

Talking to Legislators: Do's and Don'ts

- Do** identify yourself and say whom you represent immediately on each contact. Legislators meet hundreds of people and they can't remember everyone.
- Do** think of yourself as consultant to a legislator. You have expertise and insights that help the legislator understand a bill or issue.
- Do** be brief. Legislators are very busy.
- Do** be specific and practical. Relate arguments to situations in the legislator's home district.
- Do** thank legislators.
- Do** keep the door open for further discussion even if you don't agree at this time. "Politics make strange bedfellows" is not without foundation.
- Do** talk with legislators even if their position differs with yours.
- Do** be honest. NEVER lie. Acknowledge opposing arguments and any political liabilities.
- Do** ask the legislator for support.
- Do** know the issue or the status of the legislation. Refer to legislation by bill number.
- Do** leave behind a one-page fact sheet summarizing your position. Highlight important facts and arguments. Include your name, address, and telephone number so you can be reached if there are any questions.
- Don't** back legislators into a corner or get into lengthy arguments.
- Don't** overwhelm them with too much information or jargon.
- Don't** be afraid to say you don't know. Offer to find out and send the information back.
- Don't** confront, threaten, pressure or beg.
- Don't** expect legislator to be specialists. Their schedules and the number of bills make them generalists.
- Don't** ask the impossible...too often.

Adapted from Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America