

How to Engage with Your Elected Officials 101



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Chapter One: What are the Different Levels of Government?



The Three Branches Federal

- Congress in the case of the Federal Government is in charge of creating laws.
- Executive Officer a.k.a The President that “executes” laws by enforcing them
- The Supreme Court settles disputes that arise when there is a disagreement about what the law says.

The Three Branches State

- Legislature at the state level.
- The Governor enforces laws.
- The Judiciary settles disagreements.

Chapter Two: Congress & The Legislature



- **Federal**

- Senators: Senator Bob Casey, Jr. (D) and Senator Pat Toomey (R)
 - ✦ 100 serve in the U.S. Senate.
 - ✦ Length of term is 6 years
 - ✦ Salary \$174,000
 - ✦ Last election was November 6, 2012
 - ✦ Next election is November 2014
- Members of Congress (18)
 - ✦ 435 serve in the House of Representatives
 - ✦ Length of term is 2 years
 - ✦ Salary is \$174,000
 - ✦ Last election was November 6, 2012
 - ✦ Next election is November 2014

Chapter Two: Continued...



- State

- State Senators: 50 Seats, 27 (R) and 23 (D)
 - ✦ Length of term is 4 years.
 - ✦ Salary is \$78,315/year
 - ✦ Last election was November 6, 2012
 - ✦ Next election is November 2014
- State Representatives: 203 Seats, 111 (R) and 92 (D)
 - ✦ Length of term is 2 years
 - ✦ Salary is \$78,314/year
 - ✦ Last election was November 6, 2012
 - ✦ Next election is November 2014

Chapter Two: Continued...



- **Local Government**

- **Counties/Townships**

- ✦ PA is comprised of 67 counties
 - ✦ Each county is then divided into one of the state's 2,562 municipalities
 - ✦ A county commission also known as a board of county commissioners is a group of elected officials charged with administering county government.

- **Municipalities: Borough, City, and School District**

- ✦ Borough Councils, Mayor, Tax Assessor, Tax Collector and Auditor
 - ✦ City Council, Mayor, Controller and Treasurer
 - ✦ School districts are administered by PA Public School Code of 1949 and can comprise one single municipality, like the School District of Philadelphia

Chapter Two: How do you know who does what?



Federal Government

- Defense
- Trade
- Immigration
- Coining Money \$\$\$
- Copyright & Patents
- Collecting Taxes
- Creating Laws

State Government

- Transportation
- Health
- Public Welfare
- Education
- Crime
- Labor & Industry
- Economic Development

Chapter Two: Continued



- **Local Government**

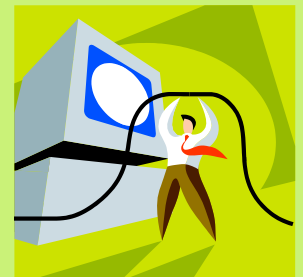
- Provide police and fire protection
- Maintenance of local roads & streets
- Water supply
- Sewage collection & Treatment
- Parking
- Traffic Control
- Local Planning & Zoning
- Parks and recreation
- Garbage collection
- Health Services
- Libraries
- Licensing of business
- Code Enforcement
- School Districts

Chapter Three: Navigating the Office



- **Setting the Meeting**

- Understand that when you call in to the office of an elected official the person on the other end of the line is most likely NOT going to be the elected official. However, regardless of the fact you definitely want to build the rapport from the first word!
- Introduce yourself, be upbeat and friendly.
- Request a meeting with the staff person (a.k.a. staffer) that handles the issue(s) that you are addressing (i.e. language access). If the elected official is able to attend the meeting great, but if not remember it's not the end of the world.
- The goal of the meeting should be to build a relationship with the staff person, and take time to ask questions and understand who does what in the office. Each elected official's office is its own little microcosm. The better you understand the dynamics of the office and what responsibilities are delegated to each staffer the easier it will be for you to navigate and advocate for different issues that arise.



Chapter Four: Getting Ready for the Meeting



- Make sure to do your homework regarding the agenda items that are important to each of your respective elected officials.
- Watch your local news, read the newspaper, and or surf the internet to make sure that your abreast on current events happening in your community.
- Pay special attention to what legislative or policy items your elected official is pushing.

Chapter Four: Continued...



Several websites to check out to keep you abreast about what's happening in PA:

- <http://www.pewstates.org/projects/stateline> You can filter by state
- <http://www.philly.com/philly/news/politics/state/> Philadelphia
- <http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/> Harrisburg
- <http://triblive.com/> Pittsburgh
- <http://www.pa.gov/Pages/NewsByDate.aspx> Press releases from the Governor's Office
- <http://paindependent.com/> Not frequently updated, but often times has better details
- <http://www.politicspa.com/> The “Morning Buzz” is typically worth reading

Chapter Five: It's not About What you Know, It's About Who you Know



- **Relationships, Relationships, Relationships!**
 - When you attend the meeting with staff person and/or the elected official definitely make sure you are building the rapport.
 - Be yourself! You definitely want them to understand who you are and what you and your organization are all about.
 - Request to meet with them periodically to keep them in the loop about the wonderful work that you and your organization are doing.
 - ✦ Be confident and professional, not annoying. Take a deep breath and remind yourself this is their job. They are non-tenured and they're here to serve!

Chapter Five: Continued...



- Make sure to keep your staffer and the elected official abreast about what's going on with your organization and in your community.
 - ✦ Don't hesitate to send them a newsletter or a holiday card with a handwritten note. Keep the connection alive! And set yourself apart from the rest!
- If you have a holiday party be sure to invite them! Don't hesitate to ask them for official greetings and/or proclamations.
 - ✦ People ask me for greetings **ALL** the time, it's part of what we're supposed to do!

Chapter Six: What to do When You're Not Being Listened To?



- The following are several examples of how constituents communicate with the Governor's Office and elected officials across the country.
 - Organize a written letter or phone call campaign regarding the issues you would be advocating.
 - Organize a peaceful gathering.
 - Write opinion editorials (op-eds) and submit to your local newspaper.
 - Remember to always be respectful and professional!



Q & A

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