Uncovering the Roots of Racial and Economic Injustice

How to Talk to Legislators About Structural Poverty and Solutions

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How Your Legislature Works

• Senators and Assembly representatives are assigned to committees and the committees do the bulk of the work of reviewing proposed legislation and regulatory changes.
• **The Budget Committees** of both houses have the most influence over the budget.
• The State of NJ budget year is July 1 of the current year to June 30 of the following year. We are currently in Fiscal Year 2016 or FY16.
• The state budget must be balanced, unlike the Federal Government where a deficit can be recognized.
• The Governor generally proposes a state budget in late February.
• The State Legislature holds hearings between and meets with stakeholders and constituents to hear their concerns and recommendations regarding the proposal.
It’s not ALL about the Budget

- Throughout the year the Legislature meets via committees to review and hear testimony on bills that have been introduced.

- Throughout the year there may be regulations proposed for new or existing legislation.

- There may be bills we want introduced.

- Other times? **Like NOW...when we want to talk about growing opportunity, not poverty.**

For more information on the legislative process in New Jersey visit: [www.njleg.state.nj.us](http://www.njleg.state.nj.us)

You can also find your legislators there, follow bills through the legislature and view a schedule of hearings.
Meeting with a Legislator

**DO:**
- Schedule an appointment
- Call several times if needed to get an appointment.
- Be prepared that the office may want the request in writing, know who is attending, how many constituents there are and what you want to discuss.
- Plan on about 20 minutes, be prepared to be concise and specific.
- Let everyone have a chance to speak.
- Be polite, don’t interrupt and don’t argue.
- If you don’t know the answer to a question it is okay to say you’ll get back to them.

**DON’T:**
- Show up unexpected
- Be rigid in terms of dates and times to meet. Legislators tend to be very busy so try to be flexible.
- Require the legislator attend and refuse to meet with staff.
- Be surprised if the meeting gets changed at the last minute.
- BE LATE!
- Wear jeans or sweatpants.
- Hog the conversation or go off onto your own persona topic.
- DON’T GO UNPREPARED!
Be Prepared

• Know where the legislator stands on the issues you are discussing. Be ready to explain the issue as legislators can’t know all the bills and issues.

• Explain how the bill or issue will affect you and others in the legislator’s district.

• Bring relevant data and stories. Bring what works and what doesn’t. Bring an “ask”.

• Assign roles to those in your groups prior to the visit. One person can facilitate and make sure everyone has a chance to speak, one person can share a story and another can be the policy wonk.

• Decide who will make the “ask”.

• Have a leave behind packet with everyone’s contact information ready to give at the end of the visit.
Engaging a Legislator When:

**It Seems Hopeless: Still Approach Them!**
- Conveying your position is basic to good advocacy.
- Good advocacy shows that opposition is based on more than emotion.
- They and their colleagues will respect constituent pressure.
- Even with opponents, good advocacy is a way to educate and build relationships.
- People and minds change.
- Never give up!

**It Seems like a Sure Thing: Don’t Ignore Your Supporters!**
- Your continued advocacy gives supporters a basis for their position.
- Their colleagues respect constituent pressure.
- Advocacy is a chance to educate and build a relationship.
- There is always more to do.
- Saying thank you is part of good advocacy.
- People and minds change. Don’t let your inaction give them a reason to change their mind!
Tell the Story

“Numbers numb, jargon jars and no one ever marched on Washington because of a pie chart...Tell stories!

Andy Goodman
(Good Ideas for a Good Cause)

Let’s hear Monique’s Story

Stories. Connect. People.
How to tell the Poverty Story

• The Opportunity Agenda report “A Window of Opportunity” reports on media and public opinion of poverty in America.

• Narrative, messaging and storytelling were found to be effective persuaders.

• What “A Window of Opportunity” Advises:
  • Lead with values
  • Equal opportunity
  • Interconnection
  • Emphasize structural barriers to upward mobility
  • Show that solutions are possible
  • Invoke a positive role for government
Telling the Story, Getting Results

Creating Solutions and Opportunity:

What would a path of opportunity look like in these areas?

- Housing
- Nutrition/Food
- Education
- Child care
- Employment

What do Legislators Want to Hear?

- Feedback and tips
- Hints on how to talk about barriers and solutions
- Data vs. Stories
- Other