

## **Tips for Meeting with Your Legislator**

### **By Michelle McLaughlin, State Legislative Chair**

As many of you may know, 1 April is Child Advocacy Day for the state of Missouri. At this time, many of you may be planning on visiting Jefferson City to meet with your Senators and Representatives. Here are a few tips before making your trip:

1. Schedule your visit. Do this as soon as possible since their schedules are often not their own. If there is more than one or two of you, be cognizant of their limited office space and time (most visits last about 10-15 minutes). Be prepared when you call to schedule your visit. Often the office may want to know whom you are, who you represent, how many will be attending, and what you want to discuss. Finally, the day before, call to confirm.
2. Do your homework. This is very important for a successful visit. Learn about whom you are meeting with (his or her priorities and which committees they may serve). An internet search will provide you information such as their position on pieces of legislation and their voting record. We strongly suggest that you visit the Missouri PTA website and the National PTA website for information on PTA's position on issues.
3. Be early. Arrive at least five minutes early; however, be patient if the member is running late or gets called into another meeting. It is not unusual for you to meet with a member of his or her staff if this occurs. If you are running late, call and let them know; you may have to reschedule.
4. Be clear. After introducing yourself and any other attendees, tell them whom you are, your unit affiliation, what you want to talk about and why. If you are discussing a certain bill, have the title, number and status of the bill readily available. Then politely and briefly, tell them which action you would like for them to take on the bill. It would be great if you could also provide statistics and facts to help make your point.
5. Listen. Carefully listen to what your legislator says. They may have a different view or disagree with your position but do not argue with them. Remember we want to build relationships with our legislators. If they ask you a question and you do not know the answer, let them know you do not know and that you will get back to them with the information; then do so. If possible, leave a fact sheet or leave behind a sheet with information about what you talked about along with your contact information.
6. Thank them. Summarize your position, thank them and leave immediately; they will probably have another meeting scheduled after yours. After your visit, send a thank you letter to your legislator and their staff. You can even invite them to attend your school or program to build the relationship.
7. Let the Missouri PTA know about your visit with a brief synopsis of what occurred at your meeting. A short email will keep us informed about how you and your organization are advocating for children in Missouri.
8. Be proud. Be proud of yourself for taking on this task of advocating for children. Many people want to do this or talk about it, but YOU DID it! Congratulations!!