



Anti-Poverty Network of NJ
Annual Summit

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

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)

DATA SATISFY THE ANALYTICAL PART OF OUR BRAINS. 
BUT STORIES TOUCH OUR HEARTS. 



Stories.
Connect.
People.

Let's hear
Monique's Story

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

