



Chapter 14. Influencing Legislators For Policy Change

When working with Legislators, there are several things to consider. Legislators have the authority to establish/modify programs, they have various levels of budgetary authority, and issues brought to them may fall along divided party lines.

Because of term limits, legislators invariably face:

- Steep learning curves
- Massive reorganization every session
- Chairs and leaders who assume leadership much earlier in careers
- Complex issues to be handled without the knowledge or institutional memory or the time to learn it
- Increased influence of the executive branch, interest groups, lobbyists, and legislative staff due to the relative inexperience of legislators
- New legislators who are often less entrenched, willing to try new things, in a hurry and younger

When working with legislators:

- Use varied media
- Aim for the middle ground on the knowledge scale
- Avoid acronyms or specialized jargon
- Include separate technical assistance for legislative staff
- Remember political diversity and fiscal responsibility (legislators are accountable to their constituents)
- Remember there is tremendous variation in knowledge level and interest
- Remember the need for sharing information is intense and ongoing in states with term limits
- Back up claims with facts and grassroots communication to legislators and staff (Annual reports of CDR teams may be very influential)
- Provide legislators with the evidentiary basis for the proposed law; credibility is essential
- Work with any and all legislators and political parties
- Work toward consensus among groups
- Keep in mind that personal stories can have a tremendous impact
- Collaborate with other organizations or interest groups that may have similar concerns, needs, and interests

Remember that CDR Legislation needs to function in a coordinated way with the existing laws and be feasible and fundable.