

# Interacting with Your State Lawmaker

Every business should have a working knowledge of government relations in order to establish two-way communication with its elected representatives. Our purpose is to build and maintain productive relationships with state and federal legislators to maximize their support for strengthening the health care system. Please refer to any policy your agency may have regarding working with legislators.

## Overview of the Legislative Process

A new two-year legislative session began January 2005.

- Bills introduced remain eligible for passage until Dec. 31, 2006.
- 110 state representatives (56 votes needed for passage, some exceptions)
- 38 state senators (20 votes needed for passage, some exceptions)
- Term limits: House members are limited to three 2-year terms; Senators are limited to two 4-year terms; statewide officials are limited to two 4-year terms
- Session days – Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays throughout most of the year

## Advocacy – What works best?

*Lobbying vs. Public Relations:*

Independent, but supporting functions: Lobbyists work to educate and convince lawmakers to take a certain position. Public Relations works to support lobbying functions, through media relations, grassroots mobilization and communication

### Elected officials are motivated in varying degrees by three generally accepted principles:

Policy	Are you right on the issue? Which groups support or oppose? Where is the party or leadership?
Politics	Will this hurt re-election efforts? Where is the public? Political contributors?
Advocacy	Are there organizations, corporations and grassroots behind the issue?



Target your efforts

## Working with Legislators

**Here are some tips for advocating with your legislator:**

- Stay solution focused. Work toward win-win strategies.
- Be prepared to explain your legislative interest in detail. Explain your problem, the present legislative situation, and then propose a solution.
- Know the details of what you are advocating for: a bill number, the status of the proposal, costs, etc. To the elected official, it is not that our issue is unimportant; it is one of many important issues.
- Make sure to communicate to the correct level of government (county, state, federal).

- Timing is important. Learn the decision-making process for the issue your agency wants to affect, and communicate to the official when he/she has a say in that process.
- Know the position of other organizations to ascertain who supports/does not support the issue.
- In-person meetings, while difficult to arrange, are most beneficial.
- Keep in mind that things change as they go through the process. Do not expect a commitment if the final product is in doubt.
- Always remember to let your elected official know that you appreciate any help he or she may have provided.

### **Identifying the committee and departments that impact your issue**

- Policy committees debate policy issues that don't involve spending
- Appropriation committees debate spending decisions
- Identifying the committee members and their staff

### **Out of sight is truly out of mind**

- Meet with lawmakers in their district
  - ✓ Mondays and Fridays
  - ✓ Coffee meetings, Facility Tours, District Hours
- Meet with lawmakers in Lansing
  - ✓ Typically Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday
  - ✓ Office meetings, Capital Days, Receptions
- Invite lawmakers to your board meetings or conferences
- Contact lawmakers through personal letters, emails, phone calls, faxes
- Form letters rarely work
- Input from non-constituents don't carry as much weight

### **Rapid Response Plan**

- Do you have a rapid communication mechanism to notify your key stakeholders and supporters when your issue is being debated or discussed?
- Are there any elected advocates who support your issue or cause?
- Are there any department officials, such as from MDCH, who will advocate your position?
- Are there other non-profit groups who support your position?

### **For More Information or Help**

Visit [www.legislature.mi.gov](http://www.legislature.mi.gov) to review legislation, bill analyses and public acts. You can also review committee meeting notices, journals and calendars.

If you would like to learn more about Community Mental Health, please refer to your Michigan Community Mental Health Ambassador Handbook or (Name of Person in Your Agency).

