

REACHING THE LEGISLATORS

Communicating with local legislators through email, a private meeting request or by attending a public session is a great way to get in front of decision makers who are either passing or denying local tobacco ordinances that may impact your business.

Before contacting your local officials, it's important to know their names and if possible, get an understanding of their key areas of interest as a way to tailor your conversation. It's also important to find out when council meets – this information can be found online at your local city council website or by calling the local clerk's office.

Here are a few things to keep in mind before calling, emailing, writing or visiting your policymakers and staff:

- 1. Be prepared before you initiate the conversation.** It can be helpful to write out notes for what you want to say in advance if you are calling or visiting. Letters should be no more than one page and emails should be brief and bulleted. And if you want to showcase facts, make sure to support them with additional references and resources.
- 2. Communicate with the policymakers' staff.** If a legislator is not available, talk to the staff. Staff members typically write the policy and advise legislators. Senior and committee staff members are often the difference between a bill/ordinance passing or failing.
- 3. You're the expert.** Very few legislators are going to know the intricacies of your business the way you do. Help them understand the steps you go through to keep regulated products out of the hands of minors and the training your staff receives.
- 4. Select the best spokesperson.** Think about whether members of your trade association have relationships with the policymakers. One member may be a more effective representative to call, write or visit on behalf of your organization.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- 1. Be respectful and brief.** Try to keep your conversation concise and talk about only one policy issue at a time. Always remember to say thank you and promptly answer any follow-up questions.
- 2. Remember to clearly say who you represent and state your position on the issue.** It's important for policymakers to understand the number of people that you serve or who you represent. Also, provide a bill number and the general purpose of the bill if applicable. Legislators meet with so many people they may forget which side of the issue you and your organization are on.
- 3. Explain how the policymaker's community will be affected from both a financial and human perspective.** Human-interest stories or statistics and research from well-regarded institutions can be very effective.
- 4. Make the ask.** Be direct and ask your legislator to vote in support of you on this particular issue. They may try to side step the question. You're the constituent and you have a right to know how your legislator is going to vote. That doesn't mean you should be rude or aggressive, but if your legislator is undecided on an issue, ask him or her if you can follow up with them at a later time to find out what decision he or she has made.
- 5. Take yes for an answer.** If early on in the meeting your legislator says he or she is going to vote with you, wrap up the meeting. These people are busy and appreciate it when you simply thank them and help them stay on schedule.
- 6. Say thank you.** Thank them for taking the time to meet with you.

T.O.T.A.L.

Tobacco Ordinances – Take Another Look