

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

— *Margaret Mead*

“The most common way people give up on their power is by thinking they don't have any.”

— *Alice Walker*

MISSOURI RECOVERY NETWORK

The Statewide Voice for Recovery

Tips on Talking to Legislators

Although talking to your legislator might be intimidating, it is important to remember that speaking with constituents is a part of your legislator's job. However, there are steps that advocates can take to ensure that you are not only prepared for a conversation about addiction recovery with your representative, but also that your legislator listens to you. Legislators are interested in what you have to say and hearing about the issues that you support. The goal of any discussion with your legislator should be the establishment of a long-term relationship in order to ensure that recovery issues and concerns stay on his/her radar.

First Steps

In order to be prepared for your meeting, do some homework and get to know the basics about the piece of legislation you'll be addressing. Or, if there isn't any specific legislation, be able to articulate the issues you are concerned about and why. Practice a short, one to two minute speech about the issues you'll be discussing with your representative that explains what you want from the legislator and why you want it. Always be prepared to make your speech quickly and concisely — you never know how much time the legislator will have to spend with you.

Remember to define yourself as a priority to your representative in order to make your issue stand out of the crowd as important. Legislators receive hundreds of different issues and pieces of legislation, so remind him/her why your issue should be a concern to them. Additionally, connect the issue with the legislator's larger agenda, public appeal, and remind the legislator that it is a priority.

Impressions are Important

After you have done your research on the issue at hand, it's time to schedule a meeting with your legislator. When contacting his/her office, make sure to clearly identify yourself as a constituent and explain why you are requesting the meeting. If the legislator is unavailable, ask to schedule an appointment with the staff member who handles his/her education issues. Don't feel offended if the legislator cannot speak with you every time; legislative staff members work very closely with the legislator and they are good allies to have.

Come prepared to the meeting with your business card (if available), along with a one-page, summary of the issue that you will be discussing for you to refer to during the meeting. When introducing yourself, be personable and be sure to introduce yourself as a person in long-term recovery or a recovery advocate, and tell them a little about yourself and how recovery has changed your life. If possible, provide at least one piece of data that will support your point of view.

Remember, you are the expert when it comes to your own recovery. Your legislator may not have any, or limited, knowledge regarding the issues you address with him/her. Your job is to educate and inform your legislator about key issues.

Don't leave without asking them to support your issue. If there is a bill associated with the issue, be specific and ask them to support the bill. You may consider ending with, "Will you support this legislation?" When ending the meeting, remember to thank the legislator for his/her time and attention.

Finally, remember the rule of **three** when addressing your legislator: The duration of your speech shouldn't be longer than **three minutes**; make no more than **three points** in your discussion; and a written statement to your legislator should not be more than **three pages**.

Making the Connection

After your meeting, send a thank you note to your legislator, along with any other documents or information you promised to send them. Consider inviting them to attend a recovery event in their district so they may meet other recovery advocates and lend their support to the issue in person. The goal of an interaction with your legislator should be to develop a rapport so that a long-term relationship can be established. For suggested language when talking to your legislator, please refer to the MRN SHARE language brochure found on the MRN website at www.morecovery.org.

