to stand out
- Don't write nasty or insulting letters or messages
- Send a Thank You note after the legislative action is finished (assuming it went the right way).

Telephone Calls

- You might end up speaking to a staff person or leaving a message. In any case, make your statement to whoever answers the phone. Identify yourself and your organization, include a call back number, state your position and why, and urge the legislator to support or reject the bill, etc.
- Make a thank you call after the legislative action is finished (assuming it went the right way).

(Sources: UUAWO, UULM-MD)